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### Working Papers

Citation:

Irimia, Alexandra. 2025. "Bureaucracies of Memory. Institutionalized History in Four Contemporary European Novels." In *European Centers and Peripheries in the Political Novel (Caponeu Working Papers)*, edited by Kyung-Ho Cha, Ivana Perica, Aurore Peyroles, and Christoph Schaub, 78–93. <https://www.caponeu.eu/cdp/materials/european-centers-and-peripheries-in-the-political-novel-caponeu-working-papers>.

Shapiro, Stephen. 2025. "Response to Alexandra Irimia." In *European Centers and Peripheries in the Political Novel (Caponeu Working Papers)*, edited by Kyung-Ho Cha, Ivana Perica, Aurore Peyroles, and Christoph Schaub, 94–99. <https://www.caponeu.eu/cdp/materials/european-centers-and-peripheries-in-the-political-novel-caponeu-working-papers>.

28 January 2025



Co-funded by  
the European Union



UK Research  
and Innovation

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094658.

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed in this publication are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

These working papers are based on presentations and responses, given at the workshop *European Centres and Peripheries in the Political Novel*, which took place at the Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung (Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research) on June 6–7, 2024. The workshop was organized by Kyung-Ho Cha, Patrick Eiden-Offe, Johanna-Charlotte Horst, Ivana Perica, Aurore Peyroles, and Christoph Schaub.

These working papers are produced as part of the activities of the research consortium *The Cartography of the Political Novel* (Caponeu), funded by the European Union and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). <https://www.caponeu.eu/>

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**Bureaucracies of Memory:  
Institutionalized History in Four Contemporary European Novels<sup>1</sup>**

Upon winning the 2023 *International Booker Prize* for his novel *Time Shelter*, the Bulgarian author Georgi Gospodinov commented:

It is commonly assumed that ‘big themes’ are reserved for ‘big literatures,’ or literatures written in big languages, while small languages, somehow by default, are left with the local and the exotic. Awards like the International Booker Prize are changing that status quo, and this is very important (Gospodinov 2023).

In the light of this statement, this paper looks into center-periphery dynamics in the European bureaucratic novel of the past decade – a corpus which reveals itself as particularly interested in juggling multiple temporalities by weaving intricate connections (both historical and speculative) – between political pasts, presents, and futures.

First published in Bulgarian in 2020, *Time Shelter* was translated into English by Angela Rodel in 2022. The novel follows an unnamed narrator, and an elusive

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<sup>1</sup> The work involved in the writing of this paper has been supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation through its Humboldt Research Fellowship program.

psychiatrist named Gaustine. The latter establishes in Zürich a special clinic for people with Alzheimer's disease. In this facility, each floor recreates a specific decade in intricate detail, aiming to transport patients back in time to revisit their memories. Tasked with the collecting of authentic past artifacts for the clinic, the narrator travels across Europe and its polyphonic histories. Under Gaustine's flair for scenography and atmospheric restoration, his work enriches the staged, layered setup of the clinic: each floor is so accurate and comforting in its reconstruction of the past that, soon, healthy people request to be admitted in order to flee their monotonous, disenchanting present. The idea becomes widespread, and the number of such clinics increases, to the point where referendums are held across Europe to decide which past decade each country should live in, in the future. A redesigned map of the continent presents the results of these elections by replacing the countries's names with their preferred decade (Gospodinov 2022, 178). As Patrick McGuinness puts it in reviewing the book,

Across Europe, political parties promote different decades in their national histories. Referendums are fought on what particular past a country's future will look like. It's funny and absurd, but it's also frightening, because even as Gospodinov plays with the idea as fiction, the reader begins to recognise something rather closer to home. *Time Shelter* was written between the Brexit referendum and the (second) Russian invasion of Ukraine, both of which represent, in their own ways, the weaponisation of nostalgia and the selection of particular eras in the time clinic of the not-so-new world order (McGuinness 2022).

This rings particularly true in 2024, a year of numerous rounds of elections threatened by the looming spectre of far-right nationalism across the continent, wielding

its “weaponisation of nostalgia” with local specificity, yet in sweeping international synchrony.

