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Urban Cohabitations as Forms of Multiculturality in 21st-Century Western Europe. A Portrait of the City of Düsseldorf, Germany

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Abstract

What it means to live after the trauma of the First World War in 1920s London is a question posed by one of England's most significant writers, Virginia Woolf, in her work "Mrs. Dalloway" This question evokes a specific state of consciousness that reveals how the inhabitants of urban metropolises early in the twentieth century coped with burdens, negative thoughts, and profound social upheavals.

Likewise, a major city is at the centre of this work whose analysis captures the phenomenon of urban cohabitation as an expression of multiculturality in 21st century Western Europe. The metropolis under investigation is located in Western Germany and is the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia: Düsseldorf.

Düsseldorf serves as an empirical case through which urban dynamics can be interpreted. The moods and atmospheres that shape everyday life in this city range from a diverse social world marked by languages, cultures, and lifestyles to a visible form of diversity continuously negotiated among its residents. At the same time, an atmosphere of anonymity and individuality emerges – characterised by limited social control - highlights not so much a lived sense of community as a societal coexistence structured by parallel modes of living.

From a scholarly perspective, these everyday cultural phenomena are illuminated through the works of key figures in classical sociology, including Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Jürgen Habermas. Theoretical perspectives gain vividness through an empirical approach: in this context, pedestrians on the streets of Düsseldorf, as well as representatives from politics, culture, religion, and actors from the fashion, music, and theatre scenes, are given a voice. In doing so, the discourse acquires a "touch of life" that connects theoretical reflections with concrete urban experiences.

Key words: urban sociology, metropolitan dynamics, diversity, lifestyles, cultural negotiation

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Foreword

During the era of industrialization, major cities gained increasing significance, evolving into new centers of labor, innovative technologies (e.g. the Eiffel Tower in 1889), and economic growth. Through novel building materials like steel, the metropolises of Western civilization emerged, with origins in North America, England (Manchester, Liverpool), Germany's Ruhr region (Essen, Dortmund), and Prussian-occupied Silesia (Katowice, Gliwice). These profound societal and economic upheavals left clear marks on people's lives – and did not escape the notice of the world's foremost literary figures. Above all, sociocritical authors of the time denounced the ever-widening chasm between entrepreneurs (capitalists) and industrial workers (the proletariat) – a conflict that continues to resonate to this day. Environmental destruction from metal processing, the exploitation of the working class, and the alienation of humanity amid technological advances profoundly shaped European literature and remain indispensable to world literature even today.

Alfred Döblin immortalized the German metropolis in his 1929 work "Berlin Alexanderplatz", widely regarded as the first major city novel in the German- speaking world. Victor Hugo also addressed urban life in "Les Misérables", though his depiction focuses on late 19th-century Paris. Franz Kafka, the "son" of Prague, repeatedly used the city on the Vltava as a literary setting, reflecting its unique atmosphere in his works. Similarly, Virginia Woolf and Christopher Isherwood demonstrated their deep ties to London, transforming it into a central stage for their literary output.

The cultural significance of Vienna is undeniable, with its elegant coffeehouse culture serving as a constant source of inspiration for Stefan Zweig (1942). Finally, Fyodor Dostoyevsky used the London of his time in "Notes from a Dead House - Netochka Nezvanova - A Nasty Story - Winter Notes on Summer Impressions" (1863) as a mirror of societal and intellectual developments. As the host of the first World's Fair in 1851, the city embodied early forms of capitalism for him. The resulting materialism remained a "thorn in Dostoyevsky's eye" – a symbol of humanity's growing alienation in modern society. However, the text increasingly departs from purely literary concerns, incorporating perspectives from philosophy, sociology, and cultural anthropology, thereby opening up a multifaceted and interdisciplinary understanding.

The following essay examines the concept of human–human cohabitation in urban, culturally diverse lifestyles of the 21st century.

At the center stands the coexistence of diverse life communities within an urban habitat (Lat. "where one dwells" or "inhabited") of Düsseldorf, the state capital of North Rhine-Westphalia.

Two core research questions guide the analysis: What characteristics might be ascribed to culturally diverse "habitations" in Düsseldorf? And what social advantages or disadvantages arise from these forms of cohabitation?

Amid ongoing immigration and rising cultural diversity, issues of urban coexistence have gained relevance in academia and public discourse (cf. Schulze 2003: 4).

This discourse addresses these dynamics from two perspectives: a cultural- philosophical and a spatial-sociological one.

The interpretive structure partly resembles literary phenomenology, thus enabling active participation by readers. Through their own experiences, readers can identify with the depicted figures and situations, fostering experiential proximity to the topic. Conversely, the phenomenological perspective in sociology is tied to an intersubjective "reality" that captures our everyday life as a shared value system. From this viewpoint, social realities do not emerge independently of actors but precisely through their subjective interpretations, which imbue life with meaning.

Accordingly, this study deliberately avoids aggregating individual interviews or all interviews into a unified whole.

Actors are thus not isolated but interconnected and interdependent through their interactions with one another and the external world (thing-human relation).

The empirical section comprises interviews exploring societal "microcosm scenes" in Düsseldorf. These generate narrative focal points oscillating between sacrum and profanum.

Voices include representatives from urban integration agencies, religious institutions, ethnic cultural associations, business associations, and a diverse political spectra. This interplay of actors and themes expands the research field to include concrete dimensions of action, interactions, and conflict lines.

A sociological systems model provides analytical clarity by situating social phenomena across macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. For this study, the meso- and micro-levels are particularly relevant: The former describes group structures and collective values that indicate prosperity, satisfaction, or social tensions in urban society. These values serve as orientations and legitimations for actions and institutions. The micro-level, by contrast, considers the acting individual, who

asserts itself in urban everyday life against the anonymous mass while balancing between identity and interchangeability.

Most urban spaces – especially those shaped by the modern Zeitgeist's dichotomization of nature and culture –

are planned, governed, controlled, narrated, and theorized as anthropocentric realms (Ulrich 2022: 144), assigned to diverse lifeworlds and silences.

These social spaces increasingly encompass the term "multicultural societal forms", which has evolved beyond a fashionable buzzword in public discourse into a key analytical concept for examining society. It functions almost as the decade's motto and a foundational term in the burgeoning field of social and cultural sciences, even if it remains unclear whether it denotes a goal, a threat, or an urban commonplace. This raises the question of why "culture" has undergone such valorization in recent years and is increasingly invoked as a relevant descriptive category (cf. Yildiz 2000: 210).

Given how cohabiting multicultural societies can be observed in the 21st century, the voice of the individual comes to the fore. In a society that is functionally differentiating ever further, individuals gain expanding rights to access and participate in partial or subsystemic domains. For them, organizational memberships multiply, as do "option spaces." Yet, this development also implies that people must increasingly actively couple themselves to relevant systems (cf. Bukow/Llaryora 1998: 21), as they no longer hold an automatic fixed place in society. The growing significance of the second dimension – the lifeworld – must be located against the backdrop of functional differentiation and systemic divergence:

As the mode of sociation became increasingly systemically organized in the process of modernization, an expanded space emerged on its reverse side for unfolding multifaceted lifeworlds and lifestyles against this background of formal organization (Schulze 2003: 12).

The hallmark of anthropotechnics is tied to the idea that Homo sapiens – the human – continually develops cognitive and practical capacities through collective practices. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk builds on this in his book "You Must Change Your Life". He describes modern humans as "anthropotechnical beings," insofar as through constant exercise and practice they become not only producers of technical progress but also its objects.

Despite the mental and technical expansions of our everyday horizons in urban habitats, most modern cities still harbor archaic-seeming and epoch-defining currents from our shared European cultural history, whose "classical" origins lie in the newly emergent urban structures of ancient Greece.

For the ancient Greeks, the term "polis" denotes an organized city-state community possessing a political center where citizens convene. This is complemented by religious communities and economic structures, from which a collective identity emerges. In the polis, citizens hold political rights, and economic institutions engage in trade with other city-states.

Hölscher (2010) presents the ancient polis - in this case Athens –

as a space of remembrance in his work. He draws on the Hellenistic travel writer Herakleides Kritikos, who praises the Odeion, theater, temples, and gymnasia. In descriptions of a polis, places, buildings, and monuments held particular significance in this context, as they served as carriers of historical memory tied to specific achievements. (Our text will also briefly address the connection between the modern city and its historical memory.) The impact of places and monuments has rested, since the polis era, on their materiality: They confer a concretely experienceable presence upon the figures and events of the past, thus countering the fragility of memory and transmission (cf. 1ff.).

In relation to Athens, memory sites and monuments thus function as collective memory databases of the ancient city-state. Memory places exert their effect through physical permanence. Every visitor to the Marathon battlefield or Socrates' (presumed) prison knows this experience. While people and events from the past cannot be revived, something of them endures at the sites of their agency. Monuments emphatically testify to the will to elevate past events and figures to universal significance and preserve that significance in memory for the future (cf. 4). In the 5th century BCE, Athens' cityscape acquired a radically new character. The erection of "political monuments" symbolizes this shift, transforming the city's public spaces into emphatic manifestations of political messages – something unprecedented, whereby the city's "image" became a bearer of its political memory (ibid., 10). In this process, the Agora evolved within decades into an exceedingly dense political center. Daily, hundreds – often thousands – of citizens had to gather in order to discuss political or judicial matters. This political space was elevated through monuments into a memorial space of Athenian identity.

