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Gillian Pye

**Introduction: Extraordinary — Ordinary / gewöhnlich — außergewöhnlich**

The intersection of the ordinary and the extraordinary is a fascinating and complex terrain. Although the routines and the materiality of the everyday are the very “foundation of experience”,¹ precisely because they are so often encountered they remain quite invisible unless called specifically to our attention.² Once closely observed, or when re-presented as art, however, the familiar loses its ordinariness, becoming unfamiliar and exceptional. The two concepts are therefore always intertwined and daily experience itself is structured by the move “between registers of the everyday and the extraordinary”.³ One of the central functions of art and literature has been to offer a means of extending our field of vision, allowing us to glimpse the relationship between these two dimensions of experience, and raising questions about the value systems and modes of perception at work in the shift between them. The contributions to this year’s special themed section of *Germanistik in Ireland* are all concerned, in varying ways, with the intersection between the familiar or everyday and the unfamiliar or exceptional in German-language literary texts from the nineteenth century until the present day.

Although the tension between the ordinary and the extraordinary in some sense underlies all artistic and philosophical endeavours, a particular fascination with the relationship between the everyday and the exceptional is associated with modernity. A greater awareness of “ordinariness, repetition, banality”⁴ is the somewhat paradoxical counterpart to those momentous changes in the perception of time, space and social structures that were engendered by the explosion of technological innovations from the late eighteenth-century onwards. This fascination has not only persisted into the present day, but has received another boost in the wake of the revolutionary changes ushered in by a digital age and the complexities of contemporary global capitalism which have once again profoundly altered our sense

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of space and time.\textsuperscript{5} Moreover, if Henri Lefebvre, writing in 1968, felt that terrorism would probably not cause levels of individual self-repression that would significantly curtail everyday life\textsuperscript{6} some commentators might now begin to disagree. “Der Terror wird langsam zur traurigen Routine”\textsuperscript{7} reported \textit{Die Zeit} in the wake of a recent attack outside a mosque in London, reflecting the sense that the experience of the everyday has been substantially altered by the exposure to spectacular acts of violence and their representation in the media.

Scholarship explicitly devoted to an understanding of the ordinary and the everyday,\textsuperscript{8} spearheaded by developments in sociology and cultural theory but with broad impact in many other fields, has been particularly vigorous since the mid- to late-twentieth century, when it was represented most prominently by French thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau.\textsuperscript{9} Reacting to an everyday environment which was undergoing reconstruction after the ravages of World War Two, and at a time when the influence of US-dominated consumer culture was making itself strongly felt, Lefebvre turned his gaze on the quotidian in an attempt to counter what he perceived to be a loss of quality in ordinary life and to transform the everyday by unlocking its extraordinary potential.\textsuperscript{10} De Certeau, and the

\textsuperscript{5} Michael Hviid Jacobsen notes that since the millennium sociology has “rediscovered” the everyday, producing “torrents of new literature” on the subject. For Hviid Jacobsen, this is partly due to developments in neo-liberal capitalism and the focus on consciously “designing” everyday life. Michael Hviid Jacobsen (ed.): Encountering the Everyday. An Introduction to the Sociologies of the Everyday. Houndmills/Basingstoke/Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 7. Andrew Epstein, on the other hand, argues that a crisis of attention accounts for the “new emphasis and hunger for the everyday” in contemporary poetry. Epstein: Attention Equals Life, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{6} Lefebvre: Everyday Life in the Modern World, p.66.


\textsuperscript{8} As Liesl Olson has argued, the terms ‘ordinary’ and ‘everyday’ are frequently used interchangeably. She notes that French theorists (unnamed in Olson’s note, but including thinkers such as Lefebvre and de Certeau) tend to use the term ‘everyday’ (‘le quotidien’) whereas others, including Stanley Cavell and J. L. Austin, use the term ‘ordinary’. In this discussion, I will also use these terms interchangeably. Liesl Olson: Modernism and the Everyday. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, fn. 4, p. 163.


\textsuperscript{10} Lefebvre describes his task as “assisting the birth of everyday life’s potential plenitude”. Lefebvre: \textit{Everyday Life in the Modern World}, p. 18.
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Researchers associated with his project, set out to explore the specific nature of this potential by tracking the “creative activity […] in the practice of the ordinary.”

