Introduction

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Sentimental Politics and the Politics of Sentimentality

In a time marked by escalating political polarization and acute social upheaval, the emotional dynamics of contemporary politics have taken center stage. Departing from the double meaning of the word "state"—signifying both a condition and a political entity—this volume focuses on affective politics of order and belonging. "Sentimental State(s)" explores the intricate interplay between sentimentality and politics across diverse global settings, highlighting how political leaders and movements from all sides of the political spectrum alike harness the sentimental to create compelling narratives and thus aim at fostering a sense of community.

Moving away from normative notions of the sentimental (e.g. heavily gendered or trivializing everyday conceptualizations), we conceive of the sentimental as a communicative and relational code which can draw on emotional knowledge and activate empathy. In a nutshell, the sentimental code operates at the intersection of emotional interpellation and responsivity. Sentimentalism, as Joanne Dobson puts it, "envisions the self-in-relation" (267). It promotes a mutual recognition of emotions—or more precisely, the socioculturally mediated human ability to affect and be affected (Ahmed 2004a)—thereby (potentially) cultivating a sense of belonging and community. The sentimental code manifests itself in a multitude of forms and functions across time and cultures, rendering it a rich subject for scholarly inquiry across diverse academic fields. Its multifaceted nature invites investigation within literary, cultural, and media studies, as well as historical, social, and political sciences—disciplines that are all represented in this volume. Accordingly, the sentimental can be explored in diverse domains of symbolic interaction. It can be examined within literary frameworks, where it also originated in its Western variant in 18th-century Europe (Chandler; Howard) and quickly

permeated a wide array of aesthetic forms. The history of modern mass media—especially cinema (Kappelhoff)—is fundamentally intertwined with the significant influence of the aesthetics and affective economies (Ahmed 2004b) of the sentimental. At the same time, sentimentalism is (and always has been) more than a genre (Gerund/Paul)—whether it be the "sentimental novel" (Rivero) or the "melodrama" (Paul et al.)—as its registers and repertoires can be identified in practices and discourses throughout modern societies (e.g. Illouz 2003; McCarthy).

This volume traces the sentimental code within the realm of political culture as an "intimate public sphere" (Berlant 1997, 1), interconnected through a "sentimental contract" (Bargetz). It illustrates that sentimental politics, as well as the politics of sentimentality, take on numerous forms and functions, widely visible across a broad variety of political contexts. Indeed, *state-building* inherently requires the (twofold) cultivation of *sentimental states*. Sociologist Eva Illouz characterizes early Western nation-states as "communities of hope" (2024, 50, translation H. P./S. P.), which were orientated towards both Enlightenment political doctrines of freedom and equality and capitalist notions of market-driven growth. In Illouz's interpretation of modernity, this hope intensified and sentimentalized people's expectations for a good life, embedding the conviction in everyday consciousness that a better existence could be achieved through human action and social institutions. Similarly, Hans Joas discusses the emergence of human rights and the concept of universal human dignity since the 18th century as a process of "the sacralization of the individual" (204, translation H. P./S. P.). Although not the explicit focus of Joas' historical sociological analysis, sentimental discourses and practices that expose and scandalize injustices and brutalities while articulating experiences of 'good' and 'evil' against the backdrop of other traditional hierarchies can be seen to have played a crucial role in this process (cf. in particular 108–46). In other words, the sacralization of the individual was inextricably accompanied by its sentimentalization. As Joas himself notes, values require not only argumentation and rational justification but must also resonate affectively and evoke a sense of subjective evidence (251). Focusing more directly on the sentimental aspect of state-building, historian Elizabeth Garner Masarik demonstrates how white and Black women reformers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries used sentimentality to mobilize political action in the development of the American welfare state. She argues that sentimentalism "gave middle-class women the language to demand protections of the mother and child connection, particularly

when it came to issues of infant and maternal mortality or the sexual 'fall' of girls and women" (2).