Here, particularly, the two themes of the citizen community and its outward-facing militancy stood at the forefront. The ideal of communal spirit under the banner of civic freedom found its shining example in the monument to the tyrannicides. The deed had indeed occurred in the Agora's vicinity, but the precise location of the statue group was determined by political function: at the edge of the so-called

Orchestra, where the popular assembly initially convened, allowing the two heroes to serve as immediate exemplars amid political decision-making. Subsequent monuments were not erected on the Agora because it was the site of the events and persons commemorated, but rather to keep those events and persons present for the contemporary actors in the Agora (ibid., 14). The ancient symbol of the "polis" most likely raises the earliest questions regarding the configuration of urban lifeworlds and their identity-forming interrelations. These open access to a complex societal structure concerning the socio-political, legal, and economic preconditions that paved the way for developments in the later Bronze Age within human history (cf. Funke 2004: 15).

The temporal leap from ancient city-states to the 21st century leads to Düsseldorf. It stands representatively for the transformation processes that have continuously unfolded in urban landscapes for millennia, continually generating new microcosms. At this juncture, I seek to portray Düsseldorf sociologically and cultural-anthropologically to derive further insights therefrom.

Memo

Düsseldorf serves as the state capital of North Rhine-Westphalia.

In 1288, Düsseldorf was elevated to city status. The modest settlement then spanned four hectares, housing approximately 400 inhabitants. Throughout the 14th century, more citizens settled there, giving rise to a new "suburb" that evolved into the present-day city of Ratingen. By the 15th century, Düsseldorf's population reached about 2,000 (cf. Spohr/Weber 1988: 10–15). In 1521, Elector Charles V incorporated Düsseldorf into the Duchy of Jülich-Berg and Cleves, positioning it at the geographic center of the resulting territory (cf. ibid., 16).

The 17th century transformed Düsseldorf's appearance through church, monastery, and civic constructions. By around 1734, it boasted extensive fortification rings and bastions. The 18th century was bolstered by the Napoleonic Wars – for instance, Heinrich-Heine-Allee was then known as Boulevard Napoléon. Urban development in that era produced numerous buildings retaining military functions. The courtly ambience remained prominent: This period's symbolism manifests in Benrath Palace, commissioned by Elector Carl Theodor (1775–1791) and designed by the French architect Nicolas de Pigage. Industrialization commenced mid-19th century. Until mid-20th century, the urban landscape was dominated by architectural works centering the monetary economy. In 1881, the municipal Kunsthalle opened for the first time, and the Tietz department store (now simply Kaufhaus) was inaugurated (cf. ibid., 136).

Today, Düsseldorf is not North Rhine-Westphalia's largest city (that distinction belongs to Cologne); with around 618,685 inhabitants (as of late 2024), it ranks second in the state and sixth nationwide. Situated on the Rhine, it functions as a major economic, industrial, and trade hub. It is also a key transportation node. In addition, Düsseldorf is renowned for cultural landmarks such as the Altstadt and the Media Harbor.

Historically, the British designated Düsseldorf as North Rhine-Westphalia's capital in 1946, owing to its favorable geography, lesser wartime destruction compared to its peers, and established economic-administrative prominence. It hosts the state government and parliament, underscoring its political significance.

Personal Note

As a Polish migrant who relocated here in 1995, I have long cherished living near Heinrich Heine University Library. At this library, during my professional tenure with students and pupils and privately, I spent formative years as a researcher and most of my books have originated here. The university library has since become my intellectual salon.

1 Introduction

I commence my observations of street life in Düsseldorf along the city's affluent stretch, Königsallee, colloquially known as "Kö". Early mornings find me cycling to sharpen my perception of the "streets," unhurried and attuned to the surrounding space and time. At this hour, commercial bustle has yet to commence; the competitive scramble for affluent customers is yet to begin. Strikingly, hundreds of parrots inhabit the old poplars lining the river near Königsallee. These wild birds have shifted their habitat from tropical to continental climates. Cleaning staff - predominantly from African countries - work in numerous shops, sweeping the walkways. Near the parking lot, I overhear my native Polish tongue. Local craftsmen are already out and about, delivering services to luxury chains. Further along Königsallee, I repeatedly encounter African women and men cleaning, alongside beggars rousing from their street-side sleeping spots.".My wife bought a four-room apartment with our savings..", a man shouts in Polish, loudly and enthusiastically. Perched on a work ladder, two craftsmen face each other mid-repair. I recognize them not only by our shared language but also by a characteristic emotional disposition often expressed unguardedly in public - especially amid joyful life events. This affective state may represent a distinctive trait of Polish mentality.. maybe.

I inwardly rejoice with my compatriot over his and his wife's success in acquiring a home ownership - a milestone likely enabled by earnings in foreign currency, the euro. This prompts me to ask: Have we advanced so far in a transcultural space that this Eastern European language, once rare and subdued in Germany a decade ago, has become socially accepted, even "salonfähig"? I am inclined to affirm this.

Gone are the days when Polish was confined to private spheres, within the seclusion of four walls, deemed undesirable or forbidden by authorities in public spaces - from schoolyards to elsewhere. This persisted despite Polish migrant laborers' substantial contributions to the Ruhr region's industrial buildup in the late 19th century, and the so-called "Sachsengänger" aiding Prussian agriculture in the early 19th.

Globalization's new era appears to foster manifold freedoms, including linguistic emancipation processes. In this instant, the U-Bahn corridor evokes familiarity, transporting me momentarily into a Polish city's atmosphere.

Against this backdrop begins my essay, which seeks to depict the ambivalences of the "hybrid" within the universal "madness" of the 21st century. It analyzes the dynamics shaping urban lifestyles' tempo and the plurality of "modern lifeworlds". Düsseldorf - a German metropolis in the Rhineland and North Rhine-Westphalia's capital - takes center stage initially. This opening section addresses this urban space; a subsequent part will later turn to cosmopolitan Kraków.

The focus of my work centers on a city culture entangled in the 21st century with manifold, diverse socio-societal processes, seeking suitable strategies to forge partial, anticipated unambiguity from inherent multiplicity for specific moments. Philosophically, sociologically, and socio-psychologically, the metropolis is not reduced to mere administrative space but conceived as a heterogeneous environment shaping residents' lifestyles.

Thus, even in this introduction, I offer a glimpse of this theme, elucidating it through Tarrach's reception: Adorno, Horkheimer, and to some extent Habermas, discern in their Dialectic of Enlightenment a human alienation - especially among urban dwellers - that manifests today, inter alia, in green urban spaces: escape or recreation refuges not conceived as everyday lifeworlds but as temporary islands of nature. This exemplifies how city design renders modern life in 2025 ever more sterile. The city culture thereby shaped exerts increasing dominance; one might say it aspires "..with creative hand to seize the future, wherein all that is and was becomes its means, tool, hammer. Its concept of cognition or creation links to power: 'Their knowing is creating, their creating is legislating, their will to truth is — will to power…' " (Panizzo 2024: 10; Thus Spoke Zarathustra, KSA 5, 145).

In the ensuing arguments, I concentrate on interpretations of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas via Tarrach's reception, thereby delineating the substrates of his reflections relative to his theses. Given the interdisciplinary cultural-philosophical and sociological perspectives of these classics, contemporary technological and economic developments can be more aptly characterized once the values, ideals, and objectives pursued within one or more city cultures are clarified. Here, practical and theoretical reason appear inextricably intertwined.

1.1 The Cultural-Philosophical "Lens" of "Worlds"

The concept of cultural worlds derives from "institutionalism" or the "production perspective." This designation encompasses a strand of American cultural sociology that, since the 1970s, has repositioned the processes of material and symbolic production of cultural goods across fields, epochs, and genres at the center of sociological analysis (Diaz-Bone 2010: 141).

Cultural worlds fundamentally exhibit the structural properties of fields. Alongside a system of relational positions, they encompass various forms of capital. This includes ownership of production technologies (factories, broadcasting stations, etc.) and facilities (such as clubs, shops, etc.). Cultural worlds feature social capital as embedded network contacts within the cultural world and as

organizational power. Specific knowledge here functions as cultural capital particular to the cultural world (ibid., 151).

At this juncture, we apply the cultural-philosophical lens to interpretations of modern philosophers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Adorno. It aims to render visible alienations in the "vortex" of urban life and attribute them to the emergence of practices and values in modern urban existence.

As to moral alienation, Adorno and Horkheimer associate the concept with a negative phenomenon: humanity's detachment from humanistic ideals. Since modern natural science dismisses metaphysical ideas and values as nonsense or superstition - leaving no bounds to human domination over others - the imperative to subdue all that exists culminates in the commodification of humanity itself (cf. Tarrach 2020: 14). This pertains to the moral nature of humans, progressively stripped away by Enlightenment processes. One might thus speak of a moral alienation.

Adorno and Horkheimer, with their concept of alienation, refer to an estrangement from humanity's natural way of life. Life in the metropolis

amid technology and culture naturally drifts ever further from the hunter-gatherer existence of gray prehistory. Cultural existence is here construed as a prison wherein individuality is lost (ibid., 6).

So-called lifeworld alienation is linked to estrangement from humanity's natural mode of being. Urban life with technology and culture automatically distances itself from primordial hunter-gatherer lifeways. Culture becomes a carceral space of lost individuality. Simultaneously, humans no longer perceive themselves as embedded in a greater natural whole but posit nature as an antithesis. (ibid., 15f.) Humanity rejects animality. This severs ties to biological origins. Nature ceases to be valued intrinsically, mattering only insofar as it can be exploited for pleasure and satisfaction (ibid., 6).

Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer do not invoke a romantic paradise of harmonious natural attunement. Any nature romanticism is refuted by the Lotophagi exemplar. Nonetheless, for completeness, I introduce estrangement from a natural, originary lifeway as a lifeworld/biological alienation — an interpretive option merely adumbrated. Ultimately, it remains unclear how humanity escapes the dilemma of exploiting nature for survival (ibid., 7). The third form of alienation concerns cognitive estrangement. This pertains to the gaze upon nature and whether natural science enables an objective view thereof. Habermas aligns fully with Adorno and Horkheimer in demanding this new fraternity with nature. He advances further, conditioning it on humanity's species-wide peace constitution (13f).