Aside from the explicitly political content of the book, I was particularly intrigued by Gospodinov’s statement made upon receiving the International Booker Prize, quoted in the opening of this article. He refers to international prizes such as Booker as an equalizing force in the uneven and often prejudiced playing ground of literatures written in languages with significantly different spread, visibility, and impact. He talks explicitly of “big languages” and “small languages” while acknowledging that the latter are often exoticized and deemed of local importance only. This statement resonated with CAPONEU’s interest in examining the existence of European centers and peripheries in the political novel, with a particular focus on spatial models charting power dynamics and the circulation of cultural capital. Such models include, among other conceptual constructs, the notion of “literary polysystems” (Even-Zohar 1990), the world-system theory (Wallerstein 2004), the hypothesis of a continuum, rather than a strict separation between dominant and dominated literary spaces (Casanova 2005), the combined and uneven development framework (Warwick Research Collective 2015) and, perhaps most recently, discussions on the transnational literary field (Sapiro, 2024).

Blending this interest with my research on contemporary bureaucratic novels (which cannot avoid being political in both subject and interpretation), I have chosen four works to explore how this centre-periphery dynamic plays out – if at all – in recent European literature: Robert Menasse’s 2017 *The Capital* [*Die Hauptstadt*], Jean-Philippe Toussaint’s 2020 *Les Émotions*, Liliana Corobca’s 2017 *The Censor’s Notebook* [*Caiet de cenzor*], and Georgi Gospodinov’s 2020 *Time Shelter* [*Vremeubezhishte*]. For

methodological ease, I will cite from and refer to the English translations wherever available, namely in three of the four cases.

From the start, a mapping of the works along clear geographical delineations is impossible, mostly thanks to the quasi-unanimous lack of overlap between the four authors' countries of origin (Austria, Belgium, Moldova, Bulgaria), the countries in which they publish, roughly matching the languages they write in (German, French, Romanian, Bulgarian), and the countries in which their narratives are set (roughly, Belgium, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Bulgaria). Although at first glance the corpus is relatively balanced between Eastern and Western Europe, which would approximate a core and a peripheral positionality, it is easy to notice how regional configurations complicate the image by bringing into discussion historical border shifts, linguistic hegemonies, and even migration patterns, therefore repeating the center-periphery model under different lenses and at different scales: the Bulgarian author is based in Berlin, the Moldovan author writes her novel after decades of research in Romanian Communist archives, the novel written by the Austrian author wins the German Book Prize, finally, the novel written in French does without an English translation, whereas the others do not, and so on.

Despite this geopolitical patchwork able to seed confusion and disputes among scholars of national literatures – while delighting the literary comparatists –, the four novels have in common two distinct, yet intersecting thematic threads: (1) the contemporary depiction of bureaucratic infrastructures and (2) the politics of memory and the museification of the past. Whereas administrative narratives set in Brussels (e.g. Robert Menasse's 2017 *The Capital*) or Strasbourg (e.g. Jean-Philippe Toussaint's 2020 *Les Émotions*) that cast satirical or melancholic glances upon EU's institutional history

are routinely produced and read in Western Europe, they fail to reach Eastern European literary markets, which conduces to an associated lack of readerly and writerly interest in the topic. In countries like Bulgaria, Moldova, and Romania, the administrative institutions and processes of the European Union, along with its cultural memory and its *raison d'être* have not yet been established as literary themes. Contemporary political fiction originally written in Romanian or Bulgarian seems to be, instead, more concerned with the political stakes involved in the institutionalization of history through state-level and state-sanctioned practices. These latter works are also more eager to travel, in translations produced with a greater sense of urgency and into a larger number of European languages. Novels such as the above-mentioned *Time Shelter* and Liliana Corobca's 2017 *The Censor's Notebook* bring to the symbolic center of cultural capital, peripheral stories in which affects (fear, nostalgia), discourses (literature, medicine, ideology), and practices (reading, dwelling) are weaponized for political goals, with significant consequences at all levels: individual, national, and transnational.