The work of these theorists would, however, be unimaginable without the inspiration provided by a strong tradition of German-speaking scholars of modernity, whose work was characterized by an intense engagement with the everyday and a sense that it is replete with extraordinary possibilities. To cite just a few examples: Sigmund Freud’s recognition that even the most seemingly innocuous detail can offer a deep insight into the inner world of the psyche underpins modernism’s fascination with the messiness and heterogeneity of the quotidian. Revealing the impact of industrialization on ordinary people, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels brought theory to bear on mundane, material existence. At the same time as shedding light on the misery and hardship of the everyday working world, however, Marx and Engels also suggested the powerful potential of production, which would later inspire Lefebvre and those who followed him to explore the notion of human self-production. Walter Benjamin’s investigations into modernity are radical in their wide-ranging attention to the ordinary details of everyday life. Epitomised by the monumental Passagen-Werk, his ambitious attempt at a “materialist philosophy of the nineteenth century” aimed to “discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event”. Georg Simmel shared with Benjamin the notion that “in jeder Einzelheit des Lebens die Ganzheit seines Sinnes zu finden ist” and, in his pioneering studies, he sought to find new ways to attend to the complexity of modern life as sociological and material change, but also as inner experience. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of “ordinary language” as the basis for human communication offered what de Certeau and his colleagues considered to be nothing short of a “philosophical blueprint” for a contemporary science of the ordinary, serving as the inspiration for theorists to study at close quarters what the ordinary man, the “common hero”, actually says and does.

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For Ben Highmore, such theorists, who were constructing “something like an avant-garde sociology”, converge with the artists of modernity on the terrain of the everyday. Both groups were responding to the need to ‘pay attention’ to the hitherto overlooked aspects of the immediate environment and to find ways of attending to it that were in step with a world that appeared “chaotic, disrupted and radically new”.\textsuperscript{16} The concern with “attention blindness”\textsuperscript{17} in the face of the modern world had already preoccupied Romantic artists and writers and Andrew Epstein argues that in the twenty-first century it is now the very crisis of attention engendered by “total electronic distraction” that has led to a renewed emphasis on, and a “hunger” for, the everyday in literature.\textsuperscript{18} This interest is reflected not only in studies of the everyday and contemporary writing, but also in a renewed interest in the way in which the literature of modernity navigates this terrain.\textsuperscript{19}

Just as the sociologists of everyday life saw the ordinary as a reservoir of productive potential, so many twentieth-century avant-garde artists and writers emphasized the transformative power of representations of the ordinary, which allow the recipient to perceive the extraordinary in the midst of the banal, or to marvel at the beauty of the mundane. Expressionist paintings by artists such as E. L. Kirchner, for example, deploy startling colour juxtapositions and unfamiliar angles to capture the dynamics of the modern metropolis.\textsuperscript{20} In the collages and sculptures of artists such as Kurt Schwitters, ordinary objects are co-opted in a discourse about the role of art and the status of the artist as an innovator and a mediator of the extraordinary.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Highmore: Everyday Life and Cultural Theory, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{17} Epstein: Attention Equals Life, p. 4. Here, the phrase “total electronic distraction” is taken from a comment by novelist Jonathan Franzen.
\textsuperscript{18} Epstein: Attention Equals Life, p. 4. Here, the phrase “total electronic distraction” is taken from a comment by novelist Jonathan Franzen.
\textsuperscript{20} See for example E. L. Kirchner’s ‘Nollendorfplatz’ (1912).
\textsuperscript{21} See for example Schwitters’ Merz collages such as ‘Merzbild 32A Das Kirschbild’ (1921), which incorporates found items including sweet wrappers, newspaper clippings and a broken pipe.
The juxtaposition of ordinary and extraordinary can therefore offer an enhanced aesthetic experience, but also an opportunity for social and political critique. Both perspectives rest on the process of defamiliarization offered by the close proximity of familiar and unfamiliar. This strategy is, of course, not peculiar to modernism, but its deployment in modernity can be seen as a response to a situation in which a theoretical awareness of alienation developed in tandem with a sense that this alienation had “doubled in strength” as people became more accustomed to it. Embodied most prominently by the Brechtian concept of Verfremdung, the critical aim of defamiliarization is to ensure that the recipient is “startled awake”. The jolt into greater political and social awareness is achieved by switching the perspective on the familiar: “insight into what is closest to the beholder grows out of his amazement at being confronted with what is farthest away.”

