The university as heterotopia in Tabea Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders...*

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Tabea Mußgnug. Academic novel. Campus fiction. Student memoir. Heterotopia. Authenticity.

Nächstes Semester wird alles anders… (Next semester all will be different…, 2015) by Tabea Mußgnug is a student memoir that constructs the university as a Foucauldian heterotopia. The nameless first-person narrator, who functions as a *persona* for the author herself, tells us about her preoccupations, idiosyncrasies and anxieties, relating anecdotes from the student life of a millennial who does not seem to take her studies in the humanities or herself all too seriously. Her student memoir provides a fresh look at the university by shifting the focus of narration to a partly factual, partly ironical description of daily study routines, after-work life, and leisure time. Her confessional tone, irreverent attitude, and frequent use of clichés and stereotypes serve her narrative construction of authenticity. With *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* Mußgnug joins the ranks of those authors of campus fiction who have come to turn away from academia, emphasizing that there are more important and satisfactory things to do in life than studying or teaching at a university.

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A number of new and previously unknown German-speaking authors have tried their hands at academic fiction in the course of the last two decades.[1] One possible explanation for this trend seems to be the popularity of Dietrich Schwanitz's *Der Campus*, which appeared in 1995 and was subsequently turned into a film directed by Sönke Wortmann (1997). Another reason is that this genre strongly reacts to changes in the university landscape (cf. Moseley 2019). In Germany, the last decade of the 20th century and the first of the new millennium have brought university reforms attempting to curb the excrescences of the liberal changes conceded by the authorities in the wake of the student rebellions of 1968.[2]

Among these authors from the millennial generation is Tabea Mußgnug (born in 1987), whose student memoir *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* (Next semester all will be different…) appeared in 2015. Like her nameless protagonist and first-person narrator, Mußgnug studied art history, religious studies and Byzantine archaeology, and did her PhD in art history at the University of Heidelberg. This information (provided inside the book) suggests that the character should be taken as a *persona* of the author herself, which leaves the readers to ponder what sort of text they are dealing with.

The book's paratexts give an important clue: it is published by Fischer Publishers, but although the book has a slightly larger format, the graphics of the yellow cover is reminiscent of the inexpensive *Reclam Universalbibliothek* series, mostly featuring classical German writers. The "smudged" yellow cover creates the impression of being a used copy, as also suggested by the red ink with which somebody (the previous reader?) seems to have filled in the letters "e", "d", and "a" on the front and the verso. Finally, the subtitles "Zwischen Uni und Leben!" (Between the university and life!) and "Für alle, die denken, sie bräuchten einen Plan" (For all those who think that they need a plan) appear to be handwritten with green and red felt pen, as if the book's owner had scribbled on the cover herself, perhaps doodling on it to kill time during a boring lecture. These graphic details point towards one of the central assumptions in this article: the fiction of authenticity and the realization that authenticity is – like truth – an artificial construction. This also applies to constructing the university as a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense.

Moreover, on the back cover we read that Mußgnug's narrative is meant to be a "Guide for all who know what it feels like to be continually asked: 'And what can you do you with it afterwards?'"[3] Mußgnug seems to have in mind a clearly-defined group of readers who are capable of sharing and appreciating her experiences, that is, prospective students or university graduates who are asking the naïve question, "And what can you do with it afterwards?" This may also include less academically-minded readers who nevertheless are curious to find out what it feels like to study at university today. Mußgnug's text is difficult to classify, depending on whether one reads it as a documentation of real-life experiences, or considers it to be fiction. The simple suggestion to read it as a student memoir based on the experiences of its author makes the work quite unique, with hardly any parallels in the German-speaking realm. As a genre, the memoir, like the autobiography, allows for the employment of episodic structures and the insertion of personal anecdotes as well as claims to be true to life.

It also allows the use of fiction, as we know, at least since Hayden White, that fiction is needed to (re)construct the past (1973).