We already have a number of analytical frameworks for the understanding of “bureaucratic fiction” (Irimia 2023) in general but, for our present purposes, I am interested here in a specific theory proposed with regard to the emergence of the “EU novel” – a recent subgenre of administrative narratives engaging with European Union institutions and policymaking (Radisoglou 2021). Two of the novels in my corpus – *The Capital* and *Les Émotions* – are largely set in Brussels, casting satirical, realistic, or melancholic glances upon EU's institutional history. More specifically, they engage with the past, present and future of the European Commission, as the European institution *par excellence*. Such novels are usually written, read, and occasionally praised in Western

Europe. In 2022, Menasse's *Die Erweiterung*, a sequel of *The Capital* won the European Book Prize. To this date and to my knowledge, none of the examples mentioned have been translated into Romanian or Bulgarian, for example, which partly explains why they don't have a profound impact in the Eastern European literary landscapes.

At the EU's eastern borders, in particular in the two above-mentioned countries which gained member status together, in 2007, the institutional culture of the Union, as well as the memory and ambitions of its creation have not been considered as topics of literary interest. Romania and Bulgaria are, in a certain sense, already situated in EU's periphery in terms of geopolitical setting; what interests us here however is their placing in the periphery of its imagery – and here I understand “periphery” in the sense proposed by the Warwick Research Collective (2015), not in terms of geography but in terms of “inclusion.” Although formalized over 17 years ago, this inclusion – as well as its reciprocal sense of belonging – are still ongoing processes, especially at the level of symbolic forms and socio-aesthetic representations.

Instead of playing with the imagery of EU administration, contemporary political fiction originally written in Romania or Bulgaria seems, at least judging by the two examples taken here, to continue be more concerned with the high stakes of the politics of memory and the institutionalization of history at *state level*, through *state-sanctioned* practices, such as national referendums and state censorship of literary works. Through their translation into English (both acknowledged by important prizes), novels such as *Time Shelter* and *The Censor's Notebook* bring from the periphery to the center stories in which affects (fear of repression, nostalgia for an idealized past), discourses and practices are weaponized for political goals, with significant consequences at individual,



national, and transnational levels. By discourses I refer to their shared treatment of jargons derivative from medicine, history, nationalist ideologies, literary criticism or pop culture references, whereas the practices they focus on include actual literary writing, reading, editing, but also housing policies and institutional administrative procedure.

*The Censor's Notebook* is a compelling exploration of censorship in the 1970s and 1980s in Communist Romania, from an unusual perspective: the censor's herself. The reader gets access to the (fictionalized) personal writings on work notebooks – doubling as diary – of a woman censor. The documents have seemingly escaped destruction and resurface, decades after the fall of the regime, to help research its memory. It's useful to mention that these particular two decades, following the so called 'July theses' pronounced by Ceausescu in 1971, had been marked by strict government control over creative works, a reinforcement of state censorship, and an unstable index of banned books and authors. The novel's protagonist, Filofteia Moldovean, is a fictional dedicated, meticulous state censor coming from a rural background and poverty during the forced modernization of the state. Her personal notes, written beyond her official duties and as a commentary thereof, provide insight not only into the inner workings of the censorship apparatus, responsible for an ideologically aligned curation of the past, but also into the moral dilemmas faced by censors, and the often-absurd lengths to which the state goes to suppress dissent.

Engrossed in her work well beyond the working hours and complaining of all sorts of physical ailments produced by her sedentary duties, Filofteia begins to question the morality of her role and the political purposes of censorship itself. Thanks to her professional skills, towards the end of the novel, she is promoted and co-opted into a

fictional organization, the so-called “World Organization of Censors” (WAC) with the “Central European Censorship Lodge” as its main branch (Corobca 2022, 344) – which acts as a shadow-double of the world literary canon, and whose invisible work shapes the world literary system in ways known only to these mysterious employees enacting the policies of their respective states. The novel delves into themes of freedom, creativity, and the power dynamics between the state and the individual, but also between national and transnational interests that instrument similar practices to different ends: “We’re laying the groundwork for a singular literature, a singular sensibility, we’re training the Censor for his new mission. Poetry passes through all curtains, even the one made of iron. We’re trying to break through borders, walls, differences. The Great Peace and the Great Censorship embrace” (Corobca 2022, 329).