“The routinization of terror, the erasure between extremity and the everyday, the terrible and the ordinary” which characterized the experience of war called into question the power of art to jolt its recipients into political awareness. Having seen the juxtaposition of ordinary and extraordinary realized in the most shocking terms it is perhaps not surprising that many writers, including those like Frisch or Dürrenmatt who were working in a German-language tradition heavily indebted to Brecht, lost some faith in the political potential of Verfremdung. However, particularly in the post-war context in the German-speaking world, the need to address the past continued to underpin the significance of art as a means to lift the lid on the ordinary. When, in Dürrenmatt’s Der Besuch der alten Dame, the grotesque Claire Zachanassian and her absurd entourage disrupt the monotonous everyday in the impoverished town of Güllen with their extraordinary offer of money in exchange for the sacrifice of Alfred Ill, the expectation is not that the audience will be jolted into changing the world, but that they may glimpse the absurdity of that world and gain a sense of the extraordinary dangers lurking underneath the surface of everyday life in post-war society.

For the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, art and literature had a didactic and moral imperative to resist the effects of mass culture, which had the potential to lull audiences into passivity. A perspective shared by de Certeau, the ordinary as manifested in “mass culture” is seen as inferior, because it “tends towards homogenization”, whereas, in its embeddedness in daily life, the ordinary is prized as an “immense reserve” of plurality and creativity.

More recent studies of the everyday call into question the need to see the ordinary as a stepping stone to the transformative or transcendent and focus instead

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on the importance of ordinariness of the ordinary. \(^{27}\) In the German literary context, this shift has been mirrored to a certain extent in some of the debates accompanying the ‘normalization’ process beginning around the time of German unification. The end of the GDR and the ever-increasing generational distance from World War Two provoked debates about the status and political function of writing. Accusing German literature of being dominated by moral concerns and still in thrall to an outdated modernist aesthetic, \(^{28}\) critics effectively queried its function as a morally charged counterpoint to the ordinary. The call for accessibility (‘neue Lesbarkeit’), a more nuanced approach to the German past – reflecting previously taboo issues such as German victimhood – and a renewed preoccupation with the daily experience in consumer capitalism, led to a focus on the minutiae of everyday life, often without an emphasis on the transformative potential of the banal as either beautiful, extraordinary or productively startling.

For example, some of the key texts associated with the pop literature of the 1990s, such as Christian Kracht’s *Faserland* (1995), Benjamin von Stuckrad Barre’s *Soloalbum* (1998), Joachim Bessing, Christian Kracht, Eckhard Nickel, Alexander von Schönburg and Benjamin von Stuckrad Barre’s, *Tristesse Royale* (2002), deliberately position themselves as superficial, apparently resisting moral and aesthetic imperatives: *Tristesse Royale*, for example, opens with a discussion about hotel toilet paper. \(^{29}\) Such overt banality certainly touched a nerve, with some critics considering it little more than “Geschmacksterrorismus” \(^{30}\) and keen to distinguish it from the more experimental “Suhrkamp pop” which was characterized by that defamiliarizing viewpoint on the ordinary more obviously inspired by the modernist avant garde. \(^{31}\) As subsequent studies have shown, however, one of the achievements of pop literature is its attempt to approach the ordinary without defamiliarizing it. For example, Moritz Baßler’s *Der deutsche Poproman. Die neuen Archivisten* (2002) revealed its ability to act as an archive for the everyday, whilst a more recent study by André Menke shows how pop literature’s attention to the everyday can

\(^{27}\) See for example Epstein: Attention Equals Life, p. 3f and Olson: Modernism and the Everyday, p. 4.
communicate the richness and complexity of (self-)authorship within particular (pop)cultural and regional contexts.\textsuperscript{32}

