**Contemporary Romany Autobiography
as Performance**

by

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Reprinted from:

The German Quarterly
Volume 76, Number 2
Spring 2003

Published by:
The American Association
of Teachers of German

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"Tanze / Entferne die Trugbilder / Durch
Tanz / Wecke das Feuer / Dass die Geächteten
sehen / Tanze / Das Zeichen der Zeit mögest
du sein [...]"

—Rajko Djuric¹

The political, social and cultural landscape of Europe has shifted drastically since German re-unification and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Faced with unforeseen changes, many writers and artists have focused on representations of the past, often struggling to determine its meaning in relation to the new present. Coming to terms with the Nazi past already had been a difficult and often painful process. Particularly in Germany and Austria literary and artistic works involving memory and autobiographical expressions continue to emerge, and it seems that the German obsession with memory is by no means over. Many post-1989 remembrances propose interesting reconfigurations of former dividing lines drawn between such oppositions as East and West, Jews and non-Jews, or Germans and ethnic minority groups. These searches for new forms of remembrance reflect cultural transformations that have taken place since the late 1980s.

In the following I focus on representations of the past in several autobiographical texts by contemporary "Gypsy" or Romany writers in Germany and Austria.² In these texts attempts to come to terms with the past play a central role especially since the writers are survivors of Nazi persecution. These writings and artistic expressions, produced by members of an ethnic minority who

—as Romany and as German or Austrian—are both cultural insiders and outsiders, represent test cases for determining what it means to be "Austrian" or "German" today. Their texts reveal the unique configurations of memory, writing, identity (both personal and national) and culture very clearly. What emerges is a notion of identity that is not essentialist but rather strategic and positional. As Stuart Hall remarks in his reflections on cultural identity, such a position

accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (Hall and du Guy 4)

More important, Hall also points out that "identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves" (4). This notion of the subject in flux, aware of how s/he has been represented, is related to the moment of performance in the memory texts under scrutiny here. Romany autobiographies often stress the importance of reviewing past and present representations of Roma from multiple perspectives. Displaying the relationships between non-Romanies and Ro-

manies, the texts perform the complex interplay between past and present. Their focus on the connection between memory and performance forces us to acknowledge the materiality of the memory process and the constructions of identity and history. It also encourages us to consider memory's potential for disruptive re-play and resistance to oppressive power structures.

The Romany autobiographies under discussion raise questions about *where* memory traces are located and *how* memory is given a place in the present. Those questions foreground issues pertaining to narrative forms of re-presenting the past in the changing sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Germany and Austria today. The emphasis on the prefix "re-" (as in re-embody or re-vision) is important, because these "repetitions with a difference" allow for transforming meanings of the past in the present or future. The texts offer new modes of remembrance concerned with understanding the present (and how the past is understood and presented in the present) rather than merely illuminating past events. As Christina Thürmer-Rohr suggests, critical remembrance is connected to forms of clear vision, re-vision, and realization:

Gegenwart hat mit Klarheit zu tun. Die deutsche Sprache gibt das wieder in Wendungen wie: Ich vergegenwärtige mir etwas, etwas ist mir gegenwärtig, ich bin mir gegenwärtig. Das heisst: Ich bin mit allen meinen Sinnen und Fähigkeiten präsent, konzentriert auf etwas, worum es jetzt geht. Ich hole Vergangenheit, Erfahrungen und Wünsche herein, bringe sie zu einem Punkt. (31)

Like Thürmer-Rohr's notion of "Vergegenwärtigung" as a particular form of representation (making visible what has been invisible), the writers under discussion are more interested in their present life circumstances than in the past, and they strive to understand the repercussions of the past in the present. Furthermore, they demonstrate a keen awareness of their particular position as cultural insiders and

outsiders, doubly inscribed as Romany and as Austrian or German.

In Austria and Germany, Romanies or Roma are curiously absent from the consciousness of most non-Romany citizens. Even though the Roma have been part of both countries since the Middle Ages, most non-Roma know little about their Romany fellow citizens. Originating from the Punjab region in India, the Roma eventually settled in Central Europe and other parts of the world. Romanies in Germany make up three main groups: The Sinti, who arrived in Germany some six hundred years ago (the earliest written documentation of their presence, included in the Hildesheimer Stadtrechnungen, records their presence in 1407 in Hildesheim [Reemstma 27]); a second group from Eastern Europe that settled in Germany between 80 and 150 years ago; and finally, refugees from Eastern Europe that have arrived since the collapse of Communism. Most Romanies in Germany are Sinti and Roma (here, "Roma" refers to the Eastern European Romanies who settled in Germany in the past 200 years). Some of Germany's Romanies belong to other groups, such as the Kalderash or Lalleri.

Sinti and Roma have also been recorded in Switzerland since the 15th, and in Austria since the 16th century (Tebbutt xiii-xvi). In Austria, most Roma settled in Burgenland, formerly West-Hungary (Mayerhofer 11), where there are also Lovara, Polish Roma and German Sinti. Since 1993 Austrian Roma have been officially recognized as an ethnic minority and classified as one of six *Volksgruppen*. Because Romany Austrian and German citizens are not legally required to disclose their ethnic identity, exact numbers are not readily available. An estimated 120,000 Roma live in Germany; their numbers in Austria are considerably lower. Today of twelve million Roma worldwide about eight million live in Europe.