"…..And, to say the least, that idea retains a peculiar allure: that a still fettered subjectivity cannot be unbound from nature until human communication is freed from domination. Only if humans communicate without coercion, recognizing themselves in the other, might humanity possibly apprehend nature as another subject not, as idealism held, itself as nature's Other, but as the Other of that subject…" (Habermas 1968: 489).

Modern natural science precludes a comprehensive gaze upon life - and thus nature. It validates only the provable, measurable, and above all exploitable for survival, dismissing all speculation, theology, and hope as nonexistent (Tarrach 2020: 26f.). In this sense, the alienation thesis constitutes an epistemological critique by Adorno and Horkheimer. Humanity becomes estranged from the desire for comprehensive cognition, for ideas valued in themselves, and for the world's beauty - domains inaccessible to cost-benefit calculus. This constitutes a cognitive alienation (ibid., 8). A final interpretation targets humanity's estrangement from free, open existence through modern technology's development, amounting to technical alienation. Technology per se is not to be rejected, yet modern technology emerges solely from - and necessitates - capitalist production modes. It is inclined toward soporific mass consumption, distancing people from authentic needs. Mass media, in particular, engender a will-less, uncritical, uninvolved, and readily manipulable mass oblivious to its human essence (cf. Tarrach 29f.).

Here, Adorno and Horkheimer invoke a universal context of delusion. Technology serves human need-satisfaction, yet merely gratifies basest drives, appealing to animality to deter contemplation of higher pursuits. Thereby, technology's operators - the capitalists - secure their power (ibid., 9).4

Habermas, however, wonders how this scientific-technological revolution is conceivable without controlled, purposive-rational action. He deems this question unclear and its feasibility highly dubious. For him, technical

developments are not merely tethered to specific cultures or production modes but trace to prehistory, rendering them intelligible only as a species-project — anthropologically, not culturally, determined: "Counter to this stands that modern science, as a historically singular [and thus culture-dependent — M.T.] project, could only be conceived if at minimum an alternative design were imaginable. Moreover, an alternative New Science must encompass a New Technology's definition. This reflection disillusions, for technology - if reducible to any design - manifestly stems only from a 'project' of the human species as a whole" (ibid.).This reflects disillusions because technology - if traceable to any design - can evidently be referred only to a "project" of the human species in toto, not to a historically surpassable one (project — M.T.) (Tarrach quoting Habermas 1968, p. 487f.).

2 Foundational Elements of the Lifeworld: The World and Its "Spatialities" Habitation

In the era of sociological classics - from which figures like Simmel and Durkheim emerge - the "productive" segment and its early-capitalist cohorts align with an epochal rupture intimately tied to rural populations' labor migration into industrial sites.

Although Durkheim analyzed cities less explicitly than Simmel, he remains attributable to urban sociology. His contribution resides particularly in analyzing social order within modern urban societies, grasped through concepts of solidarity, regulation, and institutions. The notion of social anomie points to urban contexts wherein acceleration and dynamism may destabilize norms and values - not merely weakening extant social regulation but burdening core institutions like family, labor market, education, religion, and economy. Such processes, in turn, engender new norms, values, and rules. In this vein, Durkheim invokes the functional import of social structures (structural functionalism). Serious engagement with the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of human life under functionalism raises a contradiction: Structural functionalism may, at its core, imply the development of a totalitarian societal concept wherein humans are reduced to collective aspects of existence, with individuals ideally functioning as cogs in a vast machine (cf. 159).

Social-scientific functionalism has advanced such imagery by conceptualizing "function" as a task (ergon, Greek) or performance (functio, Latin) fulfilled by a part within an ordered whole - a system. Employing this terminology without further elaboration to depict society's constitution or sociality invites criticism of systematic philosophy generally and opposition to Hegel's thesis "The whole is the true", which Adorno condensed in the aphorism "The whole is the false" (cf. Adorno 1951, p. 55). For society theory aspiring beyond time- and knowledgecritical preliminaries toward practicality, it proves expedient to supplement "functionally" described societal aspects with at least one other dimension accountable for "sand in the gears," yet also for warmth and humanity (159). Accordingly, sociological theories clustered under "functionalism" seek to delineate their subject matter via "function." Highly disparate approaches have emerged, differentially accentuating the concept. While Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, and Merton search somewhat arbitrarily for functions — hypothesizin contributions to social cohesion - Parsons endeavors to identify functions indispensable to systemic persistence (ibid., 160).

For Durkheim, structural functionalism resides in a linkage constituting society's bond between individual and group. This linkage - variously named and positioned across functionalist currents - Durkheim, likely the first to develop it, termed faits sociaux: the collectively lived culture, ".a work of the collective and the centuries…" (Durkheim 1995: 111). By conceptually grasping it, he obviates further ontological assumptions (cf. Stark 163). Thus, Durkheim writes: "Sociology must rank among the great [endeavors] that metaphysicians (..) must not take positions on the divisive hypotheses of metaphysicians. It is as free from liberty as from determinism. All it demands is the concession that the principle of causality applies to social phenomena…" (Durkheim 1995: 218).

Simmel's causal linkages to the social realities of everyday interactions - unfolding in urban centers - forge entities binding matter to life's mentality. Through such ordering emerges Simmel's (1903) seminal work in spatial sociology, "The Metropolis and Mental Life". Early 20th-century Europe, via industrialization, unleashes initial waves of transformation: impacts on urban living conditions, individual lifestyles, and above all, city dwellers' self-conception and psychic experience. Like Durkheim, who delineates societal anomie, Simmel underscores alienation and incipient anonymity within urban structures. "New citizens" increasingly face unfreedom, compelled to submit to socioeconomic imperatives - a dynamic that still persists today. The erstwhile stable fabric of communal life confronts value orientations from industry and technology's power - hitherto unknown, inundating meaning-making with accumulation of material goods and monetary gain - a paradigmatic shift across Europe. These "destabilizing" urban forces are reflected throughout the book in the concrete experiences of homeless people as well as female and male migrants.

As metropolises of Simmel's era respond to cultural and societal impulses, modern lifestyles and dichotomous horizons emerge: On one hand, rural dwellers migrate to cities for economic upswing; on the other, they risk social isolation and superficiality. Here, we should address the master's own 1903 interpretations of metropolises and everyday subjectivation. According to Simmel, large cities manifest themselves above all in their architecture, educational institutions, technological achievements, and forms of social organization as an expression of an overwhelming accumulation of objectified, impersonalized spirit, which threatens to overburden the individual personality.

For Simmel, metropolises comprise above all buildings and academies; the marvels and comforts of space-transcending technology; formations of communal life; and visible state institutions - an overwhelming abundance of crystallized, depersonalized intellect such that personality cannot withstand it.

Life is rendered infinitely easy on one hand, as stimuli, interests, and fillers of time and consciousness offer themselves from all sides, carrying it along like a current requiring scarcely any personal swimming motions. At the same time, Simmel observes that life is increasingly shaped by impersonal contents and forms of appearance, which tend to displace individual traits and personal particularities (cf. Simmel 1903: 8).

On the other hand, life increasingly comprises these impersonal contents and offerings that seek to displace genuinely personal colorations and singularities; thus, precisely to salvage this most personal core, it must summon utmost idiosyncrasy and distinction - exaggerating it merely to remain audible, even to itself (ibid., 8). In sum, Simmel's metropolis

scenario depicts urban culture as a somber tableau: marked by anonymity, instrumentalization, and competitive pressure in modernity. The acting subject is gagged by division of labor, performance demands, and economic market dependence, dwelling in artificially contrived, alienated relations. It experiences social isolation under external determination, instrumentalizing views of self and world. Behrens (2007) offers an urban theoretical critique traversing power structures, economic imperatives, and socio-societal distinctions and inequalities. Drawing on Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, he examines identity formations and social processes emergent in metropolises (cf. 21ff.). He puts critical theory approaches front and centre, discussing urbanity's problems, causally emphasizing rationalization and standardization of the urban, alongside market logic conjoined with city policy and social space reproduction (cf. ibid., 25f.).

".We define the concept of modern society by its form of differentiation…" (Luhmann 1997: 743), writes Niklas Luhmann in his research on further stages in systems theory development, which he gifts to the "world" as a universal concept.

Systems theory explicates social systems' structural persistence via the function they fulfill for their environment. Transposed to society theory, a society resolves its contingency vis-a-vis the environment when capable of corresponding performances for it, thereby acquiring productive resources requisite for further performance (Stark 2009: 165). "We define the concept of modern society by its form of differentiation" (Stark quoting Luhmann 2009: 171, 1997: 743). Luhmann here continues the sociological differentiation theory tradition, early linking differentiation to autonomization processes. He incorporates this idea - elaborated by Weber, especially Durkheim - into his theory of modernity, introducing two distinct autopoiesis5 concepts. Autopoiesis appears once as an epistemological postulate characterizing the emergence of the social, and once as a concept describing the (historically empirical) autonomization of societal subsystems. The phenomenon of emergence serves here as the linkage for their combination: "The combination of autopoietic social systems theory with the concept of functional differentiation proposed here provides us an starting point for a theory of modern society" (ibid., Luhmann 1997: 761). While the allencompassing social system of society is, for constructivists, inherently autopoietically organized from the outset.

The autopoiesis of subsystems, however, is not primordial but the outcome of historical development. Their existence as units thus finds no warrant in autopoiesis per se. Rather, positing society's autopoietic subsystems relies on empirical-historical grounding. By extending autopoiesis to social differentiation, Luhmann must demonstrate how differentiated systems historically and empirically establish themselves as emergent units - forming, as it were, their own identities (Stark quoting Schmidt 2009: 171, 1987: 27). To disentangle socalled emergent processes in metropolises from abstract depiction, concrete examples can be adduced. Neighborhood dynamics, for instance, lead to spontaneous social groups or digital neighborhood platforms. These arise from partly individual, spontaneous interactions and serve to bundle shared interests or resources, such as communally used gardens or organized neighborly aid. Even public spaces can spawn spontaneous events or seasonal festivals through use of parks, recreation facilities, or sports fields (these "spaces are not 'freed' from 'distinctions' and reciprocal systems"). Such activities alter both the composition and scale of human gatherings and the mode and intensity of

spatial utilization.