An international cast is also deployed in *The Capital*, whose main plotline turns Brussels into a funhouse of nonsensical regulations and embarrassing acronyms on the occasion of the European Commission’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary (this is in direct reference to another institutional anniversary, mocked in another Austrian writer’s novel: Robert Musil’s 1930 famous *The Man Without Qualities*). Menasse’s book begins with a chaotic scene in a Brussels plaza where a runaway pig causes commotion. This incident ties into a larger economic issue for the EU, as China, the largest importer of pork, opts to negotiate with individual EU countries instead of the union. The management of pork within the EU Commission is divided among different directorates (AGRI, GROW, and TRADE), leading to bureaucratic clashes and satire. The plot centers on the neglected Culture Department in the Directorate-General of Communication, led by a Cypriot-Greek woman eurocrat. While hoping to secure visibility and praise for a promotion to a

department with a better reputation, she takes on the organization of a significant jubilee to celebrate the commission's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary but delegates most of the work to her assistant, Martin Susman. An Austrian intellectual and idealist, he sees the celebration as an opportunity to highlight the EU's founding principle as a reaction to the horrors of global conflagrations and the Holocaust, so he starts looking for survivors of the Holocaust to include in the celebrations. The narrative also follows his brother, Florian Susman, head of the European Pig Producers, who narrowly escapes death after being run over by a cab driver profiting off disoriented groups of refugees headed to the train station. Florian is rescued by a Muslim woman, and the moment creates a poignant press image that gains international attention. Underneath the plot's immediate surface lies a critical examination of the history of the European Commission, its present relevance, as well as its future under the sign of many crises brought about by austerity policies and unpopular management of resources, Brexit, permanent tensions between long-term collaboration and short-term national interests, refugee crises, a general disconnect between institutions and citizens, further eroded by foreign interference (mainly from China).

The concept of European identity and the idealistic rhetoric of its institutional self-representation are given center-stage, along with the multiple challenges that call them into question. This exploration of unity, diversity, and belonging within the EU references on several occasions the division between the north and the south of the continent, but not so much the one between its east and west, still bearing the scars of the Iron Curtain fractures. The novel features most prominently France, Belgium, Germany and Italy, while also accounting for historical turmoil and current debates in Poland, the Czech Republic, or Hungary, but makes little to no reference to the latest

additions to the EU: countries like Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria remain invisible, although the novel is written 4, and respectively 10 years after these countries joined the EU.

As of yet untranslated into any other language from the original French, *Les Émotions*, the other novel preoccupied with the European Commission, offers a less nuanced and less diverse portrayal of the inner workings of the institution, with even less concern for peripheric identities. It is 'central' to the core, with a focus on the Commission going back to the literal construction of its headquarters in the Berlaymont building in Brussels (the narrator's brother is an architect involved in the project). The protagonist's father had been a European Commissioner himself, further intertwining the narrator's family history with that of the European institution.

The protagonist's job, himself an employee of the Commission, is to imagine various scenarios in order to anticipate the future unfolding of current European crises. Starting from presently available data and drawing from past patterns, he is trying to peer into the future of the EU in order to help inform policymakers of the implications of their choices. This role requires him to navigate the complexities of policymaking, but not so much those of cultural interplay. The subtle power dynamics at play within the Commission are relegated to the narrative background, while most of the reader's attention is directed to the inner life of this office worker, brimming with romantic or melancholic musings as he walks the corridors and passageways of the institution. As such, the narrative alternates between a very personal past (even when interlinked with the history of the Commission), present institutional crises, and plausible public futures, providing at least a layered, if not compelling exploration of the view that public futures

are easier to anticipate than the private ones. I would say that here the center/periphery dynamic is not played out in terms of geopolitics or forms of inclusion, but rather in relation to an institutional center and the multiple, peripheral subjectivities that populate it.