In Germany and Austria Roma still represent the most marginalized ethnic group, and suffer discrimination and violent attacks. As Sybil Milton points out, discrimina-

tion against Roma in Germany and Austria did not end with the defeat of Nazi Germany.³ Unsubstantiated negative images of Roma persist to this day.⁴ A 1990 survey conducted in the *alte* and *neue Bundesländer* revealed that Germans expressed more antipathy toward Roma than any other ethnic group including Jews, Poles, and Turks. The report on the survey's findings was titled "Fremde als Sündenböcke," which is misleading since most Roma have lived in Germany for centuries, have German nationality, and cannot be considered "Fremde." In 1994 sixty-eight percent of Germans stated they did not want to have Roma as neighbors.⁵ After 1989 Roma have experienced increased waves of violent attacks. In Oberwart (Burgenland) four Roma were killed in 1995 when a pipe bomb detonated while they were removing a sign demanding that the Roma return to India. The so-called "Zigeuner-Hysterie" that erupted in October 1992 in Goldberg (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) is another example. The town citizens, supported by their mayor, attempted to prevent 104 Romany asylum seekers from Rumania from entering their town by physically hindering them from leaving the buses.⁶ The deep-seated aversion to the Roma as trouble-makers, asocial nomads, or criminals has also found expression in articles in major German newspapers and magazines. These reveal the extent to which outright discrimination against Roma remains an integral part of German social and political culture.⁷ Many Roma in Germany are political refugees from Kosovo, where they suffered persecution, especially following the 1999 NATO air strikes on Serbia. Roma there speak of a "second Holocaust."⁸

Since the 1980s an increasing number of Romanies began to represent themselves publicly to counter the prevailing attitudes of hatred and discrimination by sharing their stories, cultural practices, and language with non-Roma. This marks an important historical turning point in Romany cultures. The sudden shift to the public domain and the printed word is striking be-

cause Roma have traditionally relied on oral traditions to pass on historical and cultural information. They certainly did not use the printed word to share their experiences with non-Roma ("gadzos"). Engelbert Wittich was one of few German Roma, a *Jenischer*, to have written about his life between 1908 and 1935. His writings were published posthumously in 1984 (Hohmann 34).

Contemporary German and Austrian Romany autobiographies focus on the Nazi persecution and life in concentration camps. Thus the Holocaust not only represents the "touchstone of contemporary Jewish identity," as Dagmar Lorenz has stated, but also of Romany identity in Germany and Austria today (175). In fact, most Roma are still reluctant to mention the word "porrajmos," the Romani term for the Holocaust that literally means "devouring." Approximately 1.5 million Roma lost their lives in the concentration camps of the Third Reich. Nevertheless, they are still absent from many Holocaust exhibits today as they are "from both the popular and the general scholarly histories" (Fonseca 255, 273).

I shall focus primarily on the works of Ceija Stojka (Austria) and Otto Rosenberg (Germany). Stojka has written two books: *Wir leben im Verborgenen: Erinnerungen einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (1988) and *Reisende auf dieser Welt: Aus dem Leben einer Rom-Zigeunerin* (1992); Otto Rosenberg's book is entitled *Das Brennglas* (1998).⁹ Rosenberg is a Sinto from Berlin, politically active as a member of the *Vorstand des Zentralrates Deutscher Sinti und Roma*. Stojka is a Lovara Rom from Vienna. Both of them survived several Nazi concentration camps where most of their family members were killed.

Stojka's writings focus on her family's life and that of other Roma in Austria. *Wir leben im Verborgenen* recounts the years from 1939 to 1945. Stojka describes how her life changed with the onset of Nazi restrictions against the Roma. Though her family attempted to stay in hiding, the Nazis eventually deported all her family members to

concentration camps. *Wir leben im Verborgenen* depicts Stojka's everyday life before the war, during her internment in the camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, and Bergen-Belsen, and after her return to Vienna in 1945. She illustrates the importance of the Romany family as a tightly knit social and cultural unit. In her second book, *Reisende auf dieser Welt*, Stojka focuses on her life from 1945 to the present.¹⁰ In contrast to the first book *Reisende auf dieser Welt* deals with Romany music and deconstructs the myth of "original Gypsy music" by emphasizing its multicultural elements. Both works include a preface by editor Karin Berger, and end with interviews between her and Stojka.¹¹ Family photos provide visual elements in the autobiographical projects.

In 1995 Otto Rosenberg recorded his memories on tapes which were then transcribed and published by Ulrich Enzensberger in 1998. As was the case with Stojka, five decades transpired before Rosenberg recorded his life story. His colloquial and at times laconic tone, recounting events in an associative and sometimes abrupt manner, corresponds to the sequence of eleven untitled chapters. The book concludes with informative notes enriching specific moments of the narrative with detailed and documented historical information. In striking contrast to Stojka's accounts, Rosenberg offers relatively little information about Romany everyday life but focuses instead on survival in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Buchenwald, Mittelbau-Dora and Bergen-Belsen. Both Stojka and Rosenberg discuss the persistence of racial intolerance after 1945.¹²

Stojka's public self-identification in the late 1980s and early 90s as a *Romni* and her personal accounts of the Nazi period represents a daring intervention in the history of silence surrounding the persecution of the Roma in Austria. She writes that many Roma, including her own children, hide their ethnicity for fear of discrimination. She characterizes her decision to write down her memories as a form of resistance, stating that she felt the need to talk to somebody

about her experiences but no one—not even her own family—wanted to listen.¹³ Originally, she recorded her personal experiences for her children so that they would never forget the past.¹⁴ The decision to publish her life story and perform music and poetry publicly with some of her family members goes directly against her people's tradition of remaining inconspicuous.¹⁵ Stepping into the public, into the "Rampenlicht," Stojka calls attention to the historically new situation of re-presenting her culture, of making it visible. Reflecting on her public singing, Stojka alludes to this historically new situation for the Roma:

Die Noten von meinen Liedern auf
Romanes
sie sind noch alle durcheinander [...]
Meine Töne haben noch keinen Halt
und sie streiten auch miteinander
und das, obwohl ich es ihnen sagte.
Habt doch etwas Geduld ihr seid ja
Töne auf Romanes.
Und glaubt ihr
ihr werdet das Rampenlicht gut vertragen
denn ihr kennt doch noch kein Licht?
Im Finstern ward ihr tief begraben
doch nach der tiefen Finsternis für euch
erscheint dann auch das Licht.¹⁶