2.1 Connection Between Spatial Topography and Cultural Practice in the 21st Century

With the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, this situation changes. Theatre culture becomes institutionally differentiated, and distinct audiences emerge, each favoring different performance styles and interpretations of Shakespeare's dramas. In New York - as in many other cities - this differentiation manifests itself in a particularly characteristic way within performance culture. Some of the most successful adaptations originated partly in England, such as those by Cibber, Tate, and Garrick. Levine reports on David Garrick's particularly successful adaptation of "Romeo and Juliet"

"(...) The popularity of Garrick's revision of Romeo and Juliet, which allowed Juliet to awaken from her sleep moments before Romeo's poison took effect so that the two lovers could enjoy a final farewell, was further proof that Shakespeare was viewed as a human playwright whose dramatic effects were often imperfect and could be improved upon (...)" (Levine 1988: 43).

During the first two-thirds of the 19th century, the play may have been the thing, but it was not the only thing. It remained the centerpiece, the main attraction, yet a full evening at the theatre usually comprised a long play, an afterpiece (typically a farce), and a variety of inter-act entertainments (Levine 1988: 21).

The discursive production of culture found expression in two theatre institutions, each generating distinct manifestations of class-based emotional structures. At the Broadway Theatre, a popular mode of Shakespeare interpretation - embodied by Edwin Forrest - was established, while at the Astor Place Opera House, the English actor William Charles Macready represented an interpretation of Shakespeare tailored to the tastes and sensibilities of the more affluent strata of New York society (Diaz-Bone 2010: 158).

3 Interview 1: Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus

The Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus has a dynamic history closely associated with the persona of Gustaf Gründgens. Beginning in 1947, Gründgens served as General Director of the Municipal Theatres of Düsseldorf and vigorously advocated for the establishment of an independent playhouse. His efforts culminated in 1951 with the founding of the autonomous Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus, which he inaugurated on September 13, 1951, with Schiller's "The Robbers", subsequently leading the institution with remarkable success. Since 1970, the Schauspielhaus has been located at Gustaf-Gründgens-Platz, where it remains to this day.

Today, I am meeting with a dramaturge who first gained professional experience at the Schauspielhaus in Dresden. Our conversation takes place in the theatre's in-house restaurant, where my interview partner discusses the function and current repertoire of the institution.

KG: "How long have you been working at the Schauspielhaus?" HR: "The dramaturgy department of a theatre is responsible for shaping the repertoire, accompanying each production from the first day of rehearsal to the

premiere, and representing the artistic programme of the institution to the public. As dramaturges, we are part of the theatre's artistic direction and work in close collaboration with the executive management. Consequently, our positions are generally tied to the contractual period of the artistic leadership team. I have personally been engaged at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus since 2022."

KG: "What question do you think Gustaf Gründgens would ask you today if he encountered you here in the Schauspielhaus?"

HR (laughs): "That's a difficult question.. He would certainly have inquired about our current repertoire. At present, we are deeply engaged in developing thematic focal points that correspond to the needs of various social groups. For instance, we stage classical works - by Brecht, Schiller, or Shakespeare - but reinterpret them through the lens of contemporary issues. In doing so, we place particular emphasis on social diversity and aspects of inclusion. These encompass people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer, or who position themselves beyond heteronormative conceptions of gender and sexuality. This also includes individuals with migration histories or experiences that diverge from dominant social norms. Accordingly, the Schauspielhaus also offers creative projects and integrative events designed for refugees from Ukraine."

At this point, one can critically question how far such reinterpretation actually reshapes performance form and audience experience. Political themes may remain superficial or be instrumentalized when sociopolitical topics are scaled for broad audiences in the name of departing from stereotypical representations. In this context, perspectival shifts and diversity should include structurally different voices and viewpoints. This also raises a governance question: which internal and external feedback mechanisms prevent representation from tipping into a merely administrative "integration event"?

KG: "How diverse is your ensemble?"

HR: "Our ensemble is diverse in many respects - both culturally and artistically. The majority of our members come from German-speaking regions, but we also have colleagues with Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and African American backgrounds."

KG: "Have you prepared a particularly festive programme for the winter season?"

HR: "I could mention two productions in this context: first, our family play"Emil and the Three Twins"by Erich Kästner; and second—with a summer motif set amid winter — the world premiere of "Life Began in Summer", adapted from the novel by former football world champion Christoph Kramer."

KG: "What are your aspirations for the coming years in your work at the Schauspielhaus?"

HR: "Of course, the continued expansion of our activities. However, I will conclude my tenure at the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus in 2026, when the current artistic directorship under Wilfried Schulz comes to an end."

KG: "Thank you for this inspiring conversation. I wish you and your team continued success in your work."

4 Memo

From October 11, 2025, to February 1, 2026, the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf will host an exhibition addressing the theme of City and Society in the Global Age. The exhibition centers on urban life, its socio-cultural dynamics, and the forms of cohabitation that shape diverse, multiethnic modes of living. It reflects on these phenomena through the prism of interpersonal relations among city inhabitants as well as the interrelations between urban metropolises themselves.

Through their artistic contributions, the participating artists explore how we envision future modes of life in metropolitan contexts, how an evolving ecological consciousness transforms urban processes of change, and how future generations might be motivated toward environmental and species preservation.

Spread across three floors, the exhibition presents artistic visualizations, collages, and architectural models dedicated to distinct thematic clusters. The first floor focuses on environmental protection and multicultural urban structures. Under the motto “Be worried, but be happy”, visitors are invited to reflect on global population growth and the accelerating climate crisis, which already triggers profound economic and political transformations.

Waves of Change concentrates on the interconnection between scientific research and its practical translation into the urban architecture of the future. Since 2023, university departments specializing in urban design have expanded their innovative and technological approaches, integrating ecological problemsolving tools such as virtual reality, expert collaboration, co-creation, design thinking, and scientific methodology. These practices aim to anticipate future urban scenarios - placing particular emphasis on mobility, sustainability, and the transformation of urban development in the 21th century.

5 Interview 2 EKO-House Japanese Culture Association

From the homepage of the EKÖ-Haus e.V. in Düsseldorf, we gather information that includes details about the founding of the cultural center. In 1988, with the laying of the foundation stone of the EKÖ-Haus of Japanese Culture (short: EKÖ- Haus), the concrete realization of a long-held wish of Numata Yehan, founder of the Mitutoyo Corporation, began. Let me explain the background behind the existence of the EkÖ-Haus: The founder’s experience with a serious illness, which was later cured, turned him into a conscious Buddhist, dedicating himself to the teachings of Shinran Shnin. For this reason, he developed a deep desire to share this Buddhist teaching with others worldwide. From this life experience, the concept emerged that led to the construction of the EkO-Haus in Düsseldorf, which continues to welcome numerous guests to this day. In 1992, the temple of the EkÖ-Haus of Japanese Culture was consecrated, and it has since contributed to the spread of Japanese Buddhism and culture. In 2022, the 30th anniversary of the inauguration ceremony of the statue of Buddha Amida in the main hall of the EKO-Temple was celebrated, symbolically marking the foundation of all activities of the EKO-Haus. The house itself also serves as an educational institution, hosting symposia, lectures, and offering workshops on Japanese music and

arts. My interview partner today is a familiar figure to me, as, over the course of seven years, I have frequently incorporated the EKÖ-Haus as an experiential learning site into my theories of intercultural competencies in the curriculum with my students. Hundreds of police officers, who were my students, have experienced the practical aspects of interreligious and intercultural understanding there.

N: "Good day - yes, we know each other," says Mr. Nottelmann-Feil. "You haven't been here in a long time…"

KG: "Yes, that's true, I used to visit regularly with student groups." My counterpart offers me green tea with a delicious cake. He begins to tell me about his area of activity. What I learn is this: Mr. Nottelmann-Feil has become a European representative of Shin Buddhism - he has taken on the position of a priest at the EKÖ-Haus."

KG: "It's very rare to hear that a European can be a spiritual leader for Japanese people. Surely you also have European believers who come to your religious ceremonies. Are there binational marriages?"

N: "Yes, we also have those. Now, I have become a Buddhist priest in our community. I received my ordination as a priest in the Japanese imperial city of

Kyoto. I had to study the religious canon of Shin Buddhism for many years as a Japanologist and, even more importantly, practice it. In the Japanese way of learning, written sources are very important, but practicing the rituals requires daily exercises, which, after many years, become a routine…"

KG: "Yes, through imitation, the way for us humans has been one of the most formative for thousands of years. Why did you choose this, for us Europeans, distant spiritual path? Japan is very far from Europe…" (laughs).

N: "I am a Japanologist and have lived in Japan for a long time. This cultural distinction from our European sphere continues to fascinate me to this day. This is also one of the main motivators for why I chose to be ordained as a Buddhist priest."

KG: "How does someone with your worldview perceive everyday life in Düsseldorf, for example, in your community?"

N: In Christianity, dualistic distinctions - such as God versus Satan, heaven versus hell, and good versus evil - structure religious interpretative patterns and moral orientations. As a Catholic Christian from Poland, concepts of Good and Evil, Sin and Salvation have profoundly shaped my thinking and actions. In Buddhism, however, such dualisms are not acknowledged. The ideal of nonduality is the fundamental principle of Buddhist teachings.