This article will describe the protagonist's intentionally irreverent and satirical views of university life as well as discussing the serious issues and problems that lie beneath the surface of her comic and ironic self-stylization. We should note that the style of the whole work is informal and close to oral speech, suggesting local student jargon along with the lingo of the millennial generation. This relaxed and informal way of writing is crucial to the work as a whole and to the effects it wants to achieve. The insider view and the intimate and confessional tone is part of Mußgnug's narrative construction of authenticity, with which she seems to be targeting both the group of prospective "firsties", or "Erstis" in German (41), that is, first-semester students who are facing entry into university life, as well as those who nostalgically recall their own college days. It goes without saying that the memoir also seems to be confirming the prejudices of those who have always claimed that studying at university is a waste of time, and that young people should be applying themselves to something more useful or profitable. The world of the university in Mußgnug's view resembles a pleasant heterotopia with a special space and time structure. It is a protected space where today's young people are provided for and looked after, do not need to work very hard, and have much time on their hands to try new things and indulge in their hobbies – including partying, social media, and many other types of entertainment. This picture of student life suggested in Mußgnug's memoir claims to be authentic, but it is doubtful whether it is a truthful reflection of reality. The authenticity that Mußgnug's book constructs (and to which it owes its success) is more an expression of the nostalgic longing for the genuine and the true, which in the age of fake news and artificial intelligence threatens to become a rare commodity (Schilling 2020; Dinger 2021), than a truthful account of the student experience. Mußgnug describes her laborious way into the university world, what it feels like to live inside this "bell jar", and her desperate attempts to get back into "real life".

UNIVERSITY (LIFE) AS HETEROTOPIA

In contrast to utopias or dystopias that portray imaginary worlds, heterotopias exist as parts of our reality, but according to Michel Foucault they are also different from it, demarcated by real or imaginary boundaries that mark heterotopia as a special place. Foucault lists gardens, prisons, churchyards, psychiatric asylums, museums, or libraries as examples (2005, 16). These heterotopias are related to heterochrony, that is, special concepts of time, for example, the churchyard, where time stands still, or the museum or library which "collect" time and are therefore related to eternity (16). What is also important to note is that access to these heterotopias is granted through initiation or purification rituals (18). In the academic context, we can think of the ritual of selecting the "right" university and the *Immatrikulation* (official enrollment), the host of accompanying forms and formalities, and the discouraging experiences of the narrator as she tries to settle down into university life.

Mußgnug's unnamed narrator/protagonist is aware that she is moving in a special place as well as in a special time, since quite early in her work she reflects on this process:

> The "now" is a great, boring waiting hall. But I am also afraid of the "after", because the "after" means to face the real world. Of course, the university is not the real world. The university is a cheese dome with semester ticket and student insurances, shared flats, asparagus in the canteen for two Euros, and for all and everything there is a help desk. We have a lot of time, without anyone telling us that we are just hanging around, for we are studying, we are doing something important and respectable, working with our heads. If you want to go abroad, you can live for a semester in Barcelona, just like that, university will see to it. If you don't like a seminar, well, leave it. If it doesn't work out with your credit, you can do it next semester. (2015, 12)

Here, place and time are closely related in Foucault's definition of heterotopia. The "now" ("Jetzt") refers to the time when she is still at university but has successfully concluded her studies and is writing her job applications. It resembles a "waiting hall" ("Wartehalle") in which she is preparing for the time "after" ("Danach") that is, her (re-)entry into "the real world".

Repeatedly mentioned throughout Mußgnug's memoir is the fact that students may seem to have a lot of time on their hands. This impression at least applies to the students in the humanities, for Mußgnug is aware that the situation may be different for students studying other subjects. As proof she cites the so-called "semester holidays" ("Semesterferien"), which in Germany take up ten weeks twice a year. The narrator emphasizes how the university lecturers insist on calling this "lecture-free time" ("vorlesungsfreie Zeit"), the implication being that this time is not meant for holidays but for writing seminar papers, reading, and preparing yourself for the upcoming semester (Mußgnug 2015, 137ff.).

Initiation troubles

At the beginning of Mußgnug's student memoir she faces the questions of what to study and where to study it. These matters are crucial, and are not so easily answered by the prospective *Erstie*, since the act of choosing your subject presupposes that you know about your strengths, weaknesses, and predilections, which is not always the case.