The novel emphasizes how emotions influence and are influenced by the political environment, shedding light – like *The Capital* - on the human side of the European Commission. It portrays the institution not just as a monolithic entity but as a set of processes that are always already in the making and remain ever incomplete, shaped by the performances of individuals who are swung not only by reason but also by affects, hazard, and interpersonal dynamics. As indicated in its title, the novel tries to show the impact of personal histories and emotions on the broader political landscape, but also on the handling of day-to-day crises. An exemplary scene in this regard is how the Commission's staff had to manage the severe disruption of air travel across a large chunk of Europe following the eruption of an Icelandic volcano in 2010.

These all-too-brief summaries show that all four novels share a common preoccupation with the administration of memory and the political manipulation of the past in view of an uncertain future and a present that is always under the sign of crises. In all four cases, this process is inextricably linked to metaphors of pathology, highlighting both psychological malaise and physical sickness as consequences of administrative paperwork that feels removed from individual and collective realities and affects. The censor experiences physical discomfort performing her duties, piles of documents proliferate like tumors, the commission workers suffer from depression, and the time shelters function as clinics and asylums that, through distorted nationalist rhetoric, expand to encompass entire nations.

Whatever it is we mean by the EU novel – and Radisoglou’s article throws some leads as to what it could mean – these four examples make clear the fact that the European identity and institutional imagery is, rather intuitively, far more pronounced in its geo-political core than at the periphery. The bureaucratic fiction coming from countries with a longer history in the EU (but most importantly, closer to its centers of power) display more concern with the state of the union, its functioning and deficiencies, its history and its institutions, down to architectural details and office space arrangements. They also have a greater ease in using EU’s institutional jargon than bureaucratic fiction written by contemporary authors from new member states. Testifying to their incomplete inclusion, the Romanian and Bulgarian novels hint to a desire for a continental sense of belonging and a collective European identity (especially in the case of the Bulgarian writer living in Berlin) but that is far from being their main narrative focus; they ultimately remain still more heavily anchored in their national context and unresolved traumas of their communist past.

Another important observation is the fact that the Eastern novels imagine new international institutions (which happen to be quite absurd), such as WAC, Corobca’s World Association of Censors, or Gospodinov’s quickly expanding Swiss-based network of *time shelters* that takes over the entire Europe. At the same time, the Western novels proceed to fantasize upon existing institutions: the European Commission is clearly in the spotlight, with the European Parliament and the Council making only tangential appearances). Western authors chose to de-familiarize EU’s routine and its unglamorous reputation in public perception, whereas the novelists in the East create more abstract

bureaucratic apparatuses that emerge from local contexts but point to universal threats and dilemmas.

Additionally, this corpus of contemporary European novels engaging with administration and the politics of memory poses the unavoidable question of multilingualism. Given that EU's linguistic diversity is an important factor in its negotiations of various crises, as well as in its everyday operations, this comes as no surprise. It highlights, however, both the potential for miscommunication and the wealth of nuance (political or otherwise) that different languages bring to EU's identity and culture. *The Capital* plays a lot with this: the novel has fragments in Dutch, French, Polish, Czech, and Italian. The theme of linguistic diversity receives less attention in *Time Shelter*, a novel which focuses on material artefacts and memorabilia rather than language differences. Multilingualism is largely absent in the other novels: the presence of other languages but French is only briefly acknowledged in *Les Émotions*, whereas Corobca's fictional censor drops some aphorisms in Latin and French but only to show off as an educated, overqualified employee, playing with the vocabulary of (past) cultural hegemonies, rather than a depiction of contemporary linguistic multiculturalism and shared European values. This linguistic asymmetry reflects broader power dynamics within European cultural institutions, where certain languages continue to dominate literary and bureaucratic spaces.