By going public with her individual and her people's life stories, Ceija Stojka transgresses against the Romany cultural "tradition" of secrecy imposed on Roma by the dominant cultures since their arrival in Europe and the silence concerning Nazi persecution. Talking to Karin Berger about the risk she takes by publishing her first book, Stojka stresses the need to share her Romany culture with non-Roma: "[W]enn ich als Romni von Wien mich der österreichischen Öffentlichkeit präsentiere, dann ist es für mich ein großes Wagnis, ein Risiko, denn es ist klar, daß man die Roma und die Sinti unter dem Volk seit Jahrhunderten drückt. Aber wir müssen uns öffnen, sonst kommt es noch so weit, daß irgendwann alle Romani in ein Loch hineinkippen" (*Leben* 154). The reference to the Nazi genocide implies that history must not repeat itself.¹⁷ The ambigu-

ity of the quote also suggests that Roma may inadvertently contribute to their own cultural disintegration if they fail to open up to the non-Romany world. Stojka expresses the need to record Romany history in written form now that the Nazi murders succeeded in disrupting the oral traditions by eliminating many of the Roma who would have preserved it:

Aber irgendeiner muß es machen, es muß geschichtlich etwas von uns festgehalten werden. Von jedem Volk sind Aussagen darüber da, was zum Beispiel vor zweihundert Jahren passiert ist. Aber über die Geschichte der Roma vor zweihundert Jahren, oder der Sinti, weiß man sehr wenig. Ihre alte Kultur ist fast unbekannt. Es ist in der heutigen Zeit notwendig, daß sich einer raustraute und sagt: 'Ist ja egal, wie du fühlst, wichtig ist, daß du es gibst.' Es ist wichtig, daß es festgehalten wird und daß man irgendwann, vielleicht in hundert Jahren darauf zurückgreifen kann. Es soll präsent sein in der österreichischen Öffentlichkeit. Wir sind ja auch geschichtlich mit diesem Land verbunden. Man hat uns für Vielerlei gebraucht. [...] Und das seit hundert Jahren, aber kein Mensch kennt und weiß etwas von den Leuten [...]. (*Reisende* 172)

Stojka's desire to record Romany history and publish an account of her experiences points to a decisive moment in Roma history. Stojka deliberately employs elements of Romany tradition in order to preserve her culture. By critically re-writing traditional songs, for example, she finds new forms of expression that she hopes will promote understanding between Romany and non-Romany cultures. Moreover, Ceija Stojka gives her culture voice through the use of Romani, which at times interrupts the German text of her narratives, songs, and poems.¹⁸ Traditionally, Roma refrained from speaking their language among non-Roma and were unwilling to translate it. For Stojka her language is bound up with her mother. Almost every statement by her mother in the two books is represented in Romani and trans-

lated into German. The return of her mother's voice represents the return of a silenced witness and lends expression to muted historical experience. Similar to Shoshana Felman's discussion of the return of the voice as a form of resistance and a "performative imperative" in Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985), the mother's voice and songs in Romani constitute a movement from the inside to the outside through the daughter's translation.¹⁹ The mother serves as a central figure of resistance who not only provides her children emotional strength but also teaches them strategies of survival. She is the one who teaches them that they should "nicht auffallen" (*Leben* 107), because drawing attention to themselves may lead to death. Fifty-five years later, Ceija Stojka makes every effort to render her culture visible by publishing her first book.

Certain songs transmitting historical information also represent instances of resistance.²⁰ Stojka's writings express the double role of singing as continuing the Romany tradition and a means to resist and disrupt the repression of Romanies. Stojka paints scenes of her pre-war past when family members, especially women, told stories through singing. Songs also embody and perform individual life histories. In the absence of a written tradition they function like epic poems, transmit communal experiences, and teach children the moral laws of the group. Stojka remembers the communicative function of singing in everyday life; instead of talking to each other, people would sometimes respond to each other in song. Traditionally songs have drawn on past experiences, thereby performing an act of memory. For instance certain songs commemorate those Roma murdered in the camps. Stojka emphasizes the dynamic nature of Romany songs, stating that they are frequently revised during a performance that may take hours to complete (*Reisende* 139-44; Karen Rosenberg 19). Both Otto Rosenberg and Ceija Stojka recall singing as a performance of memory that is mostly tied

to women (*Reisende* 145, 146; *Brennglas* 13).²¹

Given its cultural importance, it is not surprising that Roma used singing as a form of resistance in Nazi camps. Besides songs expressing pain and despair in clear and direct language, Stojka also discusses a form of barely audible solitary singing:

Ich habe auch im Lager gesungen, viele von uns haben das gemacht, nur für sich, leise in sich hinein, ohne Töne, im Geist. [...] Oft ist man neben einer Frau gestanden und hat gehört, sie summt in sich hinein. Das war wie eine Überbrückung von diesem ganzen Dilemma, von diesem Elend. Das war kein Singen, das war eher ein Weinen. Aber zusammensitzen und singen, sodass jeder es hört, das wäre unmöglich gewesen. (*Reisende* 150)

Other times, songs used melodies of popular songs, but the text was changed to reflect the situation in the camp. Stojka writes about one exceptional instance in which loud singing served as a daring public expression of resistance. She describes her sister Kathi's singing the famous popular song "Ich weiss, es wird einmal ein Wunder geschehen" with a changed ending to express her hope of leaving Auschwitz-Birkenau and returning home: "und dann werden wir nach Hause gehen." Their brother Mongo Stojka likewise mentions revisions of the song in his autobiography *Papierene Kinder: Glück, Zerstörung und Neubeginn einer Roma-Familie in Österreich* (2000; 120, 147). Despite the beating that her sister had to endure afterwards, Ceija Stojka admires her for her resistance and courage to sing the song in the presence of Nazis (*Reisende* 151).²²

Viewing these instances of performance as forms of resistance may strike some readers as odd, but an increasing body of research about musical and theatrical performances in Nazi concentration camps published in recent years reveals the subversive character of such performances. Some of those performances occurred clandestinely, others at the behest of the Nazis. Rosenberg remembers a

Sinti band accompanying him and other inmates to forced labor in Woffleben outside Ellrich near Dora-Mittelbau (84). Mongo Stojka mentions a Romany music band in Buchenwald that had to dress up and walk the inmates to their slave labor in the quarry (171). The Nazi commandant of the Westerbork transit concentration camp in Holland forced inmates to perform plays and cabarets because he believed these performances would keep inmates calm until their deportation to Auschwitz (Rovit and Goldfarb 126).