Furthermore, the sentimental frequently appears on the political stage as a strategy of *crisis management*. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, governments worldwide launched vaccination campaign videos that heavily relied on sentimental communication.[1] Set to emotionally charged songs like *Hello Again* by Howard Carpendale or *Freedom* by Pharell Williams, these clips depicted heartfelt scenes of friends, lovers, and families reuniting, as well as joyous gatherings at birthday parties, live concerts, and football stadiums, all aimed at mobilizing emotions and encouraging vaccination as a means to halt and overcome the pandemic. However, these official videos were subsequently satirized and parodied by critics of the health measures implemented to combat the virus. Sentimentalization was—as is often the case—met with "countersentimental narratives" (Berlant 2011, 55), which, in the context of COVID-19 protests, shifted the focus away from the suffering caused by the virus itself to the suffering resulting from the measures implemented to fight it. These countersentimental narratives—frequently intertwined with conspiracy theories or right-wing ideologies—framed the restrictions of public health policies as a significant source of pain and hardship, arguing that the emotional and economical toll of lockdowns, social distancing, and other regulations were themselves forms of injustice. By foregrounding freedoms and the impacts of governmental interventions, these narratives sought to challenge the prevailing sentimental discourse centered on the collective suffering *from* the virus. This dynamic illustrates how competing sentimental frameworks and affective economies of "grievability" (Butler) can emerge in public discourse, as different groups attempt to articulate their experiences and grievances in ways that resonate with broader societal sentiments, ultimately shaping debates around responsibility, sacrifice, and the nature of societal welfare during crisis situations.

These examples clearly demonstrate the political dynamism (and dynamite) of sentimentality and already suggest that the sentimental code is not only employed top-down but also plays a crucial role in *articulating protest and resistance*. Social movements of various kinds and political affiliations employ "sentimental political storytelling" (Wanzo) to address pressing issues, aiming

1 For an overview of a wide range of sentimentally charged vaccination campaign videos worldwide, see https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/werbung-fuer-die-corona-impfung-deutschland-singt-hello-again-a-cb2909d0-2308-4504-80a5-1b6c1204bd2e.

at mobilizing support for political change. According to Rebecca Wanzo, "sentimental political storytelling" refers to "the narrativization of sympathy for purposes of political mobilization" (3) and is essential for fostering "affective agency" (ibid.) in the political sphere. By crafting sentimental narratives that resonate emotionally and often build on scenes of suffering (and emancipation) or invoke affectively charged values such as freedom or justice, social movements seek to inspire action and cultivate a collective commitment to their causes. These narratives not only aim to engage individuals on an emotional level but also instill a sense of urgency, compelling audiences to respond and participate in the pursuit of social change. In recent years, this has been particularly striking in climate activism: Sociologists Jochen Kleres and Åsa Wettergren have demonstrated that climate activists—especially those from the Global North—harness fear to emphasize the dangers of climate catastrophe. However, they also mitigate the paralyzing potential of this fear by pairing it with narratives of hope, effectively motivating individuals to take action.

Political communication represents another vital domain within the political sphere where emotional appeals and sentimental codes are prominently utilized. This encompasses a broad array of activities, including political speeches, national festivities, commemorative events, public rituals, election campaigns, and, increasingly important, the social media channels of diverse political actors. In the United States, the use of sentimental codes in political communication (Berlant 2008; Paul 2021) and the role of "civil religion" (Bellah) in shaping American political culture and public life has been noted for some time, with its origins traced back to the very foundation of the nation. These discourses and practices that elevate the nation to a deeply sentimental and almost sacred status continue to persist today, exemplified by the frequent appeals to the Declaration of Independence (Barnes), reflecting the enduring significance of foundational texts in shaping national identity. However, this phenomenon is not unique to the U.S.; other countries also exhibit a similar affection for their constitutions. Historian Ute Frevert, in her recent book *Verfassungsgefühle*, explores this sentiment in the German context, highlighting the emotional connections that individuals and societies forge with their foundational legal documents. Such sentimental attachments underscore how constitutions serve as enduring symbols of national identity and collective values.