The question of language is also important from a literary sociology perspective: the novels from the periphery achieve a degree of success – translated into prestigious prizes such as Gospodinov's 2023 International Booker Prize and the 2023 Oxford Weidenfeld Translation Prize awarded to Corobca's novel – only after being translated

into English. This also contributes to reinforcing their authorial status at home as well. The other two novels are well received within their original linguistic boundaries (see the German Book Prize won in 2017 by *The Capital* and the European Book Prize awarded in 2023 to its sequel) and, for them, translations into English and wider international appeal feel more like an option than a requirement. However, as the nature of the prizes shows, it may happen that the peripheral novels achieve recognition well outside of the EU-space, which is not always the case for novels from EU's center: *Les Émotions*, for example, has only been translated into German, and will appear in English translation in 2025. *The Capital*, on the other hand, has been translated to date into 11 languages, including Hindi and Arabic, but has only won European prizes. These four works ultimately reveal that Europe's novelistic production is neither homogenous, nor monolithic. Rather, it reveals itself as a complex ecosystem where asymmetrical power dynamics (linguistic and political, among others) intersect with historical narratives and institutional memory-making. As a potential subgenre of the political novel, the bureaucratic novel emerges as a critical lens through which we can examine the ongoing negotiations of centrality and peripherality in contemporary Europe.

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**Response to Alexandra Irimia:**  
**“Bureaucracies of Memory. Institutionalized History in Four Contemporary  
European Novels”**

Alexandra Irimia has insightfully charted out some contours of cultural registration within the capitalist world-system through “novels” about “politics” authored by those from or in conversation with peoples of the East European “periphery.” Here I want to consider these three keywords—novels, politics, periphery—to suggest some hesitations about these as categories for our future group considerations.

From a world-systems knowledge movement perspective, the “Eastern European” nation-states are categorically not peripheries, but are zemiperipheries (previously spelled as semiperipheries) (Deckard, Niblett, and Shapiro). Peripheral nation-states are those whose entanglement within world markets are largely continuations in a different form of an economic dependency structured by their former imperial colonizers and whose economic exchanges are often limited to a narrow range of commodities, usually those involving the primary processing industries of monocrop agriculture, natural resource extraction, and a spectrum of legal and illegal migrant labor. Institutions of political representation and legitimacy are rarely autonomous or even persistent. In the terms of academic disciplinary domains, the peoples of the periphery are more

anthropologized than sociologized. Their internal social divisions tend to simplifying divisions of massifying blocs (i.e. Indigenous versus creole; majority ethnic versus minority ethnic).

Zemiperipheries function differently. They have a different set of affordances and limits within the world-system and greater immixtures of social classifications. Their political institutions look more towards those of the core and their governments often seek to be integrated within various global unions and associations. The zemiperipheries often function as the cotter pins between the core nation-states and the peripheries as well as the shock absorber for conflicts, especially amongst core nations. Their regions experience combined and uneven development as a constitutive and normative feature, unlike the peripheries which experience it in more extreme, although limited geographically, forms. Zemiperipheries often are ones of multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic contacts and histories of mutable fragmentation and re-assembly.

Even in this sketch, we might see that there is a categorical misapplication in labelling the Eastern European lands as peripheries. To be sure, less empowered than the core, but not marginalized in the ways that peripheries must contend against. Individuals of peripheral lands rarely get their academic and artistic talent sent to conferences in a core capital outside of explicit nation-state labelling and surveillance. Irimia's discussion of their chosen evidentiary texts exemplify zemiperipherality, rather than peripherality.

Getting the categories right is not merely a case of nominalism. For the terms provide a context for considering the cultural effects and artifacts of the European zemiperipheries (a term of spatial logistics that also exists *within* core nation-states). It is

a world-culture axiom that the zemiperipheries are the regions of greatest cultural innovation, often *in advance* of the core regions. And much of what has been conventionally considered *modernism* is generated by zemiperipheral actors within the core nation-state (Shapiro and Barnard). Furthermore, zemiperipheral regions also transmit culture laterally through one another. A critique of political science is that it reifies zemiperipheral circulation and transmissions under terms of “area studies,” a category of a single unit, rather than set of transversal and manifold relations. Our task, though, is to undo, to un-think, older conventional terms and associations.