Musical and theatrical performances in concentration camps served a variety of functions. They made life temporarily more bearable by providing a form of escapist entertainment. Other performances, especially readings and recitals, helped the prisoners cling to their cultural traditions. In many cases, the performances expressed defiance. Cabaret presentations in Auschwitz, Westerbork, and Theresienstadt were often highly satirical and provided a vehicle for resistance by attacking the SS or the Third Reich in general (Rovit and Goldfarb 120–21). They also transmitted coded information to other inmates while Nazis were watching.

Some theater was markedly political. Karel Svenk, also known as a "Czech Chaplin," wrote and performed satires replete with explicit and provocative allegories against the Nazis. Leo Strauss's "Theresienstädter Fragen," a musical sketch, sharply satirizes the naiveté of the new arrivals in the camp.²³ Performances of traditional drama, comedy, cabaret, puppet shows, children's theater and operas thus became media for resistance and survival among prisoners. Sometimes the performances temporarily sustained their will to live in the nightmarish concentration camp setting in which they were trapped.²⁴ As Alvin Goldfarb states: "If the outside world provided no support or sustenance, theater was another attempt by the victims to sustain one another and to try to preserve a semblance of normality in an obscenely abnormal universe" (Rovit and Goldfarb 124).

In *Reisende auf dieser Welt*, Ceija Stojka describes how she and some of her relatives perform in order to continue the tradition of passing on Romany history and stories in a public space shared by both Roma and non-Roma. Besides composing new songs, Stojka rewrites old ones, creating an unusual blend of traditional and modern music (*Reisende* 171). Clearly, Stojka's life as a singer-songwriter is part of her re-visionary memory work. Her CD *Me Dikhlem Suno* (2000) and the documentary film portrait *Ceija Stojka* by Karin Berger (1999) provide powerful examples of Stojka's songs often blended with bits of swing or jazz.²⁵ Stojka sings in Romany as well as in Austrian dialect to underscore her double identity as an Austrian *Romni*. Her songs frequently change from one performance to another, depending on the occasion. In the booklet accompanying the CD, Ursula Hemetek writes:

Das Faszinierende an der Liedtradition der Lovara ist die Spontaneität im Umgang mit Melodien und Texten. Selten, dass ein Lied zweimal gleich gesungen wird. Zwar existieren gewisse Gerüst-Töne—was um diese herum melodisch geschieht, hängt jedoch von der Stimmung der Sängerin, den Reaktionen der Zuhörer ab. Ein Lovaralied entsteht im Miteinander von Interpreten und Publikum, die Zuhörer sind Teil des spontanen Schaffensprozesses. Über Jahrhunderte wurden diese Lieder mündlich tradiert, ausschliesslich innerhalb der Romakultur. (*Me Dikhlem Suno*)

In addition to the performances determined by the "here" and "now," there are others which creatively and critically re-enact the past. Stojka and Rosenberg are concerned with exorcising stereotypical images of the "Gypsy" to counteract another widespread form of discrimination. They criticize portrayals of Roma as asocial criminals or as an idealized people close to nature. In her discussion of Ronald Lee's 1970 autobiographical novel, *Goddam Gypsy*, Katie Trumpener calls attention to the powerful effects of myths and stereotypes developed

around the Roma:

In the depictions of the press and of mass culture, in literature written for children and in school textbooks, Gypsies continue (long after political pressure has forced out analogous generic characterizations of African Americans, Jews, or women) to appear as stereotypical figures of magic and menace; what is involved here is not only ignorance, a failure to realize that the Gypsies are a real and sizable population living as a still-threatened minority in Europe and North America, but also a refusal to give up a powerful set of cultural myths for their sake. (344)

Trumpener discusses the discrepancy between representations of Roma in Western culture and actual life experiences of Roma in their particular situations as ethnic minorities. As Joachim Hohmann remarks: "Kaum ein Volk ist je so missverstanden, so romantisiert und gleichzeitig gedemütigt worden wie das der Zigeuner" (30). Moreover, Trumpener points out how cultural tradition may be seriously challenged by our perception of the Roma:

Over the last two hundred years, European literary and cultural mythology has repeatedly posed the Gypsy question as the key to the origin, the nature, the strength of cultural tradition itself. It could be argued, indeed, that as the Gypsies become bearers, par excellence, of the European memory problem in its many manifestations, they simultaneously become a major epistemological testing ground for the European imaginary, black box, or limit case for successive literary styles, genres, and intellectual moments. (369)

In fact, with so many cultures in transition and in search of a new national identity, European memory after 1989 has become increasingly complex. Countries like unified Germany, Serbia, Croatia, the Czech Republic or Slovakia struggle to reclaim or define identities that now depend on populations that are constituted differently in ethnic and cultural terms. In most European countries

Roma experience increased oppression. Trumpener's argument that the Roma as carriers of the "European memory problem" may become a "major epistemological testing ground" for the "European imaginary" can be modified to address the specifically "German" or "Austrian" imaginary. The performances of Stojka and Rosenberg investigate the meaning of "Austrian" or "German" in a contemporary context. Besides raising questions about the meaning of national identities today, they explore the role of cultural identity and tradition in their cultural and political situations.

