

# The figure „stranger“ as a child abuse perpetrator

Construction and meaning in educational discourses –  
an interdisciplinary research based on a hermeneutic inquiry  
of popular media like children´s books and motion pictures

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## Structure of the presentation

1. Introduction: Phenomena in practice – Workshops on sexual child abuse for parents
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6. Methodological approach: Semantic sequel text analysis
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Phenomena in practice -  
Prevention of sexual child abuse in Bielefeld/ Germany  
Cooperation-project „My body belongs to me!“

- 20 years cooperation-project „My body belongs to me!“ by EigenSinn e.V. Workshops for girls and boys, for parents and for teachers
- The responsibility of adults for children´s well-being
- Workshops for parents: awareness, information about prevalence, perpetrator´s strategies, help, guidelines for education

## Phenomena in practice – workshops for parents on sexual child abuse

The main motivation/questions of parents:

- How can we protect our children?
- How can a perpetrator be identified?

Previous-knowledge about the perpetrator shared by parents:

- The perpetrator is a male stranger.
- He is psychotic, forced by his sexuality.
- The perpetrator's strategy is to entice children (girls) with sweets.

## Phenomena in practice – workshops for parents on sexual child abuse

... there are parents who hold on to the figure „stranger“ in spite of different information about the reality of sexual violence.

Why is the figure „stranger“ a strong narrative?

## The social-historical contest (1): Challenges for research on sexual abuse in German postwar

Before the feminist disclosure in the end of the 70ties, there was no open discussion about the reality of sexual violence - especially incest - in German society. The topic became a social relevant main discourse since 2010.

The research on sexual abuse started in the field of psychiatric care - not before the late 80ies in Germany.

Bar-On researched on the consequences of silence in the families of national-socialist perpetrators (Bar-On 1989/1993).

Studies on PTBS report cases in which the tabou of incest is connected with the tabou of national-socialist perpetratorship in families (Bohleber 1990, Lohl 2008, Müller-Hohagen 2014).

## The social-historical contest (2): Challenges for research on sexual abuse in German postwar

Researching on the figure „stranger“ during German periods in the 20th century, we have to face the topic antisemitism because of the German´s guilt and responsibility for the World War II and the Holocaust - and in follow the immense influences of all social processes.

Actual political developments in German society show again the racist instrumentalization of the topic „stranger“ as a child abuse perpetrator (Amadeu Antonio Foundation 2016).

How can knowledge and family discourse about the child abuse perpetrator be analyzed in different periods of German society in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

## Leading questions (1):

- How is knowledge about sexual abuse formed in family discourses?
- How is the perpetrator characterized?
- How is the knowledge transferred?
- Which concepts/ objects/ methods will bring results for the research questions?



## Scientific concept: Social approach

Communicative transmission of social memories (Welzer 2002)

- Meaningful narratives will become appropriated in family discourses.
- The meaningfulness is emotionally bound and follows the requirements of the memory communities.
- Inconsistent >empty speech< serves to maintain and to ground meaning in memorial communities.
- Medial pictures have the function of patterns to fill >empty speech<.

## Scientific concept: Cultural approach

### How real are memories (Assmann 2001)

Assman differs between physical, social and cultural memories:

- Physical memories are formed by immediate sensory impressions.
- Social memories are generated by social communication.
- Cultural memories are the common sense of what as real is acknowledged.

All these kinds of memories are culturally shaped by the influence of visual media, motion pictures, TV (s.a. Wineburg 2001).

Scientific concept: Cultural approach  
Antisemitism as cultural code (Vulkov 1990)  
National antisemitism (Holz 2001, 2010):

- Antisemitism became a philosophy of life for the German middle-class during the end of the 19th century to the early 20th century (Vulkov 1990).
- This process was based on constructions of cultural terms, slogans and „false metaphors“ creating the image of the Jewish as evil for all (s.a. Braun 1989, Gilman 1995).
- The cultural code was not abandoned after 1945, but transferred (Holz 2001).

## Choice of research objects: Children´s books and motion pictures

- Popular media such as children´s books and motion pictures became objects for research since the turn of social science to everyday phenomena in the 70ties.
- These historical objects are taken for cultural representations of the everyday life in the period of its publication: Complex aesthetic structures of multiple-coded texts and pictures (Kaes 1987).
- The chosen objects are created with educational intention for adults and children (Doderer 1973, Dürrenmatt 1958, Wilken 2005). They represent popular media with great reception in the German generations of actual parents, their grandparents and the great grandparents (high edition, circulation, blockbuster).

## Methodological approach:

Sequential text analysis as reconstruction of semantics (Holz 1990, 2010):

- Research objects are defined as historical representations including semantics.
- Holz approach is to analyze sequences of originals from within themselves.
- Nevertheless semantic analysis needs knowledge about the cultural context to understand and to reconstruct meanings.

## Leading questions (2): Methodological approach

- How is the figure “stranger” characterized?
- By which literary/ cinematic means (methaphors, pictures etc.) is the figure “stranger” constructed in popular media?
- Is there a link/ transformation in the representations during the German periods?
- What can be deduced from the construction for the family discourse?

