

WHO WE ARE TODAY

— by Georgia Doll

Sieg Heil, hail to you, my Führer.” The child recites the rehearsed text. It is four or five years old, holding its right arm upwards at an angle. In its other hand there are a bunch of yellow flowers and a small swastika flag. “Adolf succeeded / with his great power / he broke the chains of Germany / Adolf was sent to us by providence. / Sieg Heil, hail to you, my Führer.” It has a slight lisp. One can see in the child’s face that it has to concentrate. One can also see that it does not understand the text. The child doesn’t know what Adolf succeeded in, in which way Germany’s chains were broken, which providence this is about and which “we”.

It hands the bunch of flowers to the boy with the pasted-on toothbrush mustache. One ear is showing under the cap with the imperial eagle. The boy with the false mustache accepts the flowers, thanks the girl and caresses the child’s short hairs.

“Thank you, Führer,” says the child with a curtsy and half a smile, a bit shy, a bit proud. It did not botch its text.

My first role. It is a children’s film from the Commune. In the language of the Commune this means that it is a film for grown-ups in which we children had to act. I can see the child from then in sound and color, but I do not recognize myself. Nor do I remember the text. But now I do understand the words that come out of my lisping children’s mouth. If someone remembers me today, a child among many others within the group, they will think of me as the child who recited the poems. This is what is stuck, not much more. The poems of Goethe. I learned the long ballads by heart, then stood in the middle and had to declaim them, I had to be sweet, talented, I had to inspire. One remembers me by the performance, the role I was given. I myself do not remember how it was to stand there, in the eternal center. The feelings from then are buried, but I still can recall the poetry: “The Fisherman”, “The Sorcerer’s apprentice”, “The dance of death” and the frightening “Erl-King”.

But first of all, I played the Hitler girl. First there was the poem for Adolf, the raised arm, the flowers of victory.

What did we have to utter as children and what was kept back from us? What words were excluded from the narrative? For which realities did we lack the concepts to put them into language and images? What do our bodies carry in them today, without words nor understanding?

In the children's film (that isn't for children) I see the honor guard of women and men with the big swastika flags, they have their right arms stretched upwards and are shouting slogans, always the same ones, rhythmically. Vaguely familiar faces of people whose names are long forgotten. But there is something I do recognise: The excited laughter. The same on all the faces. This is familiar to me. I remember these perpetually bright faces. The excited congregation of bodies, the knots of people disguised as Nazis with swastika flags, or naked at the lake and in the sauna, in dungarees and short-haired and all of them were young except the one who marched forth, for whom they formed the honor guard. I remember the jubilant enthusiasm, which was a given at that time, so that it did not need a term, and which today I can call by its name: fanaticism.

"Adolf hat's geschafft / mit seiner großen Kraft / er hat die Ketten Deutschlands gesprengt / die Vorsehung hat uns Adolf geschenkt. / Sieg Heil, Heil dir, mein Führer."

The propaganda film disguised as a children's film has the title "The Führer is coming". It is set in the past, but the title points to the future: the film, however, is our present. It is the ironical citation that in reality references itself, slightly distorted. The script is simple.

Young Adolf Hitler fails as an artist and therefore becomes a dictator. Only as dictator he is appreciated in art — that is, forcefully. As dictator he is entitled to get the girls dressed as women. Pretended consent of young girls' bodies trained to give consent. The good-old mixture of brutality and irony. The brutal joke that is no joke. The funny violence. This, too, did not have a name in the Commune, it existed like the cold bitterness of the winter, the leitmotif of our education. It was the pretense. The license. The trick. The feint. The silly game. I haven't found the right word yet.

At the Pompidou Center there is the photograph of a human penis. Today and yesterday meet in front of the exhibit. The erected penis is clasped by

a young woman's hand. But I do not want to dwell on the description of the picture, for I cannot look into the humorously distorted face of the sex offender, nor the woman's bent, naked body lying in front of him. I did not come to the museum to see this picture. The picture has seen me and is staring at me. Before I can look away, the image of the erected penis has burned into my head, settled in, and becomes a memory without my consent. The people responsible in the museum tell me that this is how it should be. They say, the reproduction of this penis that once casually wiped through children's faces and that today is rotting six feet under, is an important document. The penis is relevant for art history. The rest of the world says, "Me too." But the erected penis is staring at me, with glory and impunity. The erected penis wants to get flowers, a curtsy, adoration, fanatical exaltation. And it wants to sell itself. This cannot go on, I am thinking. But it does go on. Again, I am searching for words to explain this impossibility. They do not want to hear it. They want to misunderstand the meaning of my words. I am searching for a language that is unmistakable. I am searching for allies. For us, as children, there were words we learned too early. Ideological zombies still haunting us. Other words we learned too late. We put them on like borrowed clothing that doesn't really fit. We learn the new roles, but we always stay a bit off the track, never quite in time. We jumped out of the paint-pot and into nothingness; the nothingness became world, and again we only found chaos. We try to create some kind of order but cannot be found. We get children of our own and listen as their thoughts take shape. We're looking for stories we can tell them, selecting them carefully, with sorrow. And while the spiderweb of our childhood is slowly disintegrating, new webs can come into being. Loose structures with wide meshes we fly through to visit each other. We pass on thoughts to each other like ping pong balls in the schoolyard. Today, once again, there are only words, but words we can choose. Much silence in between. But we also listen to our silence. We take it seriously. We give significance to each other until we become as significant as the noisy insignificance that rules us. At the Pompidou Center there is a photograph of an erected penis. It stares right through the barricades of rage we built around our pain like sandcastles at the sea. It hangs in this so-called contemporary steel construction with an age-old foundation. It cannot go on forever ... And that is what all of us think, each one in their own language, their own

bewilderment. In this thought we are alike, us, the dissimilar children who came out of the paint-pot. The eyeless staring of a picture: but what we are actually interested in are those reflected in the glass panels. The “we” of the beholders. What do we see? What is called out? And what is it we stay blind and deaf and mute for? The reconstruction of the past begins in the eye of our beholding.

I join the circle of beholders, with searching eyes that again and again have to wash away the old asbestos of history. I blend my voice into the choir of speakers without script, those addressing and those expressing, formulating thoughts, searching for words, beyond the silence, in spite of the silence, along with the silence. For it must not go on. And we need a new vision.

— **Georgia Doll** born in 1980 in Vienna, is an author and theatre director. She studied literature and theatre studies in Hamburg and Toulouse, theatre directing in Paris, and playwriting in Berlin. She completed a practice-based PhD on multilingual writing in Aix-en-Provence. She writes in both German and French. Her plays have been performed in Germany, Austria, and France, some under her own direction. Her texts have appeared in literary magazines and have been recognized with various awards and grants. Her short story *Der Tag des Toten* received the 2nd prize of the Energie Burgenland Literature Award in 2017. In 2013, her bilingual work *Das blaue Gold* was published by PUM, Toulouse, and in 2023 her debut novel *Petit Monde* was released by Le Rouergue, Arles.