Early in her memoir, the protagonist realizes that her choice of "exotic" subjects might turn out to be problematic in the long run. The question: "And what can you do with it afterwards?" (196), which others continually confront her with, fuels the feeling of latent panic that takes possession of her when she is reflecting on her chances of getting a decent job in the future. It also forces her to ponder another problem, namely, "where noble idealism stops and naive stupidity begins" (194). Throughout her text, Mußgnug contrasts the so-called "orchid subjects" ("Orchideenfächer"; 40), such as Byzantine archaeology or religious studies (both of which she later chooses), to disciplines such as medicine, law, economics, or teacher training courses, which she has ruled out for herself from the start. According to Mußgnug, disorientation, pragmatism, and utilitarian thinking are la-

bels that describe the prospective student's state of mind and motivation much more adequately and authentically than the idea of a thirst for knowledge in specific disciplines. The writer/narrator's sympathy seems to be with the *Ersties,* and her intention is to encourage them by describing how many other beginners are in the same situation.

Mußgnug is right when she considers the possible outcomes of a decision that ignores the question of what you can do with a degree after graduation. She chooses subjects that make the transition from school to university easy for her, following stereotypical ideas of what might be easy or difficult. What makes starting student life even more difficult is the sheer number of universities that you can apply for, since German students can study almost anywhere in Germany, if we ignore the question of *numerus clausus* for the time being. There are hardly any study fees to be considered, as most of the universities are non-profit institutions financed by the various federal German governments. Quite in contrast to England, where the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge indisputably stand for "excellence", in Germany it is not so clear which universities can count as "excellent" institutions. The reason is that a globally recognized ranking system comparable to that existing in England or in the United States has not been established – for various reasons.

In *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…*, the protagonist is aware that in 2007, all universities are "obsessed" (34) with the idea of receiving the title of "elite university" (34). In Germany, this goal was endorsed in 2005 by the so-called "Excellence Initiatives" (34) launched by the German Science and Humanities Council and the German Research Foundation and implemented in two phases from 2007 to 2017. It is more than understandable that the label "excellence" was taken advantage of by the endowed universities to advertise themselves as "elite universities" according to the model of Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale, although in England and the US other criteria have to be fulfilled to be awarded this predicate. Mußgnug insists that, seen from a student's perspective, the choice of your university is not so much a matter of the institution's excellence, but is rather dependent on other considerations. Her decision to change from Heidelberg to Karlsruhe after her first semester and study the subject of German philology in Karlsruhe is a remarkable indicator in this direction. Karlsruhe is well known for its sciences and technology, but less so for its humanities.

Mußgnug's protagonist feels insecure, and when she begins to study art history and German philology in Heidelberg, she is intimidated by the change of her environment and by the challenging reports of her student colleagues about the difficulties they had to master by pulling many "all-nighters" of work. She loses heart and believes herself to be "the dumbest chicken at the university" (37). The subtitle of her student memoir, "For all who think they need a plan…" – implying that you do not need a plan, that it is "normal" if you do not have one – is meant to be reassuring for all those who are in a similar situation. According to Mußgnug, there are enough examples of this (35–36).

A student's perspective on relaxation and routines

Mußgnug's images of student life at Heidelberg University should be taken with a pinch of salt, for basically they are low-angle shots drawn with a lot of irreverent humor, self-irony, and partly with satirical intention:

> When some time ago, on a Monday evening, my flat mate Sarah and I were visiting Sarah's boyfriend Lukas, I started to realize how much I was – in terms of time – living in a parallel world. Actually, we just wanted to watch a film together, but we found a bottle of Absolute Raspberry Vodka, ice-cold, and because it was hot and we hadn't eaten anything substantial, only a piece of watermelon, the effect was impressive. At half past eight I was standing at the open flat window above, bawling loudly and throwing freshly washed underpants from the laundry rack on to the street. Below, Sarah tried to catch them and was laughing her head off. People passed by on their way home and in expectation of a whole week of work that lay still before them, while I threw a cucumber out of the window because I had run out of pants. At half past nine, me and Sarah took turns hugging the toilet bowl. (12–13)

Mußgnug has deliberately chosen to write from the perspective of a student of the humanities who describes herself as a "scared rabbit" (59) as well as a late developer and closet procrastinator who is to function as a representative of the average student population. The narrator thus portrays herself and her ambitions in an ironic light. She realizes and freely admits that there are better students than she is, which is an understatement that creates space for self-irony, self-critique and satire. Mußgnug's first-person narrator poses as a *picara*, who desperately tries to survive in an environment where too many students are squeezed into small lecture halls or seminar rooms, and people have to sit on the floor, where you have to enter your name on a long list with many other names to sign up for a presentation topic in the prescribed seminars, and where you are just a faceless nobody for the professor or lecturer. Descriptions and critical reflections on the course contents that her protagonist has studied for seven years are blatantly absent. The narrator does not want to come across as an intellectual, but simply poses as a young woman of our time, one who speaks the language of the millennials and who shares her generation's preoccupations, aspirations and anxieties.