Another central issue in German-language literature of the last decades is the need to balance historical narratives with a sense of the complexities of ordinary life. The generational distance from the Second World War, characterized by a shift towards a mediated ‘postmemory’ as well as a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between victims and perpetrators, has led to an increased focus on ordinary lives against the background of larger historical narratives. This is exemplified by the enormous upsurge in generational novels, which ground historical experience in a family context. As Friederike Eigler argues, the recent family novel is characterized by a focus on processes of remembering and narrating the past and on the role played by mediated memories. Objects such as letters or photographs often serve as the trigger for remembering processes, suggesting the link between the everyday life of a family and the extraordinary historical events in which family members are implicated.\textsuperscript{33}
The protagonist of Angelika Overath’s \textit{Nahe Tage} (2005) comes into contact with the power of the ordinary, when cleaning out her recently deceased mother’s apartment.\textsuperscript{34} Her close encounter with the material of the dead woman’s everyday life is the trigger for a family story, which incorporates a history of war, expulsion and intergenerational trauma. Eva Menasse’s \textit{Vienna} (2005), on the other hand, takes as its point of departure the often repeated family stories that structure everyday interactions between relatives as a means of exploring Menasse’s family experience of war and exile.\textsuperscript{35} Whilst the stories themselves often feature extraordinary anecdotes, such the tragi-comic tale of the soldiers killed not by the enemy, but by a falling crate of peaches,\textsuperscript{36} Menasse’s novel demonstrates the way in which narratives form a protective shield around the everyday and the space of home at a time of uncertainty and danger.

Generational novels such as Monika Maron’s \textit{Pawels Briefe} (1999), Jenny Erpenbeck’s \textit{Heimsuchung} (2007), Peggy Mädler’s \textit{Die Legende vom Glück des Menschen} (2011) or Eugen Ruges \textit{In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts} (2011) incorporate the GDR into their family-historical panorama. Such narratives reflect the particular interest in the ordinary-extraordinary juxtaposition, which was fuelled by the sudden collapse of the East German state and the rapid disappearance of its

\textsuperscript{35} Eva Menasse, Vienna. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2005.
\textsuperscript{36} Menasse, Vienna, p. 148.
particular material and social structures. Reporting in May 2006, the expert committee, tasked with investigating the treatment of the SED past confirmed that no “umfassende Darstellung des Alltags in der durchherrschten Gesellschaft” had yet been achieved. Although this finding was controversial, with critics arguing that the use of public funds for the exploration and commemoration of everyday life in the GDR was tantamount to the legitimation of a dictatorship, nevertheless the importance of an understanding of the GDR everyday was asserted. As theorists of the everyday like de Certeau and Lefebvre had shown, identity is constructed in association with the everyday environment and so the understanding of the GDR depends on the recognition that a personal sense of one’s own becoming is embedded in ordinary things: as Sabrow puts it, identity “heftet sich an ‘Pittipatsch’ und ‘Schnatterin’, an den Klang der Zigarettenmarke ‘Duett’ und an den Geruch von Lyosol”.

In recent literary treatments of the German past, such as those cited above, the attention paid to the everyday suggests a particular sensitivity to the importance of ordinary life as part of a sense of complex and processual identity constructed in specific historical circumstances. In Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Heimsuchung* (2007), for example, an ethical concern to render the specificity of each figure’s lifeworld is balanced against the critical ambition to explore the ways in which ideology seeps

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into seemingly innocuous everyday actions. Moreover, Erpenbeck’s focus on the everyday grounding of extraordinary historical experience reflects the complexity of the seemingly ordinary: inflected by multiple temporalities and by the many relationships between humans and the non-human environment, the ordinary life Erpenbeck depicts is shown to co-exist with the extraordinary, and often horrific. Finally, *Heimsuchung* also sheds light on the gendered aspect of the ordinary, illuminating the ways in which women, long associated with the domestic everyday, navigate the juxtapositions between the mundane and the extraordinary.