Political communication, alongside national commemoration (Ladino) and the narration of "cultural trauma" (Alexander), draws upon and emotion-

ally appeals to specific societal core values, as well as imaginaries of order and belonging, often reflecting notions about inclusion and exclusion, about hegemony and marginalization within the political and social community. By employing sentimental symbols, narratives, and rhetoric that evoke feelings of unity or division, political communication, memory politics, and the cultural narration of trauma seek to construct a shared identity among certain groups while reinforcing boundaries that delineate "us" from "them." In this context, Heike Paul distinguishes between two forms of sentimentalism, both historical and contemporary: While "civil sentimentalism" (Paul 2018; 2021) refers to political frameworks and emotional repertoires that foster inclusive civic identity and community among citizens, "*Volkskörper*-sentimentalism" (Paul 2019) emphasizes exclusive national or ethnic identities drawing on the imaginary of the nation as a supposedly cohesive and organic entity.

Finally, the sentimental code unfolds its political power not only within the confines of the political system but also extends beyond it, exerting influence through various cultural and artistic domains. Cultural products and aesthetic expressions in the sentimental vein, such as literature, films, and music, can serve as "powerful interventions into social, cultural, and political discourses" (Gerund/Paul 17). These forms of art reflect societal values, beliefs, and aspirations, often acting as a mirror to the political landscape, while simultaneously (re)shaping public sentiment and identity. As argued by Jane Tompkins, such—often popular—cultural outputs perform essential "cultural work" and significantly contribute to public negotiating processes in nuanced ways.

To more accurately capture the cultural work of the sentimental in the political sphere, we propose analytically distinguishing between two fundamental forms, which will also serve as the two main sections of this volume: *sentimental leadership* and *the people's feelings*. As already indicated in the examples above, the sentimental can act both as a technology of statecraft and as a vehicle to express protest and resistance (Paul 2021, 10). In other words, it functions as a means of political interpellation as well as mobilization, reflecting both top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the role of sentimentality within political culture.

Sentimental Leadership

Sentimental leadership encompasses various affective modes of governance and orchestrations of power. At its core, it refers to the strategic employment

of sentimental registers and repertoires from the top down. In this context, the sentimental code is deliberately utilized to promote particular political objectives, aiming to engage citizens on an affective level and consequently strengthening their ties to the political community, whether that be a political party, certain institutions, or the nation as a whole. By invoking shared values, aspirational goals, or collective experiences and memories infused with emotion, political actors seek to both cultivate and reinforce a sense of order and belonging. This analytical framework invites exploration into how political actors attempt to shape and affectively appeal to what Deborah Gould describes as a "*political horizon*" (3)—the collective understanding of what is "politically possible, desirable, and necessary" (ibid.).

For instance, election slogans such as "Yes We Can," used during Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, and "Make America Great Again," employed in Donald Trump's 2016 and 2024 campaigns, encapsulate sharply contrasting visions of the past, present, and future, each aligned with divergent political agendas. These slogans are not merely catchy phrases; they are made to evoke powerful emotional responses and reflect distinct interpretations of history and aspiration. Obama's slogan encourages feelings of optimism, solidarity, and collective agency, aligning with a broader narrative of social progress and democratic participation. In contrast, Trump's slogan elicits a sense of nostalgia, grievances, and a yearning to return to a perceived past greatness. Each campaign resonates not only with different "feeling rules" (Hochschild 1979) but also with a unique "emotional habitus," i.e., "a social grouping's collective and only partly conscious emotional dispositions, that is, member's embodied, axiomatic inclinations toward certain feelings and ways of emoting" (Gould 32).[2]

2 The recent success of U.S. ultra-conservatism can partly be understood through sociologist Arlie R. Hochschild's concept of the "deep story" of its supporters (2016, 2024). In that narrative, hardworking citizens were struggling to make ends meet while feeling exploited by a greedy federal government. They were pressured to empathize with those seen as taking advantage of the American Dream and were looked down upon as "white trash" or "rednecks" if they failed to do so. Both Donald Trump and right-wing media outlets have adeptly knitted and articulated this narrative, often by eschewing expressions of empathy for immigrants and marginalized individuals. Instead, they position white working-class men as victims of liberal policies and misguided feeling rules, providing an alternate resolution to the prevailing "deep story" by pledging to "Make America Great Again."