In this light, ought we to focus on “the novel”? Immanuel Wallerstein argued that three “ideologies” emerged from the late eighteenth century tumult of world-wide revolutions and rebellions — conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism (Wallerstein). While conservatives favored social organization by small groups, and radicals looked to mass collectives, liberals favored sovereignty managed by so-called meritocratic “talent.” Although liberals were arguably less wealthy than conservative forces and numerically smaller than the laboring class, they managed to become dominant. A mechanism for this success was the creation of disciplinary apparatuses and new forms of knowledge through the reconstruction of the credentializing university. As Foucault tirelessly explained, power in this period was no longer mainly enacted through repression, but with the production of binary classifications and categories (and here Foucault chastised Marx for also adhering to binary splits). One powerful knowledge lever was the division between the public sphere (disembodied, rational) and the intimate or private sphere (of interiority, *Bildung*, affect). A highly effective cultural technology that emerged to become dominant *to produce and maintain* this division was the long-form fiction we call “the novel” (Shapiro

2021). The novel simultaneously enabled the creation of a national imaginary (fiction, along with the other arts, remains overwhelmingly framed by national identities) as well as a device to train readers into an affective sense of possessing an individualizing liberal self.

The novel became the entrance ticket for non-core nation-states to participate in liberal development ideology. To be taken as serious on the world-market stage various cultural items were needed including, but not limited to, a statist, normative language (Hochdeutsch, Queen's English, etc.) and a "great" national novel.

Today, though, liberalism is in crisis and decay everywhere, as are the other nineteenth-century arising ideologies. The older triplet of ideologies seems to be replaced by a newer one: Fascism, Neoliberalism, and the Intersectional Left (Shapiro 2024). Consequently, ought we expand our horizon beyond liberalism's normative cultural instrument, "the novel" (Bekhta)? To be clear, this does not mean abandoning interest in long-form fiction. Instead, we may suggest a lack of obedience to the category of "the novel" and the interpretive, critical techniques designed to respond to this category. When world-systems proponents talk about a knowledge movement, it desires an un-doing, an unthinking of these older epistemic forms to reshape a new politics, a new social movement. Should we allow adherence to a particular literary form category and thus lose the insights of recent cultural achievements like *Skibidi Toilet*, the web series that stages a Pere Ubuesque conflict between residues of Soviet statism and technophilic neoliberals, and Radu Jude's *Do Not Expect Too Much from the End of the World* (2023), which uses video immixture (historic stock and spontaneously instagrammed) to express the combined and uneven development facing the newer EU member-states?

And “politics”? The late Fredric Jameson has recently been published as arguing that the ferment of “French Theory” in the postwar period began to dissolve with France’s increasing embedment within the EU, as nation-state identity gave way to one as a member-state (Jameson). Here Robert Menasse’s *The Capital (Die Hauptstadt, 2017)* seeks to provide the European Union with its own calling card for a core’s “total systems” novels in a post-national fashion, but one that loses the bite of earlier efforts like Alexander Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) or Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities (Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, 1930/1933/1943)* in order to adapt the writing better to a liberal palette. But this erasure of earlier efforts to better accommodate a diminishing audience of liberal readers reveals a greater historical analogy than difference, especially to periods when liberal democracy is failing before an insurgent extreme right-wing. Is the urgent warning light about the cadences of the 1930s and the contaminated air of its zones of interest best served by a retrospective view of the discreet charms of EU bureaucracy? Is politics a term meaning primarily administrative institutionalization and tales of its operation or should we be stretching our horizon to discern the features of something else?

In the aftermath of the German Green party’s loss of the youth vote to the extreme right, the board of the youth group collectively resigned to create a new party. Their first web video begins with statement slogan, *We’re no longer ready [Wir sind nicht länger bereit]* to denounce a politics they find oriented to the wealthy and the fascistic. The slogan both indicates a rejection of both the older forms of resistance (the DDR youth pioneer’s slogan – *Always ready [Immer bereit]* as well as the 1989’s one of collectivity *We are the people [Wir sind das Volk]*). How these still inchoate energies will condense

remains still unclear, but the youth spirit of *No more kidding around (Schluss mit lustig)* might be a beacon worth reaching for today.

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