The contributions to this year’s special themed section of *Germanistik in Ireland* begin with Dagmar PAULUS’s exploration of madwomen in Wilhelm Raabe’s *Im Siegeskranz* (1866) and Adalbert Stifter’s *Turmalin* (1853). Connoting a perversion of the ordinary, female madness is deployed in these texts as a means of critically interrogating nineteenth-century politics and society. Paulus argues that Stifter’s realist text seeks to resist the irrationality lurking underneath the surface of bourgeois society. His obsessive attention to the detail of everyday bourgeois life is a key means by which the text seeks to “keep at bay the disintegrating forces of disorder, in nature as well as in human beings”. As Paulus shows, the efforts to contain the madwoman in Stifter’s text, and to reintegrate her into everyday society are, however, only partially successful. In this way, she reflects the anxieties of an existence that rests precariously on a thin veneer of rationality, moral and economic prescription. Raabe’s text centres on the figure of Ludowike, who is a political radical and cannot be reintegrated into the everyday. Paulus reveals how the figures in *Im Siegeskranz* deal with the threat to order of this female resistance fighter by relocating her into the domestic sphere, into the domain of the more socially acceptable cliché of the madwoman. In an effort to resume their ordinary lives the family attempt to sweep Ludowike’s existence under the carpet, but this is not easily achieved and the figure continues to pose a disruption to the ordered surface of their world.

Laura THÜRING’s analysis of Karl May’s novel *Ardistan und Dschinnistan* (1907/1908) takes as its point of departure May’s indebtedness to the Romantic idealist tradition and its focus on the hidden meaning that lies behind ordinary things. Although the connection between this tendency and Expressionist art is well established, and although May’s proximity to Expressionism has been often


41 As Epstein points out, the domestic and the insignificant have long been associated with the female. Acknowledging the potential danger of reproducing binary thinking by equating women with the ‘ordinary’ he nevertheless draws attention to the potential of a feminist re-reading, which focuses specifically on the ordinary. Epstein, Attention Equals Life, p. 57. The value of a gendered reading of the everyday is also highlighted by Liesl Olson in Modernism and the Ordinary, p. 16f.
identified in criticism, this aspect of his work has nevertheless been underresearched. Thüring’s contribution therefore aims to illuminate the way in which May operates at the boundary between the Christian-Romantic and the avant-garde traditions at the turn to the twentieth century. The discussion focuses on May’s deployment of the fantastic and its relationship to everyday elements in his novel. Arguing that the fantastic operates as an aesthetic rather than a generic element in the text, she shows how it is deployed as part of an effort to transform the everyday. By undermining the boundary between ordinary and extraordinary, Thüring contends that May’s text aims to penetrate the inner quality of life, bringing it to the surface, and thus harmonizing inner and outer experience.

In her contribution on Ina Seidel’s early works Sterne der Heimkehr (1923) and Planetenspiel zur Ehrenfeier der Sonnenwende (1924) Rose SIMPSON looks at this controversial writer’s attempt to regenerate German everyday life by infusing it with mystical and esoteric energies. Simpson contends that Seidel’s texts aim to offer an alternative to an alienated everyday world that is disconnected from nature and saturated with scientific rationalism and the deadening effects of the mass media. As mediators of natural power, women are seen as central agents in this effort to reinvigorate the ordinary with the extraordinary and young people are charged with the task of reintroducing vitality. Simpson’s article shows Seidel’s proximity to the avant-garde of the early twentieth century and her embodiment of contemporary intellectual currents, such as Freudian and Nietzschen ideas, which the author integrated into her populist, best-selling texts. Whilst fully acknowledging Seidel’s connection to National Socialism, Simpson aims to offer a broader perspective, showing how this author embeds the possibility of cosmic transcendence in the “homely world of German Protestantism, kitchen scenes and family squabbles.”

Turning to Holocaust literature for young adults, Britta JUNG charts the development of this genre from the late twentieth century to the present day, showing how it gains in complexity in a contemporary age of post- and multidirectional memory. In addition to the overcoming of traditional ‘victim-culprit’ narratives and the increasingly transcultural nature of memory, Jung observes that there has been an “Anthropologisierung der Erinnerung”, which aims to pay closer attention to everyday, to the social and cultural-historical, as well as to the individual as a subjective, feeling ‘Erfahrungswesen’. In the ethical context of a young adult literature, which has a responsibility not only to try to deal with the – often inexpressible – “Zivilisationsbruch” of the Holocaust, but also to draw from this some positive values and aims for society, Jung’s contribution shows that the portrayal of the everyday lifeworld in these texts can acquire a specific pedagogical value. In the first place, it allows readers to identify with other human beings rather than being confronted with abstract information. Moreover, this approach reveals the complexity of the experience of war and genocide, refusing trivial or partial explanations and allowing a greater awareness of the necessarily fragmentary nature of experience.