Mußgnug is very much concerned with the organization of her studies and the routines a student must go through. She finds fault with the way things are administered; for example, the university administration still works with hard copies. There are other things that become more important for a student than enthusing over newly won scholarly insights into her study subjects, such as registering in time for a presentation topic (58 ff.), or not being able to sign an attendance list in an overcrowded lecture hall because it gets "stuck" in its circulation and does not arrive in time to be signed before the end of the lecture.

Writing seminar papers becomes a boring routine, dominated by paraphrasing secondary sources, copying and pasting, without using any creativity. At student level, the likelihood to be found out as a plagiarist at this time is still limited, at least as Mußgnug's first-person narrator believes, since the professors do not read the numerous student papers themselves, but delegate this task to their student assistants ("Hi-

wis" – German abbreviation for Hilfswissenschaftler; 123–124), whom the teachers treat as their "slaves" (124).

Internships and holiday jobs

If university is a heterotopia and studying amounts to life under a bell jar, the many internships that bachelor's and master's students must complete during the course of their studies seem merely ritualized attempts at making contact with real life – something which Mußgnug's narrator instinctively dislikes. Internships and holiday jobs logically build bridges to the outside world, with all the consequences this might entail for the protagonist. Time begins to move faster, life becomes more laborious, and often Mußgnug's protagonist prays that these periods go by quickly. She realizes that as a student trainee, she is really everybody's "doormat" (Mußgnug literally: "Mops"; 130) and wishes she were back in the "shelter" of the lecture hall.

The narrator makes it clear that she harbors antagonistic feelings towards the educational or teaching sector of work life. Her phobia is expressed in a comic way, for example, when she notices "forty-five crowing primary school kids equipped with Mandarin-scented India rubbers and wholemeal cheese sandwiches in Lillifee Tupperware" (121). She also observes that the children born after the year 2000 sometimes seem to bear strange names. Mußgnug's skill in creating comic dialogue is illustrated in passages such as "'Lucifer hit me on my head today with his pencil case' – 'Ach, Snow White, this is only his way of showing you that he likes you'" ("'Luzifer hat mir heute mit dem Mäppchen auf den Kopf gehauen' – 'Ach, Schneewittchen, damit zeigt er doch nur, dass er dich mag'"; 131). Other encounters with reality in the form of various internships and holiday jobs create more or less similar results: for the time being, she prefers to stay under the bell jar.

The difficult transition back into reality

The final episode of this life in heterotopia is the attempt to regain access to reality. This demands again a ritualized form of activity: writing application letters and receiving scores of polite rejections. The conflict between a practically oriented choice of study subjects (economics, law, medicine) and following the inclination of one's mind is pertinent throughout Mußgnug's text, however, and this tension reaches a climax towards the end of her memoir. Her disappointment becomes greatest when at a barbecue she meets a former student friend who took up the study of business administration and engineering when there was a demand for it on the market, and who is now successful in his job, earning a lot of money:

> He mentioned that he had always wanted to study history. Sure of victory, I asked him whether he did not regret his choice in the meantime (Subtext: "Regret having sold yourself for filthy lucre to cold economy, you bending bugger!"), and waited for regretful words. He laughed and said that he simply read many history books, which he could afford to buy for himself due to his job and doesn't need to borrow from the library, in his spare time. For the rest of the evening I felt crestfallen. (194)

Mußgnug seems to have written *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders...* during a time of unemployment after completing her PhD in 2014. In Germany the per-

centage of unemployed academics is lower than the average unemployment rate (cf. Bundesagentur 2024). Although the situation for academics on the job market is not so bad overall, there may be individual differences, such as Mußgnug's combination of three "orchid subjects", that make it more difficult to find a suitable job.

FICTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY

University life may be experienced differently by other students, especially those studying other subjects, and Mußgnug's text creates the feeling that her protagonist has formed a somewhat biased view of student life. The idea that students have so much time at their disposal is only true up to a certain point. Being enrolled in a BA course usually means studying within a set curriculum of prescribed classes and lectures, within which the student's choices are limited. When Mußgnug insists on the fact that students can skip a seminar or postpone it until next semester, she is only telling us half of the truth. Also, going abroad for a semester is not so easy, as the lectures, seminars and examinations one takes abroad may differ from those of the home curriculum and may not be recognized by the home university. Thus, despite the good intentions of the system's initiators, the intended theoretical flexibility of the Bologna agreements continues to have practical limitations.