I venture into this topic because in my professional life and in sporting contexts, I have repeatedly encountered individuals who identify as Buddhists. These encounters have expanded my cultural "scripts" and everyday logics. On one hand, it was Shaolin monks, whose practices - especially as a working woman in a societal context where women face an increased risk of violence and threat in public spaces - have opened up new physical and situational possibilities for action. On the other hand, it was Buddhist Chinese intellectuals who deepened my spiritual practice as a believer through their knowledge of meditation. As a result, I have learned to at least partially immerse myself in the thinking and emotional worlds of people from this Buddhist-influenced cultural sphere.

Therefore, I ask Mr. Nottelmann-Feil: "How would you, from the perspective of a bicultural European, describe Japanese culture? Is it even possible to do so?"

N: "The cultural-anthropological interpretation of Japanese culture can be understood as a 'diagonal' culture*. It oscillates between tradition and modernity, individuality and community. The essence of Shinto spirituality retains Confucian traits. The concept and practice of harmony (wa) is something to be sought, so that opposites are not sharply separated but integrated through what is known as the 'middle way.' An example from our community life: The founder of our house is a well-known industrialist. When he visits Düsseldorf, he invites all staff members to a joint meal and a small celebration. He personally greets everyone and expresses his gratitude to show his appreciation for the community and for their contributions to the EKO-Haus. It's noteworthy that this is something a boss from Daimler-Benz does for his employees. Buddhism often follows a very pragmatic path…"

KG: "In our Western-oriented risk society, values such as community and a sense of community have increasingly become obsolete 'projects.' Naive individualism, coupled with competitive behavior, produces the opposite. Our modernity increasingly 'trades' in prosperity and uncertainties. The individual must now learn to cope with this. As a result, in Western countries, it is especially the poorer social strata that are more confronted with these challenges than the privileged."

N: "Japan follows its own path into modernity in a specific way. It is largely regulated by the collective responsibility of its population groups. Europe is far from this in many contexts. That's why Japanese values, norms, and rules cannot always be 'read' or attributed in a European way."

A colleague of my conversation partner knocks on the door.

I look at my watch - more than two hours have passed in our conversation. The 'flow' has carried us into a deep philosophical discussion. This is the longest interview I've conducted in the past two years with one person. That speaks volumes.

KG: "I believe we have reached the end of our interview. I hope this won't be the last intellectual, engaging discussion with you, and I would like to particularly thank you for this time at the EKÖ-Haus!"

6 Interview 3 Street Interviews - Russian Participants

The districts of Düsseldorf located on the right bank of the Rhine include large Eastern European communities. This constitutes an urban cluster comprising residents from Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and the successor

* This represents a form of diagonal communication. The objective of diagonal communication is co-creation, mutual learning, and resource exchange across traditional boundaries. This mode of interaction, characteristic of Japanese encounter culture and shaped by respect for collective perspectives, describes exchanges between groups that typically do not communicate directly - such as those between different social milieus, industries, or cultural contexts. The focus lies on interfaces, cooperation, and information flows that transcend established hierarchies or divisions. Emphasis is placed particularly on collaboration within hybrid spaces of the working world, encompassing the economy, culture, and civil society, rather than isolating distinct sectors.

states of the former Yugoslavia, among others. Comparable to neighborhoods predominantly

inhabited by Muslim migrant groups, Eastern European languages are frequently audible in the urban soundscape. Over many years, a substantial number of my students originated from these regions of Düsseldorf. Following the collapse of state socialism and the political upheavals in Eastern Europe, Germany - particularly North Rhine-Westphalia - emerged as a key destination for migrants from the successor states of the Soviet Union, as well as Poland, Hungary, and Romania. A significant share of this influx consisted of ethnic German repatriates and resettlers, whose ancestors had migrated from Germany to Eastern Europe, particularly Tsarist Russia, approximately 200 years prior. (Late) repatriates [(Spät)aussiedlerinnen and (Spät)aussiedler] and their family members represent one of the largest immigrant groups in Germany. Between 1950 and 2020, the Federal Office of Administration (Bundesverwaltungsamt, BVA) recorded a total influx of approximately 4.6 million individuals, including about 2.8 million up to 1992 (repatriates) and roughly 1.7 million since 1993 (late repatriates). Since 2006, annual arrivals of late repatriates have numbered only a few thousand. While immigration until the late 1980s primarily originated from Poland and Romania, the Soviet republics (and their successor states) became the predominant source regions following the fall of the Iron Curtain (Friedrichs 2022: 4). Their descendants continued to return to the land of their ancestors - namely, Germany - until the early 2000s.

The respective ethnic niches - particularly shops offering Eastern European goods - serve not only as provisioning sites but also as informal information exchanges and cultural "oases"† of the respective mother tongues. A practical example is a large department store predominantly staffed by Russian speakers. Its assortment ranges from jewelry to pelmeni and vareniki (Russian dumplings) and encompasses a broad, deeply segmented array of foodstuffs and consumer goods tailored specifically to (former) members of the Russian-speaking diaspora, as well as other Eastern European migrants from post-Soviet republics and Russia. I occasionally shop there myself, as it stocks dairy products familiar to me from Poland. Amid the bustling shopping atmosphere, I seize a quieter moment to ask the cashier which customer groups currently frequent the store most often. After a brief pause, she explains that there has been a noticeable increase in clientele from the Caucasus republics, particularly Chechnya; Polish families have also grown in number since the store introduced a dedicated

"Polish stand" with delicacies two years ago. Additionally, a stable core clientele from Russia and Kazakhstan has persisted for about twenty years. Outside, despite the winter chill, a caterer grills lamb and sells it as shashlik. I inquire how he experiences life in Düsseldorf and whether the weather affects his customers. He reports that his clientele arrives regardless of the weather.

The location functions as a "Russian meeting point", where people discuss everyday life, work, and personal circumstances over shared meals - a role

† The term "ghettos of the mind," associated with Frantz Fanon, refers to a form of mental or cultural isolation that can arise when groups retreat into defensive identity boundaries and disengage from broader perspectives. By contrast, "cultural oases" names spaces that preserve cultural roots while also enabling intercultural exchange. In this sense, such places can protect traditions and function as liminal interfaces in which first steps of social and economic integration become possible. Furthermore, they represent epochal shifts, in which traditional metanarratives are progressively fading – a topic recently addressed by students in my seminar for the Master's program.

it has fulfilled for nearly twenty years. Many of those present arrived in Düsseldorf from Southern Russia in the late 1990s, some with Jewish roots; at the time, they were designated in Germany as contingent refugees. In response to my question about his daily life in Düsseldorf, he states that it does not fundamentally differ from that in Russia: Work, family, and vacations - predominantly spent in his region of origin - structure his existence. Looking to the future, he emphasizes that many migrants - including himself and his family - plan to spend their retirement in their homeland, as "home remains home". Since our conversation is conducted in Russian, I bid farewell with "Do cBngahna" (goodbye) and thank him for the interview on a cold, wintery day in January 2026.

The subsequent sections (interviews) of the argumentative chain are translated below into academic sociological English, maintaining precise terminology, formal structure, and fidelity to the ethnographic narrative. The following section of the argument develops a reciprocal perspective, illustrating that physical urban spaces and socio-cultural activities constitute a dyadic relationship between environment and practice. Urban dwellers actively shape their surroundings; examples can be found in the formation of social networks and cultural practices that - particularly in the 21st century - are structured by intercultural everyday rituals. These rituals interweave diverse cultural codes and thereby shape the configuration of urban life-worlds.

An urban conception of topography manifests primarily through physical forms such as buildings, streets, and neighborhoods. Within these spaces, processes of exchange unfold among cultural traditions of varied provenance. Out of these collective practices arise modalities of action that include labor, social interaction, and consumption in the metropolis. Within this dynamic, social processes emerge that enable the development of distinctive urban cultures.

In the context of metropolitan life-worlds - characterized by symbolic heterogeneity and multiplicity - a kind of bazaar mentality evolves in which ethnicities, age groups, and lifestyles continuously negotiate their everyday cultural practices in a state of performative transformation. This multilayered environment fosters heterogeneous forms of identity construction, as inhabitants do not merely pursue hedonistic "pleasure cultures" but, through dense social networking and heterogeneous interaction, become the very agents driving urban cultural vitality.

The following section focuses on this culture of pleasure, which has developed in Europe since the 19th century and encompasses key urban institutions such as theatres, cinemas, and gastronomic venues. From the social density and diversity of urban life emerges an ongoing urban evolution, generating complex socio-cultural meanings that define the metropolitan atmosphere. A well-known example symbolizing this dynamic is Frank Sinatra's celebrated song about New York, the city that "never sleeps." Perceiving the aforementioned life-worlds through the pulse of a great city allows for the construction of a space-time continuum bridging past and present. In this sense, the metropolis reveals a long-forgotten face - one that is central to our topic: the Düsseldorf of the 19th century, as depicted by its most famous "native son" of that era.

No other figure but one of Germany's most renowned poets - Heinrich Heine - describes his birthplace, Düsseldorf, in several of his works, including "Buch der Lieder" (1827) and "Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen" (1844).

His first major work conveys, with an undertone of nostalgia and melancholy, his childhood memories of beloved Düsseldorf, paying particular attention to the historic old town where he spent his formative years. In "Germany. A Winter's Tale," viewed from the perspective of an exile, Heine revisits Düsseldorf as the locus of his political reflections - a place where his critical intellect first began to engage with the cultural life of pre-revolutionary Germany.

As a young man, Heine personally witnessed the entry of Napoleon into Düsseldorf in 1811. In these literary portrayals, the city of his birth remains alive as a symbol of his childhood and youth.

How has the face of Düsseldorf changed since then, and in what ways has it become culturally diverse today? These are questions the following section explores through a philosophically inflected reflection on the concept of culture(s).