Joseph TWIST’S contribution reads Navid Kermani’s 2007 novel Kurzmitteilung through the lens of French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and his notion of the ‘Inoperative Community’. Kermani’s text registers “death’s sudden irruption into
the everyday routine” when a young man, Dariusch, hears of the death of a friend. This is Kermani’s point of departure for an exploration of the nature of connectedness, community and identity: Dariusch’s realization that he cannot make sense of the loss of his friend Maike leads him, on the one hand, to a greater awareness of his own mortality and the impossibility of conferring any meaning upon it. This seems at first to invite a more ethical position of connectedness, openness and compassion towards others. However, on the other hand, Dariusch’s attitude is not consistent, wavering between a caring openness to others, a superficial openness associated with the consumerism of bourgeois global mobility, and the totalizing, exclusionary world view of the religious cult. As Twist argues, the complex shifts between everyday and extraordinary that structure this text, and the unreliability of its conflicted protagonist, not only raise questions about the nature of community and cosmopolitanism, but also about the representational validity of the text itself. As Twist argues, Kermani’s aim is not simply to reflect fragmented reality or to ‘capture’ its complexity, but rather to show that the text itself is as an imaginative means of producing the everyday.

The final contribution to the special themed section is Linda SHORTT’s analysis of Heinz Helle’s 2015 novel *Eigentlich müssten wir tanzen*. Shortt’s article considers the portrayal of friendship in a dystopia that lacks “extraordinary features” and seems feasible. Pinpointing Helle’s novel as part of a wider trend of socially critical catastrophe narratives, she argues that these texts have emerged in response to the sense that the “ordinary everyday could easily slip into disaster simply by continuing the status quo.” Helle’s protagonists turn out to be unequal to the existential challenge of survival and the moral obligation to act in the interests of others. Instead of a developmental narrative of bravery and selflessness, the text shows figures behaving in a cowardly and individualistic manner. Their brutal, yet nevertheless banal, response to their predicament therefore renders the apocalyptic somehow ordinary. In her contribution Short considers the extent to which Helle’s narrative, by juxtaposing ordinary life in neo-liberal capitalism with a post-apocalyptic state of exception, may function as social and political critique. However, she finds little comfort in the text: physical proximity and shared childhood stories offer but a thin veneer of collectivity and security. Although the reader may be temporarily shocked by the extreme brutality of events in the narrative, the behavioural loop in which the figures find themselves suggests that contemporary individuals are ill-positioned to be effectively jolted into changing their ways.

This year’s general section contains four further articles on literature and film and a contribution on language pedagogy. The section is rounded off by the text of Professor Jürgen Barkhoff’s inaugural lecture, presented in January of this year to mark his appointment to the prestigious Chair in German (1776) at Trinity College Dublin.

Dagmar DRABENT’s article considers a dream sequence in Robert Walser’s novel *Geschwister Tanner* (1906/1907). Looking at this specific sequence in the context of the whole novel as well as in Walser’s work more generally, Drabant shows how Walser deploys imagery and literary references, including to works by
Novalis and Goethe, to create a specifically female sphere. In so doing, Drabent argues that Walser creates a complex textual space that is able to portray deep existential meaning and shows a very modern concern with psychological processes.

In her essay, Lisa Marie ANDERSON draws on the resources offered by a newly published critical edition of Ernst Toller’s work to revisit the question of the dramatist’s pacifism. Anderson’s contribution aims to address the critical uncertainty about the exact nature of Toller’s position on this issue, tracing its nuances and tracking changes in his attitude during the course of his life. Drawing on Toller’s public statements, disseminated in speeches, pamphlets and essays, Anderson argues that Toller was only very briefly an “absolute” pacifist and that his stance was rather one of revolutionary pacifism, a position which, as Anderson argues, remains consistent with and not contrary to, the author’s later antifascist writings.