Ceija Stojka is explicit in her call to work through damaging "Gypsy" images. For example, she deconstructs the popular folk song "Lustig ist das Zigeunerleben" and comments on the discrepancy between imaginary collective conceptions about Romany cultures and life experiences from a Romani's point of view.²⁶ By performing cultural images of the "Zigeunerin" while at the same time subverting them, Stojka's self-writing turns into auto-performances that create and undo themselves. The act of doing and undoing, of enacting her cultural tradition while reshaping it in the moment of performance and writing, demonstrates Stojka's memory work as an intervention in the history of silence surrounding Romany cultures in Austria.

Otto Rosenberg is similarly concerned with the clash between imaginary collective conceptions of Romany cultures and the actual life experiences of the Roma. Like Stojka, he counters commonly held clichés by stressing, for example, his family's literacy and education, their cleanliness, orderliness, and their sedentary life style. In his *Anmerkungen*, Ulrich Enzensberger explains that "Rosenberg" was already recorded as a Sinti family name in early 15th-century Germany. In Rosenberg's narrative the author tries to understand why he was able to survive the Nazi terror and the war. The text is marked by his strong desire to speak historical truth ("Aber ich will hier nichts Falsches sagen," 68). Yet *Das Brenn-*

glas also reveals a keen awareness of the self-critical and performative nature of the memory project. The dustcover shows a disturbing photo of Rosenberg and two Sinti friends shortly after the war. The photo re-enacts a life-threatening scene from the narrative, in which Rosenberg is about to be shot by a Russian shortly after his liberation from Bergen-Belsen. His gesture of proudly identifying himself as a Sinto, and displaying his bare chest to the soldier, is what saves his life. The postwar photo stages precisely this scene, but positions his Sinti friends, smiling and in civilian clothes, with rifles aimed at Rosenberg. This uncanny photo, cleverly spread out over the front and back covers so the reader has to turn it over to see the other side of the image, raises the problem of distinguishing friends from enemies. This is a central concern in Rosenberg's reflections. Throughout the book Rosenberg grapples with the problem of distinguishing among the different "kinds" of Germans, since he was himself considered "German" and "non-German" at different times. Like all Roma he lost his German citizenship when the Nazi *Blutschutzgesetz* went into effect in 1935, was 'reestablished' as a German after the war, but in the 1950s was not considered an "echter Deutscher" when he sought reparations as a victim of the Nazi persecution (119). Rosenberg repeatedly contemplates the relationship between varying degrees of German identity: "Wie das, was von der SS und, wie man so sagt, von Deutschen wie du und ich getan wurde, überhaupt geschehen konnte, das übersteigt den Horizont" (97). The impossibility to discern, as a child, the murderous intentions of Eva Justin, the assistant to Dr. Robert Ritter, director of the *Rassenhygienische und Erbbiologische Forschungsstelle des Reichsgesundheitsamtes* ("Sie war ja auch sehr freundlich und sehr lieb und sehr nett zu mir" [26]) is troubling to Rosenberg. Numerous other situations reveal the author's struggle to decide who was trustworthy and who was not (e.g., 62, 118). Other passages describe the cruel actions of Nazi camp doctor Josef Mengele,

who appeared as a positive figure to the young child (72–73), or the collaboration of the Catholic and Protestant Churches with the Nazis (23). Even after the war, the difficulty in determining whether Allied liberators were to be trusted lingered (104).

The fear of again being persecuted as the "other" is deeply rooted among the Roma. Long before the Third Reich, they had already been marked and discriminated against as cultural "others" or outsiders. Trinh T. Minh-Ha reminds us of the majority's need to construct "the other" in order to assure "one's sense of self": "If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate yourself?" (73) The distinction between "insiders" and "outsiders," however, is not always clear-cut. For example, Hitler's artificial constructions of Jewish and Gypsy identities, or incidents of official "racial reclassification" in South Africa's Apartheid where blacks were able to *become* "coloreds" demonstrate the political motivation behind notions of "race" and who is considered "inside" or "outside" the respective society. The title of Rosenberg's autobiography *Das Brennglas* makes reference to a similarly tenuous and political moment powerful enough to determine life or death for an individual. Rosenberg recounts the way he was arrested while working in a Nazi ammunition factory as a child. Accused of sabotage against the German people's property, he was imprisoned for months after being caught innocently playing with a magnifying glass ("Brennglas") that belonged to the employees (47). Thus, the book title also cleverly suggests Rosenberg's thorough inspection of German-Romany identity that is under scrutiny. Rosenberg also recalls how three inmates working at Woffleben were hanged based on the accusation that they had stolen property from the German people after they had taken a tattered leather strip to repair their shoes (95). Considering Trinh's reflections on defining identity constructions, it is important to look at the self-representations of ethnic minorities caught in-between multiple cultures and subjectivities. Trinh writes:

Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, [the writer] stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider. She is this Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming "I am like you" while persisting in her difference; and that of reminding "I am different" while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at. (73–74)

It is also useful to think of the Romany texts as "contact zones," a term developed by Mary Louise Pratt. According to Pratt, these texts open up "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (584). Maria-Regina Kecht rightly points out how important it is not to lose sight of the sociopolitical, historical reality when considering theoretical reflections on identity and politics. In her perceptive discussion of Marie-Thérèse Kerschbaumer's (self-) critical representation of the "Gypsy," Kecht grounds her analysis in the historical context of the Roma in Austria, who are generally viewed as less "authentic" and thereby less "legitimate" Austrians. This public opinion has been exploited by the media and politicians to promote continued discrimination against Romanies (84–103). Stojka wonders whether one should even talk about the "echter" Austrian: "Aber der Österreicher, der echte Österreicher—ob's einen echten überhaupt gibt, einen reinrassigen? [...]" (*Leben* 103). Having to negotiate different notions, even varying degrees of identity, members of ethnic minority groups must always consider their particular cultural positionality that may shift when public or political opinion constructs different "identities" for them.