Mußgnug's University of Heidelberg seems to be a paradise for students of art history, Byzantine archaeology, and religious studies, although Mußgnug's narrative deliberately distorts and simplifies reality in her creation of "authentic" student life. As Erik Schilling (2020) points out, authenticity should not be understood as an essentialist term that gives us access to the "truth", but as "*the congruency between an observation with an expectation of the observer*. The one who says 'authentic' in this sense says nothing about the observed person or entity, but only about her/his expectation and observation" (11).

With Schilling's definition of authenticity as our starting point, our analysis will have to concentrate on the narrative strategies that Mußgnug uses to construct authenticity, and not on the question of truth. Claiming that students lead their lives under a bell jar is certainly part of it. Other strategies were already mentioned before: the faked Reclam environment of the paratext, the choice of the narrative subgenre of student memoir, for example, and the insertion of a biographical note that the author studied the same subjects as her narrator-persona. The informal writing style, which amounts to a fiction of orality, and the irreverent tone with which she describes her teachers and the subjects she is studying, contribute to the creation of an authentic student perspective. Finally, the host of intertextual and intermedial allusions and cultural references embed her narrative firmly into the cultural context of her time. Although it seems counter-intuitive at first glance, the employment of stereotypes and clichés, together with her irony and satire also serve the purpose of creating an authentic view of reality.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE HUMANITIES

As previously mentioned, the narrator's choice of fields of study is portrayed in an ironic light, and the cavalier way she makes this choice feeds the prejudice

of the general public that many subjects in the humanities should be dropped from the university syllabus, and that studying them is a useless undertaking and a waste of precious resources. At least theoretically, the study of an *Orchideenfach* implies much more than what is suggested by the English stereotype of "left-handed underwater basket weaving". Mußgnug's memoir should be read in the context of the global discussion about the role of the humanities within the spectrum of academic disciplines, the questioning of their social relevance, and efforts to curtail them by various universities. The depreciation of the humanities is not merely a local but a global phenomenon, as J. M. Coetzee emphasizes in his foreword to John Higgins's book *On Academic Freedom in a Democratic South Africa* (2014):

> South African universities are by no means in a unique position. All over the world, as governments retreat from their traditional duty to foster the common good and reconceive of themselves as mere managers of national economies, universities have been coming under pressure to turn themselves into training schools equipping young people with the skills required by a modern economy. (xi)

Coetzee, who became professor of general literature at Cape Town University in 1983 and was distinguished professor of literature between 1999 and 2001, is arguing from an insider's perspective. Mußgnug's text makes a contribution to this discussion, not so much by explicitly voicing an opinion, but by pointing out the practical implications and consequences of this issue, as well as, perhaps most importantly for our analysis, showing what it looks like from a student's perspective.

STEREOTYPES AND CLICHÉS

The employment of stereotypes and clichés should be understood as part of the narrative strategies used by Mußgnug to construct authenticity. Cognitive psychology assumes that we use perception schemata in our everyday lives as a means of recognizing, understanding, and remembering reality by reducing complexity and structuring information (Anderson [1996] 2014; Medin and Ross 1992). The reality that we encounter daily is so full of details that we need this reduction to allow orientation. Perception schemata are stored in our memory and are activated in the process of cognition. What we recognize, therefore, is not so much reality as such but the congruency of the schemata we have learned and internalized in the process of socialization with the structures of reality we encounter. Cognition, therefore, paradoxically implies a "less", and not a "more" of information, while new and more complex knowledge comes about by adding information and restructuring these schemata, or as conceptual blending theory has shown, by the combination or blending of more than one schema of recognition (Fauconnier and Turner 2003).

Mußgnug seems aware that her narrative representation of reality is brimming with stereotypes and clichés, and the way her narrator argues about this proves her self-reflexivity and intentionality in the use of these schemata. This is the case, for example, when she tries to draw conclusions from the outer appearance of the students to what kind of subjects they study (2015, 71–73): "Clichés always somehow or other arise from the truth" (71). This statement reveals that Mußgnug conceives truth here

in an essentialist way, that is, "truth" is something that exists before the act of cognition takes place, and is already there when we try to recognize it, but in reality, this is not the case. Clichés are perception schemata that have been ingrained by repetition and have become petrified, while new knowledge only comes about by the combination or "blending" of different mental input spaces that share a common generic space with others (cf. Fauconnier and Turner 2003).