Choice of research objects  
(historical delineation):



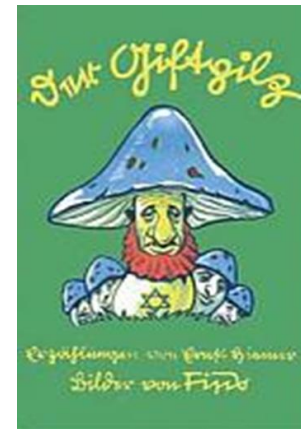
„Geh mit niemandem mit, Lena!“  
(Mönter/ Wiener)

2000



„Es geschah am hellichten Tag“  
(Vajda/ Dürrenmatt)

1958



„Der Giftpilz“  
(Hiemer/ Fips)

1938



“M” (Lang/ Harbou)

1931

## First traces for the research question:

- There is a line between the analyzed objects: The topic sexual child abuse is presented with different emphasis and characteristics in the relevant periods.
- Beginning with Weimar “M” the following objects transport pictures and quotations, transferring into the respectively cultural patterns.
- The construction of the figure “stranger” as perpetrator of child abuse might be key-concept for the understanding of social and generational problems of that period.
- The constructions follow the needs of the intergenerational dialogue.



## First traces (1): “M” (Lang/ Harbou 1931)

### Construction of sexual child abuse perpetrator:

- Beckert (Lorre) as a non-working single man
- Serial sexual murderer
- Compulsive, psychotic, forced by voices, soft, childlike, whistling “Peer Gynt”
- Dark haired, wearing dark clothes, a hat
- Fixed on girls as victims
- Strategy: Wandering around, searching for victims, giving presents (ballon or candies)



## “Der Giftpilz” (Hiemer/ Fips 1938), page 22

Translation and publication by Bishop of Durham Rv. Dr. Hensley Henson, “Friends of Europe” London 1938  
(German Propaganda Archive, 21-10-16, 11:42)

“The Experience of Hans and Else with a Strange Man:”



“Here, kid, I have some candy for you.  
But you have to come with me...”

### Construction of the perpetrator:

- A nameless strange man
- Wearing dark clothes, a hat, walking stick, glasses
- Connecting to anti-semitic propaganda pictures of stereotypical representations of face and body
- allusions of fairytale picture „Hänsel und Gretel“
- No fixation on gender
- Strategy: Giving candies

## First traces (3):

“Es geschah am hellichten Tag” (Vajda/ Dürrenmatt 1958)

### Construction of the perpetrator (a):

- Peddler Jacquier (Simon), victim of false accusation, previously convicted
- Unsightly shape, dark haired, dark clothes, outcast
- Wandering, finding the killed girl
- Nearly killed by the village community (lynch-justice)
- Suicide after the torture of a 20-hours-interrogation



## First traces (3):

“Es geschah am hellichten Tag” (Vajda/ Dürrenmatt 1958)

### Construction of the perpetrator (b):

- The real perpetrator Schrott ( Fröbe) as serial murderer
- Cruel, psychotic, childlike, forced by his frustrations
- Big stature, blond hair, black clothes
- Wealthy by marriage, surpressed by his wife
- Strategy: Driving around, searching for girls, manipulating, telling fairytales, giving chocolates



## First traces (3):

“Es geschah am hellichten Tag” (Vajda/ Dürrenmatt 1958)

### Construction of the perpetrator (c):

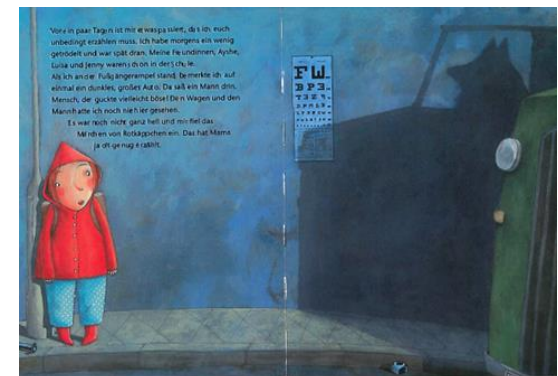
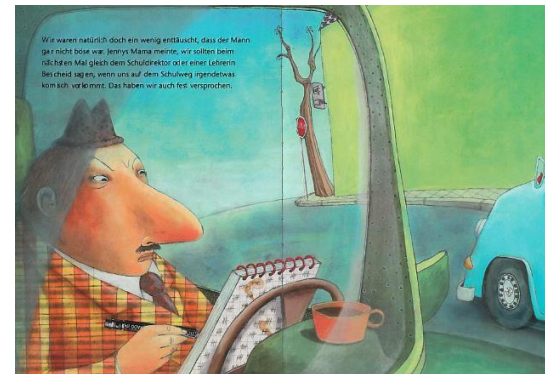
- Child manipulator as a former police officer (Rühmann)
- Double-bind character: Chasing the murderer he risks the girl’s life using her as a trap, forced by his morality
- Development from a cool analyzing officer to an emotional involved activist
- Strategy: Manipulating, giving presents, telling fairytales, helping the fatherless family



## First traces (4): “Geh mit niemandem mit, Lena!” (Mönter/ Wiemer 2000)

### Construction of the perpetrator:

- Wrong suspicion: Administrative officer, nameless
- Immense nose, unfriendly looking, wearing a hat
- Connecting the illustrations to the fairytale „Rotkäppchen und der Wolf“
- Strategy: Waiting in his car, counting the traffic
- only girls as potential victims are shown



## Questions for the PhD Workshop:

- Is the scientific approach (cultural concept, sequential text analysis) suitable for the research?
- Will the heuristic questions, analysis instruments, categories bring results ?

Thank you for your attention!