Culture functions as an inner bond that connects people with one another. The merging of cultures has a long-standing tradition within human civilization. Columbus's voyage symbolized the first structural form of "globalization", marking the conquest of a new world. Then, as now, the dynamics of globalization driven by capital flows and conflict - link distant worlds together.

For the individual, maturation entails the development of cultural competencies and the process of socialization into a particular cultural context. This culture, in turn, is rooted in a long trajectory of human cultural evolution - from the mastery of fire to the founding of cities and, ultimately, the invention of the Internet.

Philosopher Wolfgang Welsch explores modern notions of culture within the context of social evolution, tracing how these processes have generated concepts such as multi-, inter-, and transculturality. According to Welsch (2010: 1), cultural concepts typically emerge from two layers of attribution: first, a substantive dimension, encompassing perceptions, value systems, codes of conduct, and collective practices; and second, a spatial or social dimension, which describes the geographical, national, or ethnic extension of these practices.

Contemporary umbrella notions of culture are characterized by processes of hybridization. For every nation, the cultural contents of other societies have increasingly become internal components of its own. This development manifest: on multiple levels - within the composition of populations, in the circulation of goods, and through global flows of information. Across the world, most countries are now home to people originating from nearly all other regions of the globe; formerly "exotic" products have become widely accessible; and electronic communication technologies enable information to be available virtually everywhere. These transformations result from global systems of transportation and communication as well as from the dynamics of global capitalism. Yet, such innovations have not always emerged voluntarily; rather, they have often been imposed through asymmetrical power relations, economic dependencies, unequal distributions of resources, or migration processes (cf. ibid.: 4). In contemporary societies, we witness an attenuation of cultural differences. Historically evolved distinctions are beginning to merge and interpenetrate. Through the growing intermixture of cultural patterns, humankind appears to be developing greater cultural commonalities than in the differentiation-driven millennia before. Transculturality thus seems to generate a novel, culturally - rather than genetically - constituted form of human interconnectedness. This trajectory was already anticipated by

Max Scheler, who envisaged a "balancing between cultures" (1927), and by Karl Jaspers, who theorized a "second axial age" (1949). Perhaps, in the era of transculturality, we are indeed approaching the old humanist vision of a "family of man" (cf. ibid.: 16).

Within Niklas Luhmann's reflections on the concept of culture, a simultaneously skeptical and polemical stance emerges. Luhmann seeks to delimit the concept by framing it as merely "historical" - a construct arising from a specific constellation within modern society. At the same time, however, he identifies in culture a memory function to which he subsequently accords increasing analytical attention.

Luhmann's typological distinctions - between cultural forms of the ancient, the modern, and a "next" society - carry a certain irony toward speculative claims within theory, yet they might nonetheless evolve into a productive paradigm for future research and teaching in cultural sociology. For Luhmann, the concept of culture is "one of the worst concepts ever developed," having "disastrous consequences" (Luhmann 1995a: 398, 341) whenever phenomena such as art or religion (cf. Luhmann 1996a) are observed as "culture" (see Baecker 2016: 1ff).

The core of Luhmann's inquiry remains the question: What governs the concept of culture? If one observes that the modern notion of culture primarily stimulates regional and national comparisons - while only secondarily historical ones - it becomes apparent that culture is largely confined within spatial limits. Luhmann therefore argues that modern culture introduces into society a mechanism of double closure, which, however, must be evaluated against alternative mechanisms of social orientation. When the regional referent of culture emphasizes spatial orientation within society, alternative dimensions of orientation - such as through time, or through the Otherness of proximate others - are correspondingly neglected (cf. ibid.: 5; Luhmann 1995b: 53f.; Lévinas 2008). Today, however, the mode of otherness - the condition of being different - is particularly observable in Düsseldorf, which in recent years has received hundreds of thousands of migrants originating from diverse national and ethnic backgrounds, thereby contributing to a broader societal pluralism.

7 Interview 4 City Administration of Düsseldorf Office for Integration (Ms. Miriam Koch)

From 2004 to 2009, Ms. Miriam Koch served as Head of Office for the Parliamentary Leader of the Alliance 90/The Greens faction in the Lower Saxony State Parliament. Between 2015 and 2018, she held the position of Düsseldorf's first Commissioner for Refugees, and from 2018 to 2022 she directed the Office for Migration and Integration. She is currently responsible for a municipal department encompassing the Adult Education Centre (Volkshochschule), the Clara Schumann Music School, the Department of Culture, the city's cultural institutes, as well as the Office for Migration and Integration.

Since a personal meeting was not possible, Ms. Koch agreed to a telephone interview. The aim was to gain insight — both from her professional and personal perspective - how she perceives the city of Düsseldorf.

MK: "Düsseldorf, to me, is one of Germany's oldest cities, marked by a longstanding history of migration. Since the 1950s, during the recruitment of socalled guest workers, thousands of individuals from various countries have migrated to Düsseldorf to work here and to contribute to the growth of the German economy."

KG: "How would you describe the situation today concerning the 'new Düsseldorfians,' those whose roots lie in other cultures and who have immigrated to Germany? Are there still many who are arriving now?"

MK: "Yes, since the refugee crisis of 2015, we have received large numbers of displaced people from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The Russo-Ukrainian war has likewise brought thousands of Ukrainian refugees to Germany in the subsequent years."

MK: "We are still struggling with housing shortages, as many Ukrainian families were accommodated in temporary housing units. An examination of everyday urban life in Düsseldorf also reveals a spatial differentiation regarding the regional distribution of housing for refugees and, more generally, for migrants. For example, in the left-bank districts of the city, accommodations for migrants are rare; they are found more often in areas such as Bilk, where most foreign residents differ economically and educationally from more affluent local populations."

KG: "Yes, it is indeed a fact that in the past, at present, and likely in the future, patterns of urban segregation will continue to be primarily determined by income levels - even though, during the initial phase of integration, refugees are

allocated to municipalities according to the so-called Königstein quota system, which in principle distributes them independently of income."

MK:"That is true. Nevertheless, the socioeconomic profiles of individual urban districts continue to reflect the material conditions of their inhabitants. Düsseldorf is among those cities in the Rhineland that actively cultivate a 'culture of welcome.' We are living in the 21st century - an era in which multicultural societies and diverse worlds coexist. The proximity of different cultures entails not only risks but also new and productive challenges, such as the opportunity for mutual learning. Since the 1980s, Germany has, in effect, become a multicultural society through continuous processes of immigration."

KG: "Ms. Koch, thank you very much for this brief interview. I wish you continued success in your work on multicultural projects for North Rhine-Westphalia's state capital, Düsseldorf."

Oberbilk is among Düsseldorf's most culturally vibrant districts. Since the 1960s, when the first generation of so-called guest workers? was recruited, the area has become home to diverse population groups originating from different countries. In recent years, forms of community life have increasingly developed here - shared living arrangements and neighborhood networks shaped by a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Today, Oberbilk represents one of the city's key residential areas for migrants from the Maghreb region.

Predominantly, residents of Moroccan and Algerian descent live in this area. They operate a wide variety of grocery stores, barbershops, and restaurants that significantly shape the local economic and cultural life8.

According to statistical data from the Landschaftsverband Rheinland (LWL), the proportion of residents with a migration background in Düsseldorf amounts to 40.8% (see statistik.lwl.org). This corresponds to approximately 160,000 individuals of foreign descent, as reported by the city's Office for Migration and Integration. (Accessed October 15, 2025: LVR - Landschaftsverband Rheinland, Office for Migration and Integration - City of Düsseldorf).

8Theauthor herself has been a regular customer here for years and frequentl encounters her former students in these local shops.

Heidbrink and Kurtenbach (2019) conducted empirical research on migrant group formations in Düsseldorf, focusing particularly on Japanese and Romanian communities. Their work concentrated on urban areas marked by social and ethnic segregation, yet simultaneously characterized by high levels of residential mobility and long-standing migrant settlement patterns - conditions under which cohort-like community structures have developed. These so-called arrival neighborhoods function as initial points of orientation for newcomers, offering guidance regarding accommodation opportunities and potential employment.

Migration also features in debates on gentrification, though here it is primarily associated with the influx of so-called higher-status groups, regardless of whether these arrive from other parts of the city or from abroad (Üblacker 2018). Within both analytical frameworks, space occupies the central position of inquiry, while comparatively less attention is paid to the out-migration processes from these neighborhoods or to the destination contexts of subsequent residential mobility.

To analytically define arrival neighborhoods, three criteria are considered relevant and can be operationalized through indicators. A key parameter is the "base population" (Sockelbevölkerung) — the proportion of residents with a migration background within a specific socio-spatial environment, expressed as a percentage of the total population of that area. This group performs a bridgehead function by facilitating the integration of newly arriving migrants (Heidbrink & Kurtenbach 2019: 50ff).

To render visible the everyday realities of the hundreds of thousands who have migrated to Düsseldorf in the past decade, this study adopts an empirical approach. It brings together a range of actors who have long been institutionally active in Düsseldorf - such as cultural associations, public authorities, and religious organizations. Through their perspectives, the study captures the phenomenon of migration within diverse and heterogeneous worldviews.

In short, observations of migrants' experiences during interviews, presented in the following chapters, point to moments wherein cultural members act within "conjunctive experiential spaces"—guided by mental maps shaped by their cultural conditioning. This generates specific, milieu- and origin-bound habitual worldviews. In Structures of Thinking (1980), Karl Mannheim conceptualizes such conjunctive experiential spaces as socio-collective contexts of life in which members of a society share rudimentary aspects of a common worldview and interpretation of everyday existence.

This knowledge is not of a conscious nature but rather tacit, so-called implicit knowledge that is tied to a specific place of origin and operates habitually in an atheoretical manner. Alfred Korzybski (1994) interpreted this mental condition in his famous statement from 1933: "The map is not

the territory…". By this, he meant that human beings live within symbols (language) that represent the

"world," and that our knowledge is shaped by practices (habitus). Korzybski thus contributed to the awareness of differences in cultural conditioning, enabling a better understanding of potential misunderstandings.