Although sentimental leadership is frequently personified in the figure of a charismatic leader, as described by Max Weber, it is by no means confined to individual personalities. Instead, it should be understood as existing within broader dispositifs or assemblages and constellations of power. This perspective encompasses not only ruling elites but also oppositional groups, diverse media, aesthetic and material contexts, and even those iconic figures or institutions whose power is predominantly symbolic in nature.

Furthermore, as already illustrated by the examples above, sentimental leadership is not restricted to a specific political ideology or order. It is therefore neither inherently 'good' nor 'bad', 'progressive' nor 'conservative', 'populist' nor 'anti-populist', 'liberal' nor 'authoritarian', etc. Instead, it can be found on all sides of the political spectrum and has been described as an integral component of both autocracies and democracies. For instance, through his concept of the "sentimental citizen," George E. Marcus emphasizes the significance of recognizing the emotional foundations of democratic citizenship. In doing so, he challenges a widely held assumption in both democratic theory and the public sphere that emotions are inherently antagonistic to reason and consequently detrimental to the success of democratic processes. By contrast, Thomas Demmelhuber and Antonia Thies explore the role of sentimentality in autocratic regimes, using the Gulf monarchies as a case study. They define sentimentality as a "top-down initiated storytelling about the nation" (1004) and highlight how autocratic governments employ sentimentality to facilitate collective meaning-making, ultimately reinforcing their power and consolidating their authority.

Although sentimental leadership implies a top-down-scenario, it does not and cannot function in a solely uni-directional manner. In other words, its potential and power can only unfold if it is met with a corresponding response from the public: *the people's feelings*.

The People's Feelings

Benedict Anderson has famously described the nation as an "imagined community" and as a "horizontal comradeship" (7) whose bond has often legitimated the highest sacrifice possible and thus has come at the ultimate cost—that of life itself. Patriotism—in affirmative or critical idioms—is the expression of sentimental fellow feeling within the nation, and often this feeling is strategically inculcated by the state and its institutions in order to

interpellate citizens as feeling subjects sharing the same, often implicit "state fantasy" (Pease 5). In times of crisis, contingency management around the supremacy of national belonging can take various shapes and often draws on the sentimental to do cultural and political work. Elisabeth Anker has identified a rhetoric of "political melodrama" in post 9/11 discourses in the U.S. that sought to close ranks in the spirit of national mourning but also to mobilize against the enemy from outside and to punish his violation of what has been construed as American innocence. Till Werkmeister similarly has pointed to the site of the domestic as a prime locus for negotiating the people's feelings in literature in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks and for producing a "moral legibility" (Brooks 52) for individuals as members of families. A particular vulnerability is ceded to children as sentimentalized stand-ins and allegories for the innocence of the nation under attack. However, expressions of the people's feelings in a sentimental mode can also create counterpublics (Warner) seeking to contest the nation or at least some of its violent manifestations in the name of social justice. Such forms of contestation and solidarity are symbolized and evoked in civil rights discourses and movements such as *Black Lives Matter*. Here, the sentimentality of mourning does not produce an allegory of the innocent nation so much as it addresses a nation guilty of not protecting its citizens leading to "premature black death" (Gilmore; Sharpe**)** and the loss of black lives in numerous episodes of state-sanctioned police violence. It is the mothers of dead black children and teenagers who—as Hortense Spillers has it—form a "sor(r)ority" of sorts, a community of sentimental maternal suffering (see also Paul 2021). The individual and systemic failure to adequately address black children *as* children—and not as adults—is a misconception that Habiba Ibrahim sees connected to a foundational anti-blackness in the U.S. and that points to the limits of the sentimental as a communicative code in reliably producing fellow feeling across the color line, protectively wrapped around white, black, and brown children. Whereas the white child is legible as a sentimental object orphaned by the violence of 9/11-terrorism and slipping into an allegorical trope in symbolizations of white innocence, the black child is neither sentimentalizable nor allegorizable in a comparable fashion in the hegemonic symbolic order and becomes the object of sentimental mourning only after death, a death that is tragic, yet often rendered casual or accidental.

The "people's feelings" express, amplify, and reflect on cultural moods; yet they are often quite ambiguous and characterized by "affective dissonances" of various kinds (Ladino; Wanzo). More specifically, they can feel along hegemonic protocols or they may resist interpellation of "the people,"

an instrumentalization prominently employed in recent authoritarian populist rhetoric (Weale). Apart from mobilizing ambiguously feeling along, the sentimental code can also help give expression to and make intelligible 'other' people's feelings. The contested and somewhat controversial function of the sentimental in global imaginaries of humanitarianism (Boltanski) has been evidenced in a broad spectrum of popular art, ranging from Edward Steichen's "Family of Man"-exhibition to Steve McCurry's 1984-photograph of Sharbat Gula, titled "Afghan girl." Scholars—from James Baldwin to Paul Bloom—have pointed to the failure of the sentimental to adequately address otherness, while scholars such as Martha Nussbaum and George E. Marcus have repeatedly argued the opposite.

Even though many of the examples singled out here are manifestations of the sentimental in U.S. political and popular culture, such dynamics are by no means limited to this particular cultural context. In recent zones of conflict and crisis scenarios, similar patterns can be observed, and contributions in this volume speak to such strategies and effects in Thailand, China, the Middle East, Britain, and Germany.

Separating sentimental leadership from the people's feelings is a merely heuristic distinction and does not imply a simplistic, dichotomous relation of the two. Rather, we assume an interdependence between top-down-scenarios and bottom-up uses of the sentimental (also including the possibility of a horizontal bonding). All of those do not and cannot function in a solely unidirectional manner. In other words, the potential and power of the sentimental as a collective experience and as a force of mobilization can only unfold in reciprocal relationships. This underscores the complex role of the sentimental in political communication: While leaders may try to evoke certain affects and emotions, the effectiveness of their appeals hinges on the acceptance and active engagement by 'the people.' Sentimental leadership promotes certain culture-specific imaginaries of order and belonging, which must still be (at least selectively) embraced and actively adopted by the citizenry in order to be effective. Often, they are also rejected and countered by different and diverging emotional responses to a problem or a crisis. This interdependence creates a dynamic interplay between leadership figures and the public and also among different groups in civil society, constantly shaping and redefining adequate emotional responses to any given situation and political agenda.

The Contributions in this Volume

This volume comprises fifteen original essays that cover a diverse range of geographical contexts, including Thailand, China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the U.S., Argentina, Venezuela, England, and Germany. They illuminate a broad spectrum of symbolic interactions, ranging from sentimental crisis management to political communication and state-orchestrated festivities. With their varying focus on films and TV series, music, artworks, speeches, photographs, videos, and more, the essays also provide a media-specific and cross-media analysis of how the sentimental code is employed in each case. One of the overarching aims of this volume is also the theorizing of the sentimental, i.e., how it has been and how it can be conceptualized in a wide field of theoretical paradigms ranging from literary studies to feminist theory, from pragmatist thought to media studies, from historical reconstruction to performance studies, from cultural studies to sociology. We are aware that these different (often specifically disciplinary) perspectives cannot be simply added up and that they cannot be seamlessly translated back and forth, but that they need to be examined with an eye to the specific contexts out of which they emerge and with regard to the phenomena they describe and analyze. Clearly, the sentimental code comes in many different idioms and variations.