Teresa CAÑADAS GARCÍA’s contribution turns to the position of exiled Germans in Mexico during World War Two. She considers the attitudes of exiled Germans to their homeland as they passed through varying stages: relief at reaching safety, hope for a better future, determination to defend a non-fascist German identity and the challenge of mounting effective political opposition. Cañadas García’s account gives an insight into the complex cultural, existential and historical position of the exiles, who found themselves in a distant land, which, though governed by a left-liberal president and boasting a well-developed German-Mexican exile culture, was nevertheless also home to pro-fascist Mexiko-Deutsche.

Julia ILGNER explores Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles’ 360. Everything Comes Full Circle (2011), a film based on Arthur Schnitzler’s much adapted play Reigen. Although the connection between Mereilles’ film and Schitzler’s text has been interpreted as loose, Ilgner’s analysis shows that the director displays an acute sensitivity to both the formal qualities and the rich intertextual fabric of the Austrian writer’s composition. Accordingly, Ilgner’s analysis considers the film as a hybrid form between “interpretierender Transformation” or “Transposition” and “transformierender Bearbeitung”. By adopting the figure of the circle as a central principle, Ilgner argues that Mereilles draws on Schnitzler in a way which goes beyond a mere appropriation of literary raw material, moving instead towards a new filmic language.

Michael BRAUN’s essay looks at the role of cinema in German memory culture, exploring the specific question of unreliable narration in films about the National Socialist period. Braun shows that recent films dealing with this phenomenon tend towards imaginative reconstruction and fictionalization in their treatment of historical materials. In a wide range of examples, including Quentin Tarantino’s Inglorious Basterds, Marc Rothemund’s Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage and Oliver Hirschbiegel’s Der Untergang, Braun outlines the shift from a focus on history as event to history as “Struktur und Schauspiel” and towards a more nuanced and emotional portrayal of individual experience and an increased focus on minor figures. The essays by Michael BRAUN and Julia ILGNER included in this volume are based on papers presented at a panel on ‘Intermediales und transnationales
Erzählen: Deutsche Literatur auf der internationalen Kinoleinwand’ organised by Christiane Schönfeld for the 2016 Germanistentag (Universität Bayreuth).

Magdalena ROZENBERG’s essay explores the use of, and theoretical discourse about, images in foreign language teaching and learning. Given the centrality of the visual in contemporary society, she asks how we might draw on the potential of images in the classroom. Recognizing that foreign language pedagogy is primarily a “Didaktik des Wortes” Rozenberg is cautious about the extent to which visual literacy can be incorporated into language learning. She argues, however, that images may act not only as a stimulus to language production or as a source of intercultural information, but that they may also offer a means of complementing cognitively dominated language learning processes with an aesthetic dimension.

The final piece in this year’s general section is the text of Jürgen BARKHOFF’s inaugural lecture as 1776 Professor of German at Trinity College Dublin, which was delivered to a packed room in the Trinity Long Room Hub Arts and Humanities Research Institute on 17th January 2017. Barkhoff’s lecture takes as its point of departure the spirit of enlightened cosmopolitanism and innovation that, in 1774, inspired Hely-Hutchinson, Provost of Trinity College Dublin, to propose the establishment of chairs in European languages, among them the Chair in German: the first of its kind in the world. Exploring the themes of education, innovation and entrepreneurship, Barkhoff’s wide-ranging discussion spans the long nineteenth century in “four great steps”. In an analysis of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1796), Gustav Freytag’s Soll und Haben (1855), Gottfried Keller’s Martin Salander (1886) and Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks (1901), Barkhoff’s analysis reveals that these merchant novels have much to teach us about the role of the (literary) imagination as an essential component of innovation and entrepreneurship, but also as a means of fostering the empathy and social competence necessary for a genuine civic and ethical engagement.

As ever, the Yearbook features reviews and reports of recent conferences. Amongst the reports in this year’s edition are two special contributions: Hans-Walter Schmidt-Hannissa gives an account of an exhibition of work by the artist Caspar Rauh, in which he also includes his translations of poetry inspired by the event. In this year of the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Heinrich Böll, Gisela Holfter reflects on this year’s special version of the annual meeting on Achill island, which marks the long and inspiring relationship between Ireland and the German writer.