8 Street Interview 5: Kölnerstrae, Oberbilk

The Düsseldorf district of Oberbilk has for many decades been regarded as a multicultural center characterized by pronounced social and cultural diversity. On a snowy January day, I began my data collection in various grocery stores, snack bars, restaurants, barbershops, and jewelry shops. What these business locations have in common is that they are operated by owners and employees of diverse cultural backgrounds.

My first interlocutors I met on Kölnerstrae. They come from Turkey and work in a large grocery store offering fruits, vegetables, meat products, and baked

goods. After a brief introduction, I asked whether they would be willing to answer a question:

"How do you and your family experience life in the city of Düsseldorf?"

Two men who were sorting fruit at the time did not initially understand me and called out in Turkish for someone who spoke German. Shortly afterward, the store owner and a colleague appeared. I repeated my question, to which they spontaneously responded:

"Life is good in this part of Düsseldorf. It's not only compatriots who shop here, but for many years we have had regular German customers as well. The social climate between customers and traders is very satisfactory. What worries us, however, are the sharply rising rents - both for apartments and for our store spaces. All in all, however, we enjoy living in Düsseldorf."

I express my thanks and continue walking down the street. Soon I enter a women's boutique offering Islamic fashion. Two women wearing headscarves greet me warmly. When I ask how they experience life in Düsseldorf, they call out to colleagues in their mother tongue. Eventually, four women respond together: "We all come from the Moroccan city of Casablanca and have lived in this district of Düsseldorf for many years. We feel comfortable here; no one disturbs us. Our customers include not only women from our own Islamic cultural background but also German women who buy oriental cosmetics from us. We all attended German language courses in Düsseldorf and took over the business from our parents." The next door that opens to me leads into an Arabic restaurant. The place is lively; food is being prepared, and the air is filled with the aromas of coriander and cumin. I pose my questions again, and one of the men steps forward to respond:

"We all come from Lebanon and have been living here for almost twenty years. Together we run this restaurant, which is frequented by a mixed clientele, though mostly by Arab guests. In Düsseldorf, we foreigners live together with Germans without fundamental problems. What increasingly troubles us, however, is the

disrespectful behavior of some young people, especially on public transport. Offering older people a seat seems hardly self-evident anymore.

Overall, however, we consider Düsseldorf a pleasant and migrant-friendly city."

On the corner to the left-hand side of the street, I notice an appealingly designed bakery. There I meet a young Afghan man who works as a sales assistant, offering baked goods made from wheat and corn flour. He comes from Northern Afghanistan and arrived in Düsseldorf via Dresden after the Taliban took power: I have unpleasant memories of Eastern Germany. It was difficult to stay there because many people were hostile and aggressive toward migrants. I was greatly relieved when I had the chance to come to Düsseldorf. Here there is order and calm. Yet, I faced difficulties within the school system: one high school teacher discriminated against me so severely that I suffered a psychological breakdown and had to leave school. Now I work here in the bakery, selling bread instead of continuing my education."

After this conversation, my gaze turns to the colorful, exotically decorated façade of a confectionery shop. Its design evokes imagery reminiscent of "One Thousand and One Nights". The hand-crafted sweets recall the atmosphere of Middle Eastern bazaars. The display includes Baklava, Ma'moul, Basbousa, and Barazek. I enter the shop. A vendor, currently occupied with preparing pastries, explains that he is busy. When I ask whether he enjoys living in Düsseldorf, he washes his hands before answering. I gain the impression that he is indeed content living in Düsseldorf - an impression that leaves me with a sense of warmth. I thank him for the brief conversation that took place almost in passing and continue along my route. In a small side street, I discover a shop specializing in Moroccan wedding attire. Upon entering, I find three women in the space while the voice of a muezzin reciting the Qur'an resounds in the background. I hesitantly ask whether I am disturbing them. The women respond kindly.

"No, please come in.." I now find myself in an oriental bridal boutique where numerous festive garments for women are displayed. Not all of the dresses are white; many feature green fabrics symbolically associated with the Prophet. In response to my question about whether they enjoy living in Düsseldorf, one of the saleswomen replies in hesitant German: "Yes, we don't have any problems in this city. However, we tend to keep to ourselves. We have little contact with other migrant groups and none with locals. Our fashion business has existed since 2010 and is run exclusively by the three of us. Our customers are almost entirely women preparing for Islamic wedding ceremonies." She adds that she comes from a city in Morocco and has spoken little German since completing her language course, as she rarely has the opportunity to use it in daily interactions. Another woman interjects: "If you worked with Germans, you would learn the language quickly." The third woman concludes with a smile: "We are happy in Düsseldorf." I thank them with a "Shukran" ($x_1 \geq 1 \sin$) in Arabic and leave the shop.

Continuing along KölnerstraBe, I notice the glittering display of a shop window densely adorned with gold jewelry. I enter the jewelry store. The owner asks how he might assist me. I inquire whether he is content living in Düsseldorf. He invites me inside, where several men — presumably goldsmiths — are at work.

"I haven't lived in Düsseldorf for very long. Four years ago, I came to Germany as a Kurd from Northern Iraq. What currently troubles me is the noise from constant construction sites and the smog caused by the many cars. I also feel that people have become increasingly restless and disrespectful. There is little consideration on the streets; many appear

aggressive. Nevertheless, I enjoy living in Germany, especially in this city, which, despite everything, still offers numerous green spaces. Contacts with Germans are rare, however; most of our customers come from the Middle East."

The next interview locations are situated on the left side of the street. Several small traders stand in front of their shops, observing the scene. I approach a man I estimate to be in his fifties and ask if I may come inside to pose a brief question. He agrees kindly. When asked whether Düsseldorf feels like home to him, he explains: "Yes, one could say so, although I regularly return home since I live in Serbia. At the moment, I commute between Germany and the former Yugoslavia. After the COvID-19 pandemic, business has declined sharply, and I sometimes wonder whether it is still worthwhile to continue running this store. Fifteen years ago, this street was highly multicultural. Today, it feels more like an Arab enclave. Many African and Chinese stores have closed or relocated. Each year more traders and employees from the Maghreb countries and Syria arrive. In my view, this concentration is too strong. Segregated groups are forming, and I personally dislike that. Nevertheless, I do enjoy living in Düsseldorf overall."

I thank my last interview partner for his openness before turning to my next interlocutor — one who operates in more "heavenly" dimensions.

9 Interview 6 "Icons — windows to the divine."

On a rainy autumn Saturday, I meet with the priest of the Ukrainian Catholic parish. His first name is Mychaylo. We encounter each other in the sacristy, where his relics used for conducting Christian rituals are kept. Our conversation begins in German.

KG: "Since when have you been the spiritual leader of your congregation?"
M: "I have served as the spiritual leader since the early 2000s, though the parish itself was founded several years earlier. Our community continues to grow, and it has expanded most significantly as a result of the Russo-Ukrainian war. Many thousands of Ukrainians have migrated to Düsseldorf, and most of them are active churchgoers."

KG: "According to which rites do you practice your faith?"

M: "Our internal logic is Orthodox, yet the outward form of our religious practice follows Roman tradition. We are also affiliated with the Vatican. The current head of the Church is the newly elected Pope, Leo XIV - you can see his portrait here on the wall."

KG: "Yes, an American cleric…"

M: "The Polish Pope Wojtyla was both a philosopher and a political thinker. Without his spiritually grounded political religiosity, the communist system might still be active in Eastern Europe today. Pope Francis, by contrast, was a charismatic figure."

KG: "How did the residents of Düsseldorf respond to the arrival of numerous migrant groups from Ukraine?"

M: "I would like to share my experiences from years of pastoral service in Düsseldorf. We Christians from Ukraine feel very comfortable here. Encounters with locals and other city residents have mostly been positive.

With regard to receiving refugees from Ukraine, the people of Düsseldorf have acted in an exemplary manner. We received financial donations totaling around EUR200,000, as well as food, sanitary supplies, and clothing, which we transported by train to the war zones. Day and night, people have come to the parish to make contributions. It is truly remarkable - such generosity."

KG: "Indeed, that is a profoundly humane gesture - a sign of solidarity in a time of need."

M: "Our parish is, moreover, a very active community. We engage in numerous recreational activities together with our parishioners. Let me show you our icons, which are still individually displayed on the altar. Soon, an iconostasis will stand here. The meaning of an icon is that it should direct the gaze toward the future — a future that remains beyond human foresight. Through the image of a particular saint, the icon creates a spiritual window through which believers may pray, venerate, and seek God's presence. For centuries, icons have been understood as windows to the divine."

KG: "That is a very beautiful metaphor you have highlighted. Incidentally, I have visited Western Ukraine several times over the past twelve years — a region that once belonged to Poland — and there I saw very old icons dating back to the 12th century."

M: "Which areas did you visit?"

KG: "Lviv, Truskavets, Sambir, and Drohobych."

M: "That's a pleasant coincidence - I used to live in XYZ."

KG: "Yes, we Poles share a partly common history with the Ukrainians."

M: "Indeed, though one that has not always been positive."

KG: "Yes, that is true. I would like to thank you for the conversation today. I know that the families who have just arrived with their infants are waiting for the baptism ceremony. All the best to you, Father, to your congregation, and to the new Christians who are about to be welcomed into the community of faith."

10 Interview 7 Interreligious Dialogue in the Name of Saint Francis

I have known Brother Jürgen since last year, when I was collecting donations for homeless animals in Tbilisi. Saint Francis of Assisi (Francesco) is traditionally regarded as the patron saint of animals and the environment. Environmental protection and care for creation have been central concerns of the Franciscan Order in Düsseldorf since 1651, as the order has been actively engaged there in social, pastoral, and spiritual work.