The first section on **sentimental leadership** opens with an essay by **Julian Müller,** who examines new forms of sentimental leadership in German politics. Observing a tension between passion and dispassion—between appearing both professional and approachable—he explores the characteristics and potential causes of this new political tone. Alongside portraying former German Green Party leader and former vice-chancellor Robert Habeck as a symptomatic figure of this new form of sentimental leadership, Müller also explores the role of new media in this development. This includes selfies and videos on social media, new television formats, and podcasts, all of which emphasize the visible, personal aspect of the leader and convey a sense of immediacy. **Harald Zapf**'s contribution critically engages with the office and the institution of the U.S. poet laureate in the context of U.S. democracy, past and present. Taking the examples of Amanda Gorman (National Youth Poet Laureate, 2017) and Juan Felipe Herrera (Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry, 2015–2017), the essay identifies a somewhat paradoxical tension inhabited by the respective office holder, that between serving America, on the one hand, and serving poetry, on the other. The sentimental may function as a code to

transcend this contradiction but does so at a prize: Through its "sentimental authority," the office of the PLOTUS actually serves to compartmentalize and minimize poetry's power, a power that becomes merely symbolic. **Carmen Birkle** turns to U.S. political culture and the role of sentimentality in public appearances. She identifies somewhat of a gender gap in the public display of feeling and illustrates this by referring to appearances of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, and, as part of the cultural imaginary, also to fictional characters from prestige television. Shedding tears may be one of the most intense—and spontaneous—forms of public feeling—yet, its dramatic appeal for political communication varies quite fundamentally. **Jan-Henrik Witthaus**' contribution critically examines the balustrade as a dispositif of political power. Balancing both proximity and distance, balcony scenes literally serve as 'exposed' examples of sentimental political communication, where leaders bridge the gap to 'their people' through emotionally charged speeches and rituals. Analyzing two case studies—the 1951 re-election campaign of Juan and Eva Perón in Argentina and Hugo Chávez's 2012 presidential campaign—Witthaus explores how the balcony, as an assemblage, stages the union between ruler and people within populist and neo-populist contexts. He highlights how evolving forms of mass media have reshaped this form of political communication over time, demonstrating that while the crowd-leader dynamic is central to the spectacle, the collective emotional experience cannot be fully transmitted via electronic media. **Antonia Thies** explores the sentimental politics employed by the Saudi government to consolidate its authority. Drawing on official documents, state-affiliated media, and speeches by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, she examines government-led narratives about national identity, shared belonging, and cultural heritage. By identifying sentimental codes and narratives crafted to resonate with the public, her analysis situates these efforts within the broader historical development of the Saudi state, showing how past events are leveraged to foster collective meaning through strategies of sentimental leadership. **Saowanee T. Alexander**'s and **Duncan McCargo**'s contribution illustrates a case of attempted sentimental leadership gone wrong. They examine the use of impolite and emotive language in response to a 2023 election campaign video from the ultra-conservative party Ruam Thai Sang Chat (United Thai Nation Party). This video not only ignited a significant number of political responses but also predicted the election outcomes, as the preferred party Move Forward achieved victory, while the beleaguered United Thai Nation Party struggled. Alexander and McCargo use this case as a valuable opportunity to analyze

public sentiment and the underlying imaginaries of order and belonging in contemporary Thailand.

In the second section on the **people's feelings**, **Christian Krug** identifies and analyzes three sentimental states of the nation in the U.K. as symptomatic of discourses of national belonging and affective community building that all involve the monarchy: First, he looks at representations of Diana's funeral and of a 'nation in mourning' on television and in print (the mass media that dominated the news at the time) in 1997. Second, the essay zooms in on representations of Diana, still a sentimental icon, at the 20th anniversary of her death in 2017. Beyond a brief comparison of these two historical moments, Krug closes by taking a detour and going back 400 years: 1597 saw the publication of the first Quarto of Shakespeare's *The Tragedie of King Richard the Second*. In all these scenarios, the author identifies sentimental strategies that correlate seemingly personal emotions with the circulation of public feelings. **Elaine Roth** examines Ava DuVernay's award-winning film *Selma* (2014) and its representation of the 1960's civil rights movement's initiative in Selma, Alabama. In both content and form, Roth argues, the film foregrounds the sentimental politics and appeal of the movement and contextualizes Martin Luther King's activism within a broader network of *women* civil rights activists. In her choice of mise-en-scene/dramaturgy, casting, and music, DuVernay has her film linger on moments of care and affection, giving visibility to the affective connections to community, shared values, and camaraderie, i.e., the kind of civil sentimentalism that largely defined the civil rights movement. **Charleena Schweda** analyzes Gerard Johnstone's *M3GAN* (2022) as a maternal horror film, exploring how it negotiates motherhood, the mother-daughter relationship, and childcare through various female characters in a sentimental mode. While the film satirizes sentimental tropes, it simultaneously reinforces the emotional significance of the (surrogate) mother-child bond, ultimately sentimentalizing motherhood as a core value. **Sarah Marak** and **Heike Paul** discuss the yearly "National Christmas Tree Lighting"-ceremony in front of the White House in Washington, D.C. as part of a larger narrative about Christmas in America. The roughly one-hundred-year-long history of this particular ceremony at the seat of executive power highlights conflicts over religiosity, patriotism, and environmentalism. At the same time, it is a spectacle of public feeling, where pop culture, civil religion, sentimentalism, consumerism, and patriotism intersect. **Anna Corrigan** discusses the work of Argentinian visual artist Lucila Quieto, whose father disappeared before her birth in 1976, along

with thousands of individuals who were kidnapped, detained, and executed by the Argentinian military dictatorship and remain unaccounted for. Quieto uses the medium of photography, and especially the genre of the family album, to imagine and interrogate the possibility of forging relationships between the children of the disappeared and their absent parents. This contribution analyzes Quieto's family album-art as a visual form for performing sentimental and genealogical attachments that imply a process of societal and interpersonal repair in the wake of state violence and mass disappearance. **Vincent Steinbach** explores the role of sentimental communication in the negotiation of COVID-19 as a political and medical crisis, comparing the staging strategies of German YouTube creators Oliver Janich and MaiLab. While MaiLab employs staged anger and humor to reinforce trust in science—ultimately allowing for doubt and ambivalence—Janich harnesses resentment and anger to construct a quasi-religious, unambiguous truth, portraying himself as a tragic hero. His sentimental narrative fosters a sense of collective grievance, aligning with broader right-wing populist strategies. The study highlights how sentimental codes shape different modes of knowledge production, audience engagement, and political mobilization. **Thomas Demmelhuber** examines the role of music in Egyptian politics since 1952, highlighting its function in shaping collective identities under autocratic regimes. The essay explores how sentimentally coded music has been used both to support and contest political power, focusing on two key periods: the Nasser era, where Umm Kulthum's songs symbolized national unity and Pan-Arabism, and the 2011 revolution, where Egyptian hip-hop voiced societal change and resistance. His analysis underscores the fusion of traditional and modern musical forms in the Middle East and North Africa, illustrating how music and its sentimental ties between the past and the present continuously reshape national identity, serving as a tool both for regime consolidation and as a medium for protest. **Marc Andre Matten** analyzes the funeral rites surrounding the death of Mao Zedong in the fall of 1976 as a rare occasion where tears were allowed to be shed in public as numerous iconic sources show. At the same time, the expression of grief shared by millions of people in the country was channeled—following the official motto of "turning grief into strength"—into a sense of gratefulness for the achievements of the leader and a commitment to continue the work of the revolution. Today, Zedong's political legacy is once again sentimentalized in similar ways in Chinese political propaganda. **Sarah Pritz** offers a cultural sociological perspective on the sentimental, developing it both theoretically and empirically through the example of so-called 'lost places.' She proposes

conceptualizing the sentimental as a set of social practices focused on the (re-)production of sentimental experiences and their material or symbolic 'objectifications' (such as narratives, cultural artifacts, and spaces). Integrating insights from spatial sociology, she analyzes lost places as sentimental spaces, demonstrating how their complex spatiotemporal figurations invite a sentimental mode of feeling by making absence and historical ruptures tangible. In conclusion, her contribution positions lost places—and their aestheticization—as key to understanding how late modern societies engage with loss, decay, and the material manifestations of social change.

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