Within Mußgnug's student memoir, clichés and stereotypes serve a double function: not only are they applied to construct what the narrator conceives of as "authenticity", but they also serve the narrative purpose of satire, as the reduction of complexity, simplification and exaggeration are also well-known strategies of satirical style, which is illustrated in the following passage:

> as far as law students are concerned, the cartoon pictures of them are more or less completely in congruence with reality: deck shoes, beige Chinos, Ralph-Lauren shirts, pearl necklaces and Longchamp bags give themselves the honor. Not so long ago, I saw three female law students queuing up for lunch. They were all wearing medium blue jeans, beige trench coats, Burberry scarves and ponytails, and were probably all called "Theresa". I don't know how it happens that none of them has a look at the others and asks herself where they took a wrong turn. (2015, 71)

Stereotypes and clichés can be found frequently all through Mußgnug's narrative of student life at Heidelberg University. Early reviewers (Menz 2016; Wüstehube 2015) have criticized the author for these seemingly superficial and clichéd views of reality. These critical voices are justified up to a certain point, because Mußgnug seems to rest content with the first step of the recognition process, that of confirming "identity", while the more complex thought processes according to Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner would require "integration" and "imagination", that is, cognitive "blending" (2003, 6). Nevertheless, Mußgnug's intention behind this is clear: by confirming the prejudices and preconceptions of her readers, she tries to draw them to her side, turning them into "accomplices" in her observations of student life, encouraging them to laugh with her about the cartoon-like representation of her student world. This tendency towards simplification, caricature, and stereotypical observation is also characteristic of Mußgnug's images from the world of the millennials, a generation that came to maturity in the first decade of the 21st century.

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

Mußgnug goes to great lengths in recreating the *Zeitgeist,* the cultural context, and the mentality of this time. The world of the millenials is created by countless references to cultural trends and tendencies, to typical role behavior, and to popular conventions and institutions, although the narrator herself admits that in doing so, she again has to resort to clichés and stereotypes: "It sounds terribly trite to call any generation a generation" (2015, 134). Although Mußgnug calls our attention to this, she does not hesitate to fill in the picture further.

Her intertextual and intermedial references are all intended to confirm the authenticity of the world being narrated. Whatever "turn" one would suggest at this

point, the age of information, of artificial intelligence, or the post-factual age (cf. Kowalik 2023; Gess 2021), for example, suffice it to say that the author is writing in a time characterized by the longing for authenticity (besides Schilling 2020, cf. Dinger 2021, 17), a category that oscillates between essential genuineness and artificial construction. Nostalgic memories that her readers may want to share help to form a common ground of understanding, and on this basis the author constructs the authenticity of her narrative.

Once again, the starting point for Mußgnug's observations on the lifestyle of her student generation between "lightness and depression" (2015, 136) is the assumption that students have too much time on their hands. This time has to be "killed", by binge-watching popular German or American TV series, for example. In remembering the recent past, Mußgnug's protagonist quotes lines from her favorite pop songs, and she discusses lifestyle journals for the younger generation (*Neon* and *Vice*; 84). She mentions famous rock festivals such as "Wacken" and "Rock am Ring" (93–94), reflects on the drinking habits "pre-drinking" and "level drinking" (108) of her generation, and recites the names of fashionable alcoholic beverages of this time and hip cocktails such as Hugo, Aperol Spritz, Caipirinha, and Wodka O (105–108). In this way, the narrator spins a dense web of cultural references, into which she can embed her observations about the student life of this time.

Reading through her text, one cannot help getting the impression that "leisure time" and "after work life" seem to be more important than studying at university. Mußgnug's partial defiance of political correctness and her transgressions of cultural taboos must also be discussed in this context, as disregarding cultural proprieties creates the impression of a spontaneous, honest narrator, one who is aware of her own shortcomings and faults. In the context of what Mußgnug is doing, this becomes a technique of constructing authenticity by subverting authority, while self-reflection and self-affirmation serve as buffers to fend off critique.

She emphasizes that her mission is to speak about the "unspeakable", and by doing so she underlines that she is telling nothing but the truth.

In her attempts to identify and describe characteristic features of the millennial generation, Mußgnug's narrator does not neglect to mention the internet and the smartphone, which have undoubtedly shaped the life of the whole generation (Dimok 2019). In *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* she gives us an insider's view of how the internet and the smartphone influences the behavior of her cohort. Again, she observes that there are so many options of distraction, together with her generation's tendency for procrastination as well as the general fear that one is missing out on something (FOMO). Social media here play a crucial role, since they provide access to so many different types of information: "Ahh, the internet and the smartphone, mothers of so many wasted hours" ("Ach, das Internet und das Smartphone, so vieler *vertüdelter* Stunden Mütter"; 2015, 141, emphasis added). The Northern German verb "vertüdeln" not only implies "to waste time", but also "to be entangled", thus nicely expressing the compulsive and obsessive nature of social media communication.

In the chat application Bibflirt (144), these technologies have even conquered the library, formerly a place of strict learning and research and a typical heterotop-

ic space, which in the new millennium seems to have been conquered by modern communication technology. The internet and the smartphone are also at the root of many anxieties of the millennial generation (Docu 2018, 8–9), such as the youth cult spread by influencers, social media, and the cosmetics industry. In Mußgnug's student memoir, there is a lurking fear of having to leave the safe academic environment and face life beyond it: "If you feel yourself growing old at university, you realize the only things that life has in store for you now are home loan savings and children's seats" (2015, 198). Becoming a full-fledged adult member of society is inevitably related to being expelled from this paradise/hell, and having to face reality in the form of taking on a job.

CONCLUSION

Tabea Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* is unique among German texts about the university in its form of a student memoir that attempts to capture the spirit of the millennial generation. At times, the work is hilariously comical and reveals that Mußgnug is a writer with potential. It is not a study guide ("Leitfaden") for those looking for orientation, as it proffers clichés and stereotypes, half-truths, and questionable claims about studying subjects in the humanities.

Comparable to other campus fiction written in the last three decades (Mengel 2019), it also examines "the university in relation to society at large" (Staphorst 2023, n.p.), following David Lodge's *Nice Work* (1988), J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (2000), Niq Mhlongo's *Dog Eat Dog* (2004), and Jonathan Coe's *Middle England* (2015) in this respect (Mengel 2022). All of these texts are only partly campus novels, for they all reach beyond the campus and are embedded in the social and political contexts of their time. What Mußgnug shares with these authors is their lack of enthusiasm for academia, and their critique of its shortcomings. Mußgnug's question on the back cover: "And what can you do with it afterwards?" draws our attention to the fact that we are not only dealing with the anxieties of the millennial generation but also with what turns out to be an existential crisis or identity crisis ("Sinnkrise") in the humanities and, in a wider sense, of the university as such.

More examples of this kind can be found in recent literature set at universities. Tiphaine Rivière's graphic novel *Carnets de thèse* (Notes on a thesis, 2015), translated into German as *Studierst Du noch oder lebst du schon?* (Are you still studying, or have you begun to live?, 2016) reads like a companion piece to Mußgnug's *Nächstes Semester wird alles anders…* The work is also based on the autobiographical experience of its author, who in contrast to her protagonist Jeanne Dargan – and to Tabea Mußgnug – ended her doctoral studies at the Sorbonne about Franz Kafka after three frustrating years of struggle. It is interesting to note that the question "Und was macht man dann damit?" also appears on the inner cover of the German translation of Rivière's graphic novel.

As Mußgnug states about herself in the paratext of her book: "She works in an archive and is waiting for the great brilliant job offer." In the meantime, she has written two more books in the field of art history, and under the pseudonym of Katharina Innig she published her first traditional work of fiction, a historical novel with the ti-

tle *Die Forscherin. Prinzessin Therese und der Ruf des Amazonas* (The researcher: Princess Therese and the call of the Amazon, 2022). It seems that Mußgnug has tried to answer her own question in this way – as has Tiphaine Rivière by becoming a successful author of graphic novels.

NOTES

[1] See the list of authors and titles in the Appendix below.

[2] This period has also seen the implementation of the 1999 Bologna declaration and the introduction of a new study architecture in form of BA and MA courses at almost all German universities (cf. Mengel 2001).

[3] Since there is no English translation of Mußgnug's novel, the translations are by the present author.

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