Stojka's and Rosenberg's autobiographical narratives reveal the close connection be-

tween memory and performance. As an "art of the present," the act of performance links past and present through its enactment of memories. In *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha's discusses the way culture works on the "borderline," a position taken by the Romany writers who are continuously encountering and negotiating differences, or those elements that are not part of the continuum of past and present. This art of the "border lives" represents, according to Bhabha, also an "art of the present" because it focuses "on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (1). Enacting and performing this particular work of "cultural translation," this "art" presents the possibility of a "cultural hybridity" or reinvention that negotiates difference without assuming one element to be more powerful than the other (Bhabha 2-9). Rosenberg and Stojka collaborated closely with their non-Romany editors, and their memory projects clearly represent works co-produced by Roma and non-Roma. *Reisende auf dieser Welt* and *Wir leben im Verborgenen* feature lengthy and informative excerpts from conversations between Berger and Stojka in the second half of the books, complementing Stojka's own writings by more specific reflections triggered by Berger's questions. Rosenberg's *Das Brennglas* concludes with a list of detailed endnotes, compiled by Enzensberger, that supplement Rosenberg's memories with historical information. At times, Rosenberg's text also displays a dialogic structure, and he often addresses his conversation partner or interviewer, who is otherwise absent from the text with phrases such as "Sehen Sie, [...]" or "Wissen Sie, [...]" (64).

Thinking about this "presentness" of the past in theoretical terms helps clarify the relationship between memory, writing, and performance. Rosenberg's and Stojka's project of re-visiting the Romany past in Germany and Austria reveals their hope for a present and a future in which Romanies are no longer repressed. The texts literally enact and produce their referent, and only exist in

the precarious moment of the "here" and "now." Thus, they are defined as part of a specific time and site, and—very importantly—bound to an individual body. Research in contemporary performance and ethnographic studies has shown how culture is created and how it grows through various instances of local performances that contest assumptions and conventions.²⁷ Performance, then, as a "doing and a thing done, drifts between past and present, presence and absence, conscience and memory" (Diamond 8).

These new forms of representation that have recently emerged among German-speaking ethnic cultures are of particular interest for cultural studies today. The literary and artistic productions do not merely reflect the surrounding culture but function as cultural interventions themselves. Here, Homi K. Bhabha's discussion of minority cultures in his article "Culture's In-Between" as "internal differentiations, the 'foreign bodies', in the midst of the nation [...]" is helpful (Hall and du Gay 58). His notion of "hybridity" takes into account the double position of the minority culture as part of the dominant society and as the cultural outsider. Bhabha's understanding of minority cultures as hybrids stresses the position of minority cultures not as forces from the 'outside' but as a simultaneously internal and 'foreign' body within the nation state. Expanding Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the novelistic hybrid, Bhabha links it to the speech act and the cultural realm of performance. He quotes Bakhtin's reflections on the novelistic hybrid, saying that it

is not only double-voiced and double-accented (as in rhetoric) but is also double-language; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, [sic] consciousnesses, two epochs ... that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance.... It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms ... such unconscious hybrids

have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words. ("Culture's In-Between," in Hall and du Guy 58)

As Bhabha explains, Bakhtin proposes a space of enunciation where the "negotiation of discursive doubleness by which I [Bhabha] do not mean duality or binarism engenders a new speech act" (58; Bhabha's emphasis). Bhabha's reflections raise questions of cultural authority within unequal power structures. Avoiding the trap of thinking in binary oppositions (i.e., "us" versus "them," or cultural assimilation versus collaboration), he suggests the term "interstitial agency" (58). This notion not only describes the particular position of the minority culture as in-between, but also emphasizes the political moment of agency. Hybrid agencies, Bhabha states, "deploy the partial culture from which they emerge to construct visions of community, and versions of historic memory, that give narrative form to the minority positions they occupy; the outside of the inside: the part in the whole" (58). Despite contemporary critiques of the notion of an originary and unified subject, Bhabha stresses a certain irreducibility of the concept of "identity." He includes moments of agency and politics of location in his reflections on "identity." Identities emerge within the play of specific modalities of power and are more the result of markings of difference and exclusion than signs of a "naturally" constituted unity. As can be seen in the autobiographical texts by Stojka and Rosenberg, moments of differentiation linked to the writers' awareness of negotiating two cultures inform cultural performance or representation of identity. Their work also reveals how artistic and political agencies are linked to the authors' specific positions, particularly when they occupy the precarious site of living, remembering, and writing from both inside and outside their culture.²⁸

Stojka's and Rosenberg's writings are based on an understanding of memory as a

process that constructs and performs memory images or scenes. The moments of (re-) creating memory images raise the problem of interpretation. As demonstrated by the cover of Rosenberg's autobiography, the memory images can be viewed as "effects" of a traumatic history. They are not always re-presented but rather presented or reenacted. In this sense, memory represents a particular form of writing that includes modes of 'inscription' that need to be deciphered. The emphasis on the performative and the body may enrich the understanding of contemporary German cultural memory, particularly in works produced by ethnic minority writers. Interesting shifts in memory texts have been taking place that call for a conceptual reconfiguration of memory and new approaches to understanding memory in German-speaking countries. Critical perspectives of minorities contribute significantly to the complex of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that increasingly shift away from the perpetrators' points of view to those that were marginalized or victimized. The new memory performances suggest forms of *Vergegenwärtigung* capable of working out and displaying the complex relationships between past and present, and between majority and minority groups.²⁹

Both Stojka and Rosenberg make their readers re-view stereotypical "Gypsy"-images and encourage non-Romany readers to revise their relationship with the Roma. Furthermore, their writing and artistic productions stimulate readers and viewers to rethink notions of culture and nation that depend on a hierarchical division between the dominant culture and ethnic minority groups. Clearly, beyond the personal identity at stake for the individual Romany national, the identities of Germany and Austria are in question. The inequitable relationship between the non-Romany culture and the Romany groups in these countries is in need of revision and reparation. The same applies to relations with other "ethnic minorities," such as Afro-Germans or Turkish Germans, who, as national citizens, similarly occupy

the place of cultural insiders and outsiders. Yet the Roma have been part of Europe for centuries. Given this historical dimension, any sense of German or Austrian national identity is thus inextricably bound to an understanding of the relationship between the non-Romany majority and the Romany minority.

Writing and performing from an insider and outsider perspective, the memory performances of Rosenberg and Stojka call attention to the ethnic diversity at the heart of German and Austrian culture. As Sybil Milton perceptively remarked in her discussion of postwar and contemporary Germany, the treatment of the "only indigenous minority long native to the German lands" will be a "yardstick" or "touchstone by which we can judge German democracy in the next century" (325).³⁰ A lot is at stake indeed: it is time to listen to voices that were silenced for so long. This time, both non-Roma and Roma will have to do the work together in order to create democratic cultures where discrimination, oppression and violence can be overcome.

Notes

¹Excerpt from Rajko Djuric's poem "Der vierte Weg" (*Zigeunerische Elegien* 61).

²I generally use the terms "Roma" or "Romanies" instead of "Gypsies," since the latter has often been used in a pejorative context. The Gypsies call themselves "Rroma" [sic] which means "persons" or "human beings" in the Romani language (in German, *Roma* refers to the male person, and *Romni* to the female.) There are, however, many Roma who proudly identify themselves as *Zigeuner* or "Gypsies."

³See Milton 324. For detailed information on the historical situation of the Roma and *Jenische* in Switzerland, see Thomas Huonker and Regula Ludi, *Roma, Sinti und Jenische: Schweizerische Zigeunerpolitik zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* [Beiheft zum Bericht: Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus; Unabhängige Expertenkommission: Schweiz—Zweiter Weltkrieg] (Bern, 2000). See also the work of Sybil Milton. With regard to

the increased violence against Roma in Eastern European countries, see "Roma and Eastern Europe," *Harvard International Review* 22.1 (2000): 6–7, and David Holley, "E. Europe's Anti-Gypsy Bias is Back," *Los Angeles Times* (24 Sept. 1999): A1.

⁴For more information see Katrin Reemtsma's chapter "Die Lage der Sinti und Roma nach den politischen Wenden von 1989/90" in her *Sinti und Roma* (164–79).

⁵See Susan Tebbutt, ed., *Sinti and Roma: Gypsies in German-Speaking Society and Literature* (ix–xiii).

⁶In Rumania, twenty brutal pogroms directed against Romany villages occurred within one year (1990–91).

⁷See Roland Schopf, ed., *Sinti, Roma und wir anderen: Beiträge zu problembehafteten Beziehungen* (Münster: Lit, 1994) 103f; Reemtsma 11; Fonseca 222.

⁸In Kosovo, the situation for the Roma is particularly difficult: The Roma represent a prime target for racial violence and often do not even receive help from non-governmental, international organizations distributing humanitarian aid. The Kosovo Roma are rarely included in official statistics even though they constitute about ten percent of the population.

⁹Among those who have published books are Ceija Stojka, Karl Stojka, Mongo Stojka, Alfred Lessing, Philomena Franz, and Otto Rosenberg. Lolo Reinhardt's memoir *Überwintern: Jugenderinnerungen eines schwäbischen Zigeuners* (Gerlingen: Bleicher, 1999) is written entirely in dialect. Rajko Djuric from Serbia is one of the authors from Eastern European countries who also writes in German. Other writers include Ilija Jovanovic and Miso Nikolic, Serbian Roma living in Austria, or Dido Ernst in Germany, whose poetry appears in journals. There also exist several oral Romany self-portraits transcribed and published by German scholars.

¹⁰It may be interesting to compare Herta Müller's *Reisende auf einem Bein* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1992) to Stojka's *Reisende auf dieser Welt*. Both books were published the same year. Müller's book also focuses on a woman negotiating multiple identities. In her novel, the main female protagonist struggles to find her place in Germany as a Romanian German after her return from Rumania.

¹¹Karin Berger's research focuses on forms of

women's resistance to Nazi oppression. See Berger and Elisabeth Holzinger, et al.

¹²For more information on the postwar continuation of discrimination and violence against the Roma, see Schopf and Reemtsma.

¹³She took to writing despite a fair amount of ridicule and lack of support within her own family, and even had to hide her manuscript in the kitchen where no one would find it (*Wir leben im Verborgenen*, conversation with Karin Berger, 97–98).

¹⁴See the interview between Karen Rosenberg and Ceija Stojka: "They couldn't take our thoughts" 18.

¹⁵Perhaps one could talk about an "art of forgetting" among Roma in contrast to a "monumental industry of remembrance" in regard to Jews. Cf. Fonseca 276.

¹⁶Ceija Stojka, *Bilder & Texte: 1989–1995*. Stojka published these thoughts in a catalogue of her paintings, where they serve as a poetic commentary on her visual art. Most of her paintings are visual representations of memory and dream images.

¹⁷Shortly after German reunification, the well known Sinti-Swing-Quintett refused to play at one of the public music festivals in Berlin fearing Neo-Nazi attacks (Gilsenbach 235).

¹⁸Romani (German: *Romanes*) is the basic form of Gypsy language. It is of Indian origin, and still spoken today as one of India's dialects in Northern India. Sanskrit and Hindi are part of its roots. For more information, see Jean-Paul Clébert, *The Gypsies*, trans. Charles Duff (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967) 235–43.

¹⁹As Felman writes in reference to the film, "the haunting repetition of an ill-understood melody [...] make[s] the referent come back, paradoxically, as something heretofore unseen by history; to reveal the real as the impact of a literal that history cannot assimilate or integrate as knowledge, but that it keeps encountering in the return of the song" (Felman and Laub 276).

²⁰The problematic nature of the term "resistance" within the context of Nazi concentration camps has been discussed in detail elsewhere. Cf. Berger and Holzinger, et al. 8–10. See also Ulrich König, *Sinti und Roma unter dem Nationalsozialismus: Verfolgung und Widerstand* (Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1989) 19–50, 167–76. In the Nazi camps, expressions of resistance ranged from

the rare forms of active and organized resistance by the Roma to a variety of types of passive resistance which included, for example, the refusal to obey, work, or eat. It could also mean to lie, falsify documents, or to smuggle information, which was partially coded with Romani, to the outside world. One example of active resistance was the armed defense in the "Gypsy camp" of Auschwitz-Birkenau on the fifth of April 1944 which saved several thousand Romanies from being gassed at Birkenau. Of approximately 9,000 Roma scheduled for gassing that day, only 3,200 were gassed later in August 1944. The others had been brought to other camps in the meantime. Other important forms of resistance included diverse forms of solidarity among the inmates in order to survive.

²¹Judith Ingram also stresses that it has been Romany women "who have consistently held the community roles of conveyors of tradition and nurturers of the family" (19).

²²Cf. the following account of similar situations in Terezín (Theresienstadt) in which singing was clearly an act of resistance: Singer Karel Berman, who survived Theresienstadt, recounts: "How often [...] did we sing out resistance and give the people strength to endure! We were indeed risking our necks when we sang: 'The hour has struck—the gates are opening' from Smetana's *Brandenburg in Bohemia* [...]" Quoted by Aaron Kramer, "Creation in a Death Camp" (Rovit and Goldfarb 181).

²³Zdenka Ehrlich-Fantlová writes about the artistic productions in Terezín: "The Czech theater in this camp was no mere entertainment or social distraction, but a living torch showing people the way ahead and lending them spiritual strength and hope. For many, a cultural experience became more important than a ration of bread." See her "Czech Theater in Terezín" (Rovit and Goldfarb 235).

²⁴Cf. Rebecca Rovit's "Introduction" to *Theatrical Performance during the Holocaust* 9.

²⁵The title of her CD means "I had a dream."

²⁶"Ich weiss nicht, wer das komponiert hat, 'Lustig ist das Zigeunerleben'. Mir gefällt es nicht, wenn sie das singen. Was ist da lustig? Für den, der kein Rom ist, ist es lustig. Aber für mich, die ich dieses Leben habe führen müssen, für mich ist es nicht lustig." And: "Immer habe ich mich geärgert, wenn sie dieses Lied gesun-

gen haben. Lustig ist es, solange alles funktioniert" (*Reisende*, conversation with Karin Berger, 131 and 134). This song has been part of the German and Austrian folk culture since the second half of the 19th century. Stojka discusses this song whose title has become a notorious, cliché-ridden phrase about Gypsy life. Her descriptions of everyday-life deconstruct populist myths of supposedly carefree, blissful Gypsy life. Her family and most other Romany clans were already well integrated in the Catholic Austro-Hungarian Empire (*Wir leben im Verborgenen* 103).

²⁷Cf., for example, the work of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. Contemporary ethnographers, such as James Clifford, do not speak of culture as "social drama" anymore which assumes culture to be organic in its development. Clifford, for instance, talks about culture as "local performances from (re-)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages." He stresses that "'culture' is not an object to be described, neither is it a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitely interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal, and emergent" (quot. Diamond 6). Cf. also Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, eds., *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 1–18.

²⁸Susan Tebbutt also calls attention to the hybridity of contemporary Austrian writing, in particular that by ethnic women writers. She claims that scholars have neglected to pay attention to works produced "in the last quarter of the twentieth century by women writers from ethnic minority groups in Austria" ("Marginalization" 141).

²⁹This kind of self-conscious and critical mode of self-representation is also central in *Latcho Drom*, directed by Tony Gatlif, himself of French Romany descent (1993, "Safe Journey"). This film represents a musical travelogue through the various countries in which the Roma settled after leaving India. Gatlif's highly choreographed staging of the Romany singers and musicians is striking, because it highlights the construction of "Gypsiness." Like Rosenberg's and Stojka's autobiographies, the film uses and critically subverts stereotypical images of "Gypsies" frequently held by non-Roma. However, by allowing the Romany bands to represent themselves in their own right and by presenting them cinemato-

graphically as ethnic groups that are clearly performing in the film (Gatlif is not "documenting" the supposed naturalness of the musicians, singers, and dancers in their everyday lives), the film also foregrounds the fascinating ways of Romany self-representation that is noticeable in autobiographies written by German-speaking Roma.

³⁰Roland Schopf also remarks: "Die neue deutsche Einheit markiert eine Schnittstelle für alle unsere Überlegungen zum Nationalstaat. [...] Die demokratische Staatsordnung stellt keineswegs einen absoluten Wert an sich dar. Einer ihrer einsichtigsten Kritiker, Alexis de Tocqueville, hat schon vor 160 Jahren darauf hingewiesen, dass das Qualitätsmerkmal einer Demokratie sich aus der Art und Weise ergibt, wie in dieser Staatsform, die Mehrheitsherrschaft bedeutet, Minderheiten behandelt werden. Machen wir uns klar, daß die Behandlung der Minderheit der Sinti und Roma einen Maßstab dafür abgibt, wie es um unsere demokratische Staatsordnung bestellt ist" (22–23).

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