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Michael Richardson & Kerstin Schankweiler

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## Introduction: Affective Witnessing as Theory and Practice

Michael Richardson and Kerstin Schankweiler

On 21 May 2016, an asylum seeker named Shabaz Saleh Al-Aziz had been in and out of a Netto supermarket in Arnsdorf, a village in Saxony in the East of Germany. Al-Aziz entered and left three times, attempting to communicate a problem with his phone card. Eyewitness reports variously described his demeanour as frustrated, violent or simply confused. On the third occasion, he was holding two bottles of wine and made the cashier nervous. Four men entered the store and removed him against his will, dragging him across the street before cable-tying him to a tree. He had no chance to testify in court about what took place that afternoon. A year later, just a week before the trial of his attackers, the body of Al-Aziz was found frozen to death in the woods outside Dresden. It was ruled an accident, with no direct connection to what happened in the Arnsdorf supermarket. Without the victim to testify, charges against his attackers were dropped.

Smartphone footage of the incident is shaky, the image blurred (Figure 1). Shot from a position half hidden behind a rack of greeting cards and the shelves at the end of an aisle, Al-Aziz is only partially visible. His body moves minimally. He refuses to give a security guard the bottles in his hand. He continues to engage the cashier. Shoppers pass by. Then four large men enter the frame, seize the Iraqi, take the bottles from his hands, and then drag him past the cashier and towards the sliding glass doors to the outside. A scuffle breaks out and the men hurl Al-Aziz onto what looks like a recycling station before asserting control and dragging him out into the sunshine. The video cuts off, but the footage set in motion a mediated spectacle after it went viral on social media, first circulating in right-wing online forums.<sup>1</sup> Media coverage mapped a spectrum of interpretation between the righteous intervention of private citizens to restore public order and xenophobic vigilantism. Right-wing press and politicians hailed the four men as heroes, particularly in the area of Saxony that is considered the stronghold of the New Right and the cradle of the right-wing Pegida movement.<sup>2</sup> Other newspapers and left-wing politicians condemned the actions of the four men as vigilantism ‘Wild West style’ and as ‘lynch law’, the vigilantes were seen as a danger to public security and the rule of law.<sup>3</sup> Throughout, the four men claimed to have been inspired by *Zivilcourage* (moral courage), a distinctly German notion that means courage in daily life and includes the willingness and ability to put aside one’s own security and comfort in an unpleasant or even threatening situation, in order to stand up for a cause considered just and become active accordingly. *Zivilcourage* is seen as an important virtue of citizens in a democracy, the other side of a coin whose opposing face is vigilante justice.



Figure 1. Smartphone still, screengrab from YouTube.

With its grainy footage rendering details difficult to discern, the video opened the event to witnessing but could not foreclose meaning. Image testimonies such as this offer no definitive meaning, only an open-ended witnessing of bodies moved and moving in that everyday terrain of the supermarket.<sup>4</sup>

In Mario Pfeifer's video installation 'Again/Noch Einmal' (2018), this smartphone footage forms one of several intertwined acts of witnessing to the events of 21 May 2016. Commissioned by the 2018 Berlin Biennale and described by the *New York Times* as "this show's most talked-about work," the two-channel video work occupied one corner of the top floor of the festival's main location at the Akademie der Künste in Hanseatenweg, Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Projected onto two large screens set at obtuse angles to one another, the 42-minute work (re)stages the witnessing of the incident and its surrounding media spectacle. Over the first half of the work, an invited audience watches an orchestrated re-enactment of the incident on a recreated supermarket in an empty factory building. Performed by actors and hosted by the German television personalities Dennesch Zoudé and Mark Waschke, this restaging is interrupted by interventions by the hosts, testimony from a relative of Al-Aziz and media footage surrounding the event, including the smartphone footage. In one snippet, the judge is quoted as saying the video triggered an "emotional avalanche" that needed to be stopped. After the re-enactment, each member of the small audience – what we might call the jury – is invited to reflect on what they have seen, the event itself, and its resonance with their own experiences of violence, racism, migration and injustice. In their words and the micro-movements of their faces, the event itself refuses fixity: it expands and dissolves, bleeds into other memories, into the now. Through its attention to the interplay of media, embodiment, time, politics, memory and affect, 'Again/Noch Einmal' illuminates the complexities and possibilities of affective witnessing as a critical concept and lively practice. As such, it is an

ideal aesthetic work to anchor this introduction to this issue of *parallax* on Affective Witnessing.

As the seven articles that make up this issue demonstrate, affective witnessing is a flexible and generative reconception of witnessing that centres relationality in both theory and practice. While there are traces of the affective in much witnessing theory, embodied relations have taken a backseat to signification. While our individual and collaborative research into witnessing and affect opened up new and interdisciplinary paths, this themed issue pushes much further, engaging with a rich array of subject matter and theoretical stances. Its earliest life can be traced back to a stream we proposed and convened for the Affect Inquiry/Making Space conference organised at Millersville University in 2018 by the marvellous Greg Seigworth. A number of the contributions here began as papers at that conference but have moved in new directions and adopted unforeseen siblings along the way. In this introduction, we build on our own prior writing on affective witnessing to further refine our understanding of the concept.<sup>6</sup> To do this, we develop four key thematics through close analysis of Mario Pfeifer's 'Again/Noch Einmal': mediation, vulnerability, embodied testimony and witnessing communities. Through these themes, we also introduce the contributions to this issue by Tesla Cariani, Nicole Weber, Jonas Bens, Nicholas Chare and ourselves, each dwelling with sites of witnessing practice that span the globe from Uganda to Australia to Germany to the Americas. Before turning to the artwork, however, we first outline what we mean by affective witnessing in general terms and provide a necessarily brief overview of witnessing scholarship.

### Affective Witnessing

Affective witnessing is a relational account of the theory and practice of witnessing that centres encounter, embodiment, affect and intensities of experience. As theory, affective witnessing provides an analytical perspective for attending to aspects of witnessing often overlooked: the social, embodied and constitutively relational dimensions that are present in all acts of witnessing. This critical framework also means that other dimensions of witnessing – ethical, moral, political – cannot be addressed without the affective. The affective is in this sense not against signification and cognition, but constitutive of processes of sense- and truthmaking. To stay with our example: what is actually witnessed in the video testimony of 21 May 2016 - an act of vigilante justice or an act of civil courage – depends on affective relationalities.<sup>7</sup> On the level of witnessing as a practice, it acknowledges that witnessing is something felt, something that involves the whole body and at the same time kicks off relationalities to other bodies (all kinds of bodies). As an account of practice, affective witnessing also describes a particular mode of witnessing in which affect itself is what is witnessed. In 'Again/Noch Einmal,' we encounter this most prominently in the testimony of the jurors who watch the re-enactment, as dual close-up images capture the nuances of affect in minor movements of the face. Affective witnessing proves most analytically useful when relations

between bodies, events, environments, worlds and objects are at the forefront of study, even if that prominence stems from their obscuring or absence. As we theorise it here and elsewhere, affective witnessing is not a replacement for witnessing theory more generally, but rather a conceptual aperture that sharpens focus on the inherently relational and inescapably bodily aspects of witnessing.<sup>8</sup>

New media forms, platforms, devices and infrastructures have made affective witnessing increasingly prevalent, yet it remains more than simply a subset of the broad practice of “media witnessing,” which Paul Frosh and Amit Pinchevski define as “witnessing performed *in, by* and *through* the media.”<sup>9</sup> Affective witnessing describes a form of witnessing that is often manifested and encountered through media, but is not reducible to it. While there are a number of valuable approaches to understanding affect, ours borrows from the Spinozan tradition that understands affect as the bodily capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies, human and non-human.<sup>10</sup> For Brian Massumi, this means that affect can be equated with intensities of experience that occur between bodies, shaped and shaping but not owned by any given body.<sup>11</sup> Lacking predetermined form, affect cannot contain meaning prior to its occurrence: it is the animating force of encounter that undoes the seemingly fixed boundaries of bodies. As Melissa Gregg and Greg Seigworth write, ‘with affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.’<sup>12</sup> This means that affect can be understood as the relational dynamics of bodies in context: permeable and elastic in their inherent tendency towards change, attunement and entanglement.<sup>13</sup> Thus, affective witnessing shifts the emphasis from the figure of the witness and the belated act of testimony to the process of witnessing as an intensive encounter. As an open-ended and relational process, witnessing can be mediated, communicated, shared, experienced and recomposed by others who become co-witnesses across fluctuating temporalities, making and binding witnessing communities around truths that, though shared, remain open to contestation.

Much like the example from Arnsdorf in May 2016, videos of violent attacks or human rights violations have become a transversal genre and a global phenomenon of what we call affective witnessing. This group of videos, often with a violent content, has a particularly explosive potential. The fact that the dissemination of a video recording can unfold unprecedented dynamics was recently demonstrated with renewed vigour in the case of the Black American George Floyd, who was killed by the police on 25 May 2020, which led to worldwide protests against structural racism under the banner of Black Lives Matter. Shared images, like the video of George Floyd or Shabaz Ali-Aziz, convey an experience of co-presence, producing a witnessing community of those present in the moment and those who encounter the event via their screens. Events, eyewitnesses, media witnesses and the images themselves together constitute an affective community, a community of affective witnessing. This virtual co-presence makes the event feel simultaneous, even though the very

bearing of witness through the recorded image depends on a belated temporality. Affective witnessing topologically reshapes the event, enabling it to overflow and multiply, to stretch and expand, thin and thicken. These videos offer more than testimony to the event: watching them we are witness to the becoming-witness of the videographer. Affective witnessing need not be confined to the image, however, as the textual virality of #MeToo attests. On social media, and through its permeation of more traditional media forms, the tendency towards virality of the platforms themselves provides rich currents through which affective witnessing can flow. Yet, as the contributors to this themed issue show, all witnessing contains affective, embodied relations. Networked media makes visible this affectivity, but it can be equally present in photography, drawing and sculpture as it is on social media. As we aim to show following a brief excursion into the scholarship on witnessing, affective witnessing is particularly powerful because it attends to processes of mediation, bodily vulnerability, the embodiment of testimony, and the making of witnessing communities that have not always been given appropriate attention.

### The Paradigm of Witnessing

Contemporary scholarship on witnessing can be traced to the 1980s and growing investigation into the legacy of the Holocaust. While many scholars centred trauma, for Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub the problem of witnessing historical trauma through literature, film and poetry was essential and taken up by many that followed, including Giorgio Agamben in his influential reflections on the figure of the Auschwitz witness.<sup>14</sup> Influenced by Derrida and his writings on the necessary aporia or unknowability at the heart of testimony, this inauguration of witnessing as intimately related to signification has endured through the literature. Yet while the Holocaust rightly continues to retain its gravitational pull, witnessing theory has proven transferrable, adaptable and expendable, as many authors have stated.<sup>15</sup> Over the past 15 years, theory around witnessing and testimony has diversified and proliferated; it has been taken up in anthropology,<sup>16</sup> political science,<sup>17</sup> postcolonial studies,<sup>18</sup> media and communication studies,<sup>19</sup> as well as cultural studies and art history.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, witnessing has become an essential mode of engagement with the present as well as the past. As media technologies are increasingly constitutive of contemporary cultures, societies, economies and politics, the role of witnessing has become inescapable such that we now live in ‘an era of becoming a witness’,<sup>21</sup> an ‘age of testimony’<sup>22</sup> and even ‘the century of witness.’<sup>23</sup>

In much of this scholarship, emotions surface as a relevant aspect of witnessing. Annette Wieviorka argues that ‘testimony appeals to the heart and not to the mind’<sup>24</sup> such that ‘the one who testifies signs a ‘compassionate pact’ with the one who receives the testimony’.<sup>25</sup> Witnessing theory is often speaking of ‘moral concern and political engagement,’ which depends on the formation of affective connection as a prerequisite for emotional involvement and for

taking a (moral, political) stance.<sup>26</sup> Typologies of the figure of the witness and their associated modes of testimony depend on the distinction of affective modes.<sup>27</sup> While the *superstes*, which is the survivor-witness and herald of the past, is sustainably affected by what he or she has experienced and therefore is subjective, the *testis* as the juridical witness takes an impartial, more external perspective and is supposedly neutral and objective because he is emotionally not involved. Yet even though affect, emotion and embodiment circulate in witnessing theory, affect as such – the capacity of bodies to move and be moved by other bodies, by things, and by the world – rarely emerges explicitly.

This changes with the arrival of the so-called ‘affective turn’ in social sciences and the humanities.<sup>28</sup> With a focus on journalism Sue Tait writes, ‘figuring affect as central to practices of bearing witness requires acknowledging the partiality and embodiment of bearing witness, and the manner in which the testimonial appeal extends beyond facticity.’<sup>29</sup> Michael Richardson sets affect, along with power and trauma, as central categories for his analysis of torture in images, films and literature.<sup>30</sup> Penelope Papailias links practices of witnessing to ‘affective publics’ in the era of networked digital media in her study on online memorials.<sup>31</sup> In a similar vein, Larissa Hjorth and Kathleen Cumiskey highlight how ‘the circulation of mediated images of trauma takes on new forms of powerful affective practices that haunt the user, the viewer and the device’.<sup>32</sup> While indebted to the breadth of witnessing scholarship, the contributions to this issue of *parallax* build on this emerging body of research on affect and testimony to show how affective witnessing offers a cross-cutting reconception with relevance to disciplinary and interdisciplinary discussions on witnessing.

### ‘Again/Noch Einmal’: Affective Witnessing as Theory and Practice

Mario Pfeifer’s work opens with drone shots of rural east Germany on both screens. A voiceover notes that economically disadvantaged areas are predominantly in the east, opportunity in the west. Failures of policy threaten to leave communities abandoned. Then the title: ‘Noch Einmal’ on one screen, ‘Again’ on the other, the words superimposed over funhouse mirror imagery of Al-Aziz in the supermarket. In German on the left and English on the right, text appears: ‘All characters in this work are not fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.’ This disclaimer does double duty, asserting veracity while disavowing the legal implications of representing real persons. It also establishes one of the central tensions of the work: it lays claim to witnessing the event, but its aesthetic deployment of mediation and re-enactment to question community and court opinion means it must disavow any institutional authority to speak ‘truth.’ After the titles, a vehicle enters a dark, blue lit space that resembles an indoor parking station. Seven men and three women emerge and walk to a low platform, where they take seats in two rows. Mostly older, the group contains visible racialized members, as well as others who present as white. Cameras scan the



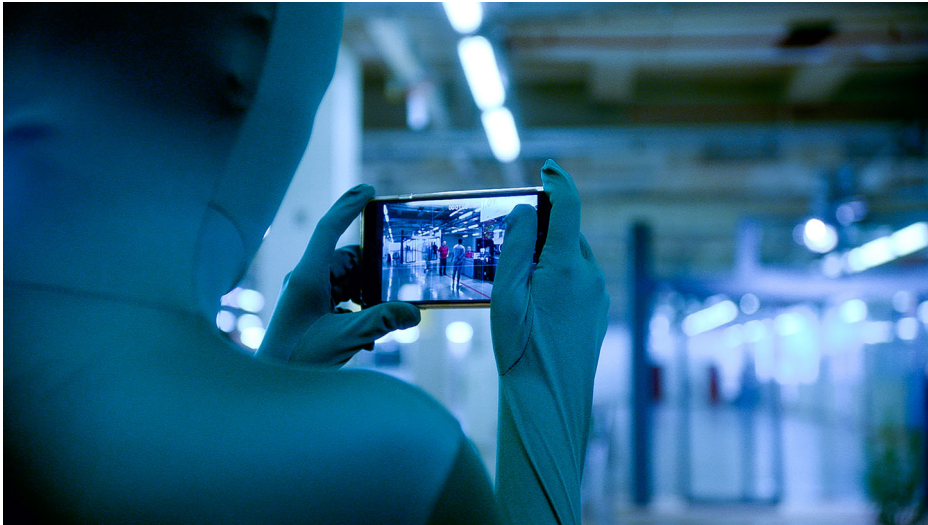
faces, the two channels differing perspectives and establishing the visual aesthetic of the work. Then, lights come up on a supermarket set. A woman of colour walks briskly to the cashier, a man follows. He interjects at the point of sale, first in German and then, after receiving no response, in English. She answers in German, but he asks her, again in English, 'Where do you come from?' She confronts him, tension builds, and then the woman interrupts it, turning away towards the audience and asking '*Zivilcourage* (civil courage), where does it originate?' This interruption is the first of many, a deliberate strategy of breaking into trajectories of narrative, lines of inquiry, and the temporalities of the events surrounding what happened on 21 May 2016. Orchestrated by hosts Dennesch Zoudé and Mark Waschke, these interruptions reposition relations, prompting a self-reflexive mode of engagement with how what is being witnessed might be thought and felt differently.

When the two of us first encountered the work at the 2018 Berlin Biennale a screening was almost over. We watched one of the last jurors give her testimony and waited for the work to restart. In the midst of co-authoring our first essay on affect and witnessing, 'Again/Noch Einmal' swiftly struck us because it paid intimate attention to the layered and mediated processes through which witnessing takes place and comes to matter. As the event is repeatedly re-enacted through multiple layers of *mediation*, the *vulnerability* entailed in witnessing comes to the fore. Contestations over meaning, inseparable from xenophobic political affects, occurs through *embodied testimony*. Held together affectively, *witnessing communities* emerge both on Pfeifer's stage and in the fragments of media coverage included in the work. In our analysis of 'Again/Noch Einmal' we take up these themes of mediation, vulnerability, embodiment and community to show how affective witnessing can be applied as a critical framework. Doing so reveals points of contact and resonance with the contributions to this themed issue.

### *Mediation*

In the live performance at the centre of 'Again/Noch Einmal,' multiple media elements are integrated via screens mounted on vehicles parked next to the set or on the smartphone that films the re-enactment of the viral footage from within the scene. As Chiel Kattenbelt writes, theatre is 'the only medium that can incorporate all other media without damaging the specificity of these media and its own specificity.'<sup>33</sup> Media reports featuring the testimony of the four men and people in the local area figure prominently. Presenting what happened on stage enables both embodied co-presence and mediated spectacle to co-exist as elements of affective witnessing. At the same time, the performance itself is mediated and re-presented as video installation. Mediation, as Rebecca Adelman notes, 'encompasses various means of transmission and representation that enable audiences to experience and to imagine distant people, places, and phenomena.'<sup>34</sup> In the context of witnessing, mediation has often been figured as potentially problematic, rendering distant suffering into spectacle<sup>35</sup> or making witnessing ambivalent<sup>36</sup> through





Figures 2. Mario Pfeiffer. Still from "Again / Noch Einmal," 2018. Courtesy Mario Pfeiffer.

its simultaneously intimate and distant nature. But 'Again/Noch Einmal' is less interested in the presence of multiple media than how mediations take place, in the transition or translation from one informational state to another.

Understood in Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska's terms as a vital process constitutively concerned with the liveliness of materialities and affects,<sup>37</sup> mediation becomes constitutive of the event itself as it comes to matter for others. 'Again/Noch Einmal' uses the event's entering into media of all kinds as itself something to be witnessed, as well as a process that enables witnessing and, at times, spectatorship. Adopting an affective witnessing lens sharpens focus on the intensifications and modulations of witnessing relations that occur through processes of mediation. Perhaps the most revealing moment in this regard is when the screen of the smartphone enters the frame of the camera (Figure 2), so that we witness the aesthetic mediation of the initial act of mediated witnessing that transformed yet another act of anti-immigrant violence into a national media event. The body of the witness who holds the camera is clothed in blue lycra, indeterminate, deliberately keyed to the blue light of the stage. The body of the witness is there and not, present but not known, necessary for the circulation of the camera that captures the affects of the scene and yet withdrawn from its happenings. Even when directly addressed by Waschke, the figure does not reply. The sequence seems to ask what it means to witness when the witnessing figure is subsumed by the production of media and its necessary circulation and further mediation.

Mediation is at the core of all witnessing. Whether an event is inscribed in the bodily memory of the witness or recorded on a smartphone, its registering as an event is necessarily a mediation that enables the potential transmission of the event to others elsewhere. Mediation is the process that enables

witnessing to be belated, it splits time and carries the temporality of the event forward into the future. Temporality is bound up with what John Durham Peters calls the ‘veracity gap’ of witnessing, or the uncertainty of translating experience into discourse, because any translation or transmission necessarily takes place after the event and must be an inferior copy.<sup>38</sup> But Frosh and Pinchevski point out that media witnessing both retains the singularity of the event and makes it repeatable, creating the sense that lost time has been recovered.<sup>39</sup> As the title ‘Again/Noch Einmal’ suggests, the work is very much about mediation, re-enactment and time – as well as the repetition of xenophobic acts in contemporary Germany. It dwells in the belated space of the veracity gap, staying with the ambivalence, uncertainty, anxiety and indeterminacy but without submitting to an aporia of unknowability. As the video work returns again and again to certain moments, whether through re-enactment, narration, smartphone footage or media reports, the time of event unspools – its singularity comes undone. It is always already in process, mediated, bound up with what it is becoming before the footage is even online. In ‘Again/Noch Einmal’ there is no time in which the event is not being mediated, nor in which the event is separate from media: the milieu of the event was and is one of media – but media that marshals, modulates, amplifies and circulates affect. Affective witnessing, then, is not oppositional or otherwise to media witnessing. As theory and practice, both affective witnessing and media witnessing cut through and across one another, complementary rather than contradictory.

Within this themed issue, mediation as constitutive of affective witnessing figures prominently across all the contributions, from the courtroom objects analysed by Jonas Bens to the fugitive photographs of queer life in Haiti discussed by Tesla Cariani. In Michael Richardson’s article on scale and witnessing, the combination of affect and mediation enables aesthetic engagements with the radically disjunctive scale of planetary crisis. Richardson shows how aesthetic approaches can confront the problem of scale in unexpected ways, revealing how the very relationality of scale brings the non-human into a continuum with the human as a mode of affective witnessing. Affect, witnessing and mediation come together very differently in Nicholas Chare’s meditation on gesture and encounter in the drawings of Shanawdithit, a Beothuk woman from what is now called Newfoundland, off the east coast of Canada. Bridging almost two centuries, the drawings attest to the affects of rupture, trauma and dislocation that continue to define settler colonialism today. Despite their radical differences, Shanawdithit’s drawings resonate strongly with the politicised violence and unstable encounters mediated by ‘Again/Noch Einmal’. They are, too, mediations of intense vulnerability, a vulnerability that both enables witnessing and is, at least in part, its object.

### *Vulnerability*

‘Again/Noch Einmal’ stages vulnerability as intrinsic to witnessing. This vulnerability is an affective state, defined by the bodily exposure to others and

to the world necessitated by the act of witnessing itself, the subsequent lived experience of the witness, and the bearing of witness in the form of testimony. Approaches to witnessing that privilege language and the narration of events tend to diminish or obscure this vulnerability, if not erase it altogether. Human rights testimony, for instance, hinges on the narration of vulnerability, but its corporeal rendering as trauma, the failure of language, or an incapacity to testify remains on the margins of what can be accepted by governmental institutions and even by human rights organisations themselves.<sup>40</sup> In its repeated return to bodies and its attention to ambivalence, situatedness and context, 'Again/Noch Einmal' shows how affective witnessing is necessarily attuned to vulnerability as a risky yet potentially transformative mode of relation for Al-Aziz, the witnessing jury and even the xenophobic public depicted in media footage surrounding the assault.

Captured by the smartphone footage that sparked public interest in the assault, Al-Aziz possesses an immediate vulnerability. Even with two bottles in his hands, he is surrounded and surveilled, his movements are agitated and might easily be read as threatening by those on the scene. The intimacy of this footage is crucial. As Larissa Hjorth and Kathleen M. Cumiskey write, 'mobile media in crisis situations generate affective responses and uses'.<sup>41</sup> The individual shooting the footage becomes vulnerable, they argue, but the same might be said of the individual caught in the surveillant gaze of the camera, liable to be circulated online as was the case for Al-Aziz. According to Hjorth and Cumiskey, 'his vulnerability leads one to consider the ethical dimensions surrounding how and when mobile media, mainly via troubled images, are produced and possibly distributed'.<sup>42</sup> In the case of Al-Aziz, with the footage initially shared on a far-right web forum, the vulnerability of the cameraperson is not at issue – quite the reverse. As 'Again/Noch Einmal' carefully details, Al-Aziz lived precariously from the inability to find epilepsy treatment in Iraq to the gruelling journey to Germany to his movements in and out of various institutions and wardens of the state once there. Attending to vulnerability as the defining fact of the asylum seeker's life, Pfeifer asks the viewers of his work to grasp the event within its context, a context not of anxious cashiers and xenophobic locals, but an extended vulnerability that crests in those moments captured on video and in the hours that followed. A vulnerability that is not lessened by being witnessed, but intensified. Nor can Al-Aziz bear witness before the law to that vulnerability. As Pfeifer's work tells us, he dies of exposure to the cold before the trial can take place.

Vulnerability is also on display in the response of the witnesses to Pfeifer's re-staging and the parochial, anti-immigrant sentiment of the Saxony public, albeit with altogether different orientations. For the witnesses of the jury, their vulnerability becomes apparent in the second half of the work, as each reflects on the events in Arnsdorf and its resonance with their own experiences. This vulnerability, as we will discuss below, grounds their embodied truth-telling, but it is also evoked as a distinctive characteristic of bearing witness. Through the vulnerability entailed in their (re)witnessing of the event,

the women and men are brought back to their own histories of vulnerability, to which they testify in the wake of watching the mediated events of that May afternoon in Arnsdorf. 'Again/Noch Einmal' culminates in the breakdown of one of the jurors, her vulnerability made radically evident in her incapacity to hold together in the face of the intensities of witnessing. Vulnerability, however, is not inherently virtuous, as the anti-immigrant sentiments of a certain swathe of small-town Saxony make clear. In media footage woven into the video work, vulnerability emerges as a site of fear and racism, bound up with a sense that how things might not – or cannot – hold.

Foregrounding vulnerability does not make affective witnessing virtuous or moral, but rather brings affective witnessing into close proximity with the capacities of bodies to be exposed to one another. Tesla Cariani explores a resonant vulnerability in her contribution to this themed issue, tracing the photography of Josuè Azor in its creation of an archive of the fugitive encounters, caresses and commitments of queer communities in Haiti that would otherwise remain witnessed only in the flesh. Cariani shows how vulnerability is navigated through faces that are obscured, shadowed or outside the frame entirely. Like 'Again/Noch Einmal,' Azor's Port-au-Prince photography does not shy from the aesthetics of witnessing. Rather, it shows how witnessing as a political practice of the queer everyday depends on attention to affectivity. As Pfeifer and Cariani both show, witnessing attunes to vulnerability as a material, experiential state of bodily exposure. Shifting the locus from logos to corps, from word to body, affective witnessing brings vulnerability to the fore as a constitutive dimension of witnessing.

### *Embodied Testimony*

Affective witnessing broadens the frame of analysis for truth claims by attending to the embodied dimensions of testimony. Embodied testimony does not fetishize the eyewitness, but rather centres embodiment within the analysis or evocation of any act of witnessing. In other words, embodied testimony anchors the bearing of witness in the body rather than the word. History and memory, too, become accessible through the body rather than through written records. Installed at the Berlin Biennale, 'Again/Noch Einmal' engages its audience in the embodied witnessing of embodied testimony. With seats placed in two rows mirroring those of the jury in the video, the liveness of the installation repeats the staging of the re-enactment. As audience to the installation, we witnessed ourselves in the form of the juror – not mirrored as such, but placed in an embodied relation to the act of witnessing performed on the screen. Such a relation is at the core of affective witnessing, as we not only become witnesses of events, but witness the relational networks that emerged through witnessing and its affective dynamics. In 'Again/Noch Einmal' embodied testimony is most powerfully manifest in both the embodied performance of the re-enactment of the events in the supermarket and the response of the jurors who are eyewitnesses to the re-enactment, itself a form of embodied testimony. If the rendering of witnessing into testimony



Figure 3. Mario Pfeifer. Still from "Again / Noch Einmal," 2018. Courtesy Mario Pfeiffer.

necessarily brings it into a space of contestation over meaning, legitimacy and authority, then embodied testimony attends to those gestural and relational dynamics of the body that testifies.

With its structuring around two staged acts of witnessing, the re-enactments of 21 May before the jury and the bearing witness of those jurors, 'Again/Noch Einmal' shows how testimony can be embodied despite the mediation of the event in question, and even in response to that mediation. Re-enactment is not reproduction, it is an iteration that always entails a transformation of the original event: the physical performance, by actors, on an artificial yet quite accurate set stifts the event and produces it anew, even as it calls back to and depends upon the 'ground truth' of the recording of what happened that afternoon.<sup>43</sup> This staging allows other pieces of information to be heard and seen (for example the history of Al-Aziz illness and migration), other perspectives to be included (we see the anonymous videographer and his or her recording mobile phone), and moments otherwise unseen to enter the frame, as the re-enactment continues beyond where the video cuts off as Al-Aziz is dragged from the store. Cable tied to a stylised tree (Figure 3), this re-enactment for the jurors and its mediation for the audience of the installation both enabled an embodied relation – an affective engagement – that is itself a relation of witnessing. Witnessing the (same but different) events of 21 May 2016 can shape, change and transform affective relations not only in the moment of witnessing, but also in the future: '[t]he aesthetic and political expressivity of bodily figurations in (p)reenactments draws on the ambiguity of their points of reference, as these figurations oscillate between different layers of time, subjectivities, and affective arrangements, making it impossible to contextualize their actions definitively'.<sup>44</sup> It is this potential that makes



affective witnessing inherently political. Responsibility to the events becomes responsibility for the ongoing event of marginalisation, racism and hate. This responsibility is not rendered in the abstract, but through embodied testimony.

Embodied testimony as an essential element of affective witnessing emerges across a number of contributions to this themed issue. Nicole Weber, however, offers the most substantive consideration through a case study of the GRRRL™ fitness brand and community on Instagram. Weber's analysis of fitness transformation testimonies shows how the embodiment brought to the fore in affective witnessing offers new possibilities for becoming-bodies that seek to resistant dominant paradigms of femininity, even as they remain contained with the capitalist logic of platforms and brands. For both the communities that Weber analyses and the multi-layered witnessing of 'Again/Noch Einmal,' embodied testimony comes together with mediation and vulnerability in the formation of witnessing communities.

### *Witnessing Communities*

If witnessing is the formation of relations between the body of the witness and the event they experience, then testimony seeks to forge those relations into witnessing communities. Sharing the mobile phone video recorded in the Netto supermarket on 21 May 2016 via social media is first of all "motivated by a desire to connect with others," even if we don't know who the videographer was or what his or her intentions exactly were.<sup>45</sup> Deciding to make the video testimony available for others to co-witness was already a political act. In 'Again/Noch Einmal' this building of witnessing communities takes place at several levels: the fervor of the German populous (both right and left) in explaining what happened as either *Zivilcourage* or vigilante justice; the jury of Pfeifer's re-enactment; the audience who encounters the work in its gallery installation. As the narrative returns again and again to events in the Netto that afternoon, it asks in different ways how it is that a community comes to agree on the meaning and significance of what happened. Media footage of protests, interviews with the men who dragged Al-Aziz from the store, and the vox pop remarks of members of the community show how witnessing feeds into what is called a 'moral community', a form of collective identification that occurs around testimony. Witnesses performatively bring forth this moral community through the appeal of testimony, most often through a shared connection with a traumatised victim.<sup>46</sup> 'Again/Noch Einmal' shows how moral authority becomes readily contested when an appeal to communal morality and the political values that ground it are at issue. *Zivilcourage* or vigilante: this binary question is one of political affiliation, a co-feeling that precedes the event itself.

Affective witnessing is tied to affective politics: affective witnessing finds fertile ground in epistemic communities in which shared feeling takes precedence of agreed facts. Sara Ahmed calls this feeling 'witness', which she traces in

the uncomfortable connections between citizenship, love of nation and far-right discourses.<sup>47</sup> Affects and emotions delineate bodies and align them with each other and against others, such that a feeling of belonging together comes about through being with a “witness” (whereby one is “with others” and “against other others”).<sup>48</sup> For Ahmed, ‘self-love becomes a national love that legitimates the response to terror as the protection of loved others who are “with me”, whereby “witness” is premised on signs of “likeness” and whereby likeness becomes an imperative or a condition of survival’.<sup>49</sup> While the affects and orientations of German politics do not easily align with the Anglo-American affective economies described by Ahmed, her analysis of the love and likeness is resonant with 21 May 2016 and the reception of the event in German media, in which determinations of what happened to the refugee Al-Aziz became bound up with the question of who ‘we’ are, and who ‘we’ are not.

While Pfeifer might be read as asking for an alternative identification around Al-Aziz, the work is more about how identification takes place and its relation to witnessing as community building. There is certainly a moralising dimension to ‘Again/Noch Einmal’ but its attention to the affective bonds woven through witnessing undercuts any moral superiority as such. As the jurors each reflect on their own experiences of marginality and their various identifications with Al-Aziz, the work sits with the working-through of relations to the event. Every witness needs another witness, the community of co-witnesses is central to the practice of witnessing. For the ways this community comes into being, affective relationality is necessary, it is what kicks off a relation of bodies in the first place. The jurors of ‘Again/Noch Einmal’ share their reflections individually, each testifying to the camera. But this echo of the courtroom frays in the final moments of the work, as an older white woman breaks down and her questioner steps from behind the camera to hug and comfort her as she weeps and laughs at the intensity of it all. Givoni remarks that ‘testimony is an event in which the responsibility of the witness – and only rarely his or hers alone – is at play.’<sup>50</sup> Witnessing, in other words, refers to an assumed group identity. A witness is, so to speak, always on the lookout for other witnesses whose existence she is convinced of, she weighs herself in a community, and one aim of the testimony is the constitution of that community. To see this work in the gallery is to be brought into that shared space of witnessing, of affective witnessing as a forging of community – even if only temporarily. Givoni has also reminded us that ‘the best way to neutralize it [testimony] is not to counter its factual assertions but rather to set another testimony against it.’<sup>51</sup> But not only neutralizing testimony, giving testimony is also used to affirm and reinforce other testimonies. This is why we encounter so many other testimonies in ‘Again/Noch Einmal’. The witnessing community is also a community of embodied testimonies.

Communities of testimonies in social networks is the topic of Kerstin Schankweiler’s contribution on ‘reaction images and metawitnessing’. Schankweiler analyses different forms of reacting in and with images as



testimonies that demonstrate a shift: what is actually witnessed is relegated to the background, in favour of a self-reflexive practice of witnessing the affects involved in witnessing itself. A very different type of witnessing community is the subject of Jonas Bens' postcolonial investigation of affective witnessing at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork data from The Hague and northern Uganda, Bens shows how testimony and its credibility become questions of affective manipulation, of how certain bodies resonate with others, and affect and cognitive comprehension blur together in unavoidable ways.

## Conclusion

'Again/Noch Einmal' teaches us that the witnessing of events is not a closed process. The event spills over all efforts to contain it, prompting new testimonies and encounters, making new affected bodies and communities. Witnessing ruptures the time of the event, elongating its temporal life as an embodied, relational happening taken up in media and made communicable and sensible. Both the jurors watching Pfeifer's stage and the citizens found in the media footage are caught up in the overflow of the event, brought into a witnessing relation whether they expected it or not, like it or not. Their vulnerability to the event becomes manifest in the embodied testimony they offer, but that testimony cannot be the final word. The last images of Pfeifer's work, in which someone (probably the artist himself) appears at the edge of the frame as the juror weeps and media footage decrying the refugee presence in Germany plays, show just this resistance to closure: affective witnessing endures, different yet repeated. Watching this scene, the audience is invited into that enduring affective witnessing, just as the two of us were in our first encounter with the work at the Berlin Biennale. As an analytic, affective witnessing attends to such moments, to the relational dynamics that keep witnessing alive – and that ask how the milieu of the event folds into it to gather and be gathered by its participants. As practice, affective witnessing opens the space of ethical and political relations to events to a far wide array of actors and encounters than traditional conceptions of testimony or even media witnessing might allow.

Across the essays in this themed issue, affective witnessing emerges as a concept that makes room for change, for bodies and politics and possibilities that are otherwise obscured, for voices and stories and cultures that might be silenced or oppressed or simply unable to be witnessed otherwise. Reaction images and testimonies of body transformations on social media, witnesses in the courtroom, photographs of fugitive encounters, and witnessing scale—an expansive, affective account of witnessing opens up space for these and countless other sites, situations and techniques of bearing witness. The assembled case studies traverse varied technologies, bodies, situations, aesthetics and practices and develops affective witnessing as both a concept and methodology for understanding the contemporary moment. Just as in 'Again/Noch Einmal,' the essays gathered here touch upon mediation, vulnerability,

embodied testimony and witnessing communities in multiples ways and with varying emphasises and implications. In their powerful contributions to this themed issue, Tesla Cariani, Nicole Weber, Jonas Bens and Nicholas Chare reveal affective witnessing to be a flexible, capacious concept that opens witnessing onto new dimensions of race, sexuality, gender, environment, history, materiality and connectivity. Affective witnessing, in other words, provides a new framework for understanding how relations to an event can lead to both justice and injustice across interconnected and mediatized worlds.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Meisner, 'Bürgerwehr fesselt Flüchtling'.

<sup>2</sup> For example Paulwitz, 'Tiefer Riß'.

<sup>3</sup> Meisner, 'Bürgerwehr fesselt Flüchtling'.

<sup>4</sup> Schankweiler, Straub, and Wendl, *Image Testimonies*.

<sup>5</sup> Farago, 'Berlin Biennale, Art of Saying 'No''.

<sup>6</sup> Richardson and Schankweiler, 'Affective Witnessing'.

<sup>7</sup> See Slaby, 'Relational Affect'.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson and Schankweiler, 'Affective Witnessing'.

<sup>9</sup> Frosh and Pinchevski, 'Introduction,' 1 (emphasis in original).

<sup>10</sup> de Spinoza, *Ethics*.

<sup>11</sup> Massumi, *Parables*.

<sup>12</sup> Gregg and Seigworth, *Affect Theory Reader*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Slaby and Mülhoff, 'Affect'.

<sup>14</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*; Agamben, *Quel che resta di Auschwitz*.

<sup>15</sup> Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, xiv-xv; Assmann, 'Vier Grundtypen von Zeugenschaft', 12; Givoni *Care of the Witness*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Fassin, 'Humanitarian Politics of Testimony'; Redfield, 'A Less Modest Witness'.

<sup>17</sup> Givoni, 'Witnessing/Testimony'; Givoni *Care of the Witness*.

<sup>18</sup> Beverley, *Testimonio*; McCormack, *Queer Postcolonial Narratives Ethics of Witnessing*.

<sup>19</sup> Frosh and Pinchevski, *Media Witnessing*; Peters, 'Witnessing'; Tait, 'Bearing Witness'; Allan, *Citizen Witnessing*.

<sup>20</sup> Richardson, 'Drone's-Eye View'; Schankweiler, Straub, and Wendl, *Image Testimonies*.

<sup>21</sup> Givoni, 'Witnessing/Testimony', 165.

<sup>22</sup> Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing*, 201.

<sup>23</sup> Ellis, *Seeing Things*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 143.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Givoni, 'Witnessing/Testimony', 149.

<sup>27</sup> Fassin, 'Humanitarian Politics of Testimony', distinguishes testis, superstes, and martyr; Assmann, 'Vier Grundtypen von Zeugenschaft', juridical, religious, historical, and moral witness.

<sup>28</sup> Clough, 'The Affective Turn'.

<sup>29</sup> Tait, 'Bearing Witness,' 1233.

<sup>30</sup> Richardson, *Gestures of Testimony*.

<sup>31</sup> Papailias, 'Witnessing Age of Database'.

<sup>32</sup> Hjorth and Cumiskey, 'Mobiles Facing Death,' 167.

<sup>33</sup> Kattenbelt, 'Intermediality Theatre Performance', 22.

<sup>34</sup> Adelman, *Figuring Violence*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Boltanski, *Distant Suffering*; Chouliaraki, *Spectatorship of Suffering*.

<sup>36</sup> Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*.

<sup>37</sup> Kember and Zylinska, *Life After New Media*.

<sup>38</sup> Peters, 'Witnessing', 711.

<sup>39</sup> Frosh and Pinchevski, 'Introduction'.

<sup>40</sup> Dawes *That the World May Know*.

<sup>41</sup> Hjorth and Cumiskey, 'Mobiles Facing Death', 167.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*.

<sup>44</sup> Czirak et al., '(P)Reenactment', 203.

<sup>45</sup> Allan, *Citizen Witnessing*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Assmann 'Vier Grundtypen von Zeugenschaft'. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Ahmed, 'Affective Economies', 130.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Givoni, 'Witnessing/Testimony', 148.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 149.

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**Michael Richardson** is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of the Arts & Media UNSW. He is the author of “*Gestures of Testimony: Trauma and Affect in Literature*” (Bloomsbury 2016), holds an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (2019-2021) for the project ‘Drone Witnessing: Technologies of Perception in War and Culture’ and is co-director of the UNSW Media Futures Hub. Michael has been a Visiting Research Fellow at Freie Universität (Berlin) and Goldsmiths University (London). He is currently working on a book project on nonhuman witnessing. Email: [michael.richardson@unsw.edu.au](mailto:michael.richardson@unsw.edu.au)

**Kerstin Schankweiler** is a professor for *Visual Culture Studies in a Global Context* at the Institute for Art and Music, Technische Universität Dresden. Her research focus includes Image Practices in Social Media, Contemporary Art from Africa, and Art History in a Global Context. She is the author of *Bildproteste [Image Protests]* (Wagenbach 2019), of a monograph on Benin artist Georges Adéagbo entitled *Die Mobilisierung der Dinge [The Mobilization of Things]* (Transcript 2012), and co-editor of *Image Testimonies. Witnessing in Times of Social Media* (Routledge 2019). Kerstin has co-curated the exhibition *Affect Me. Social Media Images in Art* (KAI10 Düsseldorf, 11.11.2017-10.3.2018). Email: [kerstin.schankweiler@tu-dresden.de](mailto:kerstin.schankweiler@tu-dresden.de)