In 2014, the old monastery building, which had become dilapidated, was demolished. The community moved a few meters away to the Church of the Immaculate Conception, where its work continues. The friars' current activities include sacramental counseling, city pastoral care, faith education (Fides), and assistance to the homeless - such as through the Brother Firminus Klause, which offers food and social contact for people in need.

In the multicultural city of Düsseldorf, inhabited by diverse communities of life, the Franciscans serve as a stable social and spiritual institution for many citizens. The order is an integral part of Düsseldorf's historical and contemporary identity.

Brother Jürgen, the head of the community, is expecting me above the Brother Firminus Klause, where his small office is located. I hurry there, as my lecture lasted longer than planned and I am running late. Brother Jürgen is in good spirits, and my gaze falls upon a photograph hanging over his desk - it shows him shaking hands warmly with former Pope Francis.

KG: "In which language did you speak with the Pope?"

BJ: "In Spanish. By the way, what became of your last fundraising campaign for stray animals in Georgia?", he asks with curiosity. I tell him a few details and then inquire…"

KG: "When I came in, I saw several women in the kitchen - apparently volunteers from different cultural backgrounds. Would you say that parish life here is very multicultural…I?"

BJ: "That's right. We are very diverse but by no means monotonous in terms of cultural or social backgrounds. Our cook, for instance, is from Iraq. Many of our volunteers come from Islamic or Hindu faith traditions. We are truly a colorful community. Everyone is welcome here - whoever comes will be received.

Charity, simplicity, and service to those in need are at the heart of our mission."

KG: "Brother Jürgen, as a member of the clergy, how do you perceive everyday life here in Düsseldorf?"

BJ: "Life in Düsseldorf has become even more multicultural over the past few years. We have experienced an increasing influx of various migrant groups. In recent years, those who have joined our communal meals include not only local residents facing financial hardship but also refugees from Ukraine, who regularly participate in our midday gatherings."

KG: "Who are your main supporters in providing for people in need?"

BJ: "Most of all, shops and local businesses donate food to us from their daily surplus. Bakeries also supply us regularly with their products. At present, we are well provided with food, which in turn benefits our guests. The current supply situation is very good…"

KG: "Would you say that Düsseldorf, overall, is a humane metropolis?"

BJ: "Yes, I would certainly affirm that. Life in this urban environment is complex and at times contradictory, yet the residents participate actively and consciously in the life of the city. So far, my experiences in Düsseldorf have been overwhelmingly positive."

KG: "Then I would like to thank you for the pleasant conversation. I can see that you already need to hurry to your next appointment"

11 Interview 8 Polish Catholic Mission (PCM) "Our Polish Home (DOM) Abroad"

After several years, I once again open the entrance door to the Polish Catholic Mission. A young, bearded priest, Father Andrzej, opens and greets me with a phrase of faith. The mission's interior has changed little since my last visit. In the foyer hangs, as always, the large portrait of the "Black Madonna" of Czestochowa - a symbol of profound religious significance for us Poles.

KG: "How long have you been in Düsseldorf?" I ask my compatriot…"

A: "For two months. Before that, I served at our parish in Bochum - deep in the Ruhr area…"

KG: "Could you share your first impressions of the city where you are currently serving.?"

A: "Yes, the rhythm of life here, for me, results from the interplay between the busy city center and the quieter outer districts. What strikes me more strongly here than in Bochum is the different mental and bodily language of people …"

KG: "Aha — so the people you describe seem to have a kind of 'tunnel vision…'?"

A: "Yes, that's one way to put it. It feels as though everyone operates according to an inner agenda that leaves no room for deviation. Life in a big city moves at turbo speed. I can clearly sense the difference from my last mission in Bochum - moreover, Bochum's population was composed almost entirely of people from Islamic countries."

KG: "How do you perceive the life of your parish members, many of whom are circular migrants constantly traveling between Poland and Germany?"

A: "I myself emigrated from Poland to Australia when I was fifteen. There, I received my education and eventually felt the calling to return to my homeland to study theology in the seminary. Later, I served as a missionary for our

compatriots in various branches of the Polish Catholic Mission in England and Northern Ireland. In Belfast, I first ministered to the local Irish population, but from that work the first Polish Mission in the city eventually emerged. Our migrant destiny makes us more empathetic in our interactions with others. This experience shapes us and broadens our social competences - qualities that today count among the most important intercultural skills."

K: "Yes, that's true. I am very pleased that our community in Düsseldorf now has an open-minded and contemporary priest, who will certainly build a special connection with his congregation."

A: "Our order, the Society of Christ (Christusorden), always envisions temporally limited missions abroad. We are indeed wandering clergy. Düsseldorf will not be my final destination either."

KG: "I wish you meaningful experiences here in Düsseldorf - both for yourself and for our compatriots. Thank you very much for the conversation!"

12 Interview 9 The Islamic Center e.V. "Good Neighbourhood as Social Support in Rapidly Changing Times"

Situated in a side street near the main railway station district, the Islamic Center e.V. has existed since the 1970s (established in 1972). It is one of the most significant cultural institutions representing the Islamic world in Germany. The center comprises office facilities, a prayer hall, and rooms for ritual ablution.

The reception room, where the director of the center greets me, is connected directly to the prayer room. From it, one can hear both the call of the muezzin and the voices of the worshippers who, in spiritual devotion, offer reverence to God. In the foyer, several believers are present — all men - following the prayer in quiet concentration.

The Director (HI): "I warmly welcome you. Please introduce yourself and explain the purpose of your interview with us"

KG responds, introducing herself and outlining the aim of her research. The interview partner then begins to share his account.

HI: "I come from Cairo and have lived here in Düsseldorf since the 1970s. For many years, I have served as the head of this institution. We have long cooperated with municipal bodies such as the police and the regulatory office. However, in recent years, we have had neighbours whose behaviour has considerably disrupted daily life within our community."

KG: "Please, go on."

HI: "In front of our windows..outside our windows, drug-addicted individuals and people struggling with alcohol dependency often sit and consume their substances. On more than one occasion, they have entered our premises without authorization, used our washing facilities, and then gone into the prayer room, where they attempted to lie down and spend the night. We experience this as highly problematic, especially since many of these people are in very poor hygienic condition and some suffer from serious illnesses. Fortunately, our cooperation with the police and the public order office functions very effectively. Within a few minutes, these individuals are asked to leave and they usually comply."

KG: "How many active members or regular visitors does your center have?"

HI: "I cannot provide an exact number. Anyone who wishes to pray with us is welcome. The confession of faith alone is sufficient to become part of our prayer community. It makes no difference whether one is Sunni or Shia."

KG: "How have neighborhood relations developed over the years?"

HI: "I have something to show you. Here is the Holy Qur'an in a contextual translation Arabic-German and Arabic-English. Please select a surah…"

KG: "Gladly. Could you show me a surah on the topic of neighborliness?"

The director opens Surah 36 and explains the role of good neighborly relations from the perspective of the Holy Book of Muslims. In the contextual German-Arabic translation, it becomes evident that stable neighborhood

relations constitute a central concept of mutual everyday support. It emphasizes reciprocity, respect for one's neighbors, clear communication, and the avoidance of conflict.

HI: "The prayer has now ended. I would like to introduce you to the muezzin. This is Mr. Y. - he is over eighty years old."

KG: "Good afternoon and Salam. Your age surprises me; judging by your voice, I would have guessed you to be much younger, as your vocal tone sounds very lively…"

Mr. Y.: Salam and good afternoon. Yes, the prayer itself is far older. I have been reciting the prayers for many years, and they continue to inspire both myself and the community toward a shared and sincere worship..'

KG: "I thank you sincerely for the interview and wish you strong neighborly relations and all the best for the future of your center."

2.2 The Culture of Uniforms and Its Symbolic Order

Clothing

At events and celebrations of all kinds, Düsseldorf is praised as a fashion city. Indeed, the city hosts numerous design agencies (such as Lagerfeld, Chanel, etc.) and showrooms, as well as fashion trade fairs and related events held regularly each year. The Königsallee is regarded as Düsseldorf's premier

shopping boulevard and a magnet for people with a pronounced interest in fashion and luxury.

This opens up a broad thematic field concerning lifestyles. Within these, various "actors" appear who are exposed to continuous processes of transformation, as these patterns can be shaped or predetermined by macro-level political and economic decisions. Individual resources and class positions - thus, material conditions - constitute key determinants in lifestyle formation.

Those who argue that lifestyles emerge primarily from individualization expect them to diversify and unfold relatively independently of vertical class structures, rendering them more fluid and structurally unstable (cf. Hradil / Spellerberg 2011: 55). Researchers in the social sciences who attempt to demonstrate lifestyles empirically usually draw upon leisure activities, cultural preferences, and general attitudes that serve as a framework orienting everyday behavior (cf. Georg 1998; Spellerberg 1996).

In terms of leisure behavior, empirical studies often ask which friends are met and how frequently, whether theatre performances are attended, works of art viewed, or computers used. Regarding cultural tastes, questions concern preferred music genres, sports, films, and books (ibid. 57).10

The sociological theories of Luhmann (1984, 1997), Foucault, and Habermas (1981, 1984) place the order of knowledge, discourse (albeit differently conceptualized), and processes of communication at the center of their analyses of modern society (cf. Diaz-Bone 2010: 124).

In this context, ordinary everyday experiences (the profane) and experiences of the extraordinary (the sacred, metaphysical, or ideological) converge within an individual's way of life (ibid., p. 134). The concept

of "lifestyle" presupposes that individuals possess a certain degree of freedom in shaping their daily lives. The more affluent, secure, educated, and liberal a society is, the greater the scope for individuals to lead their lives autonomously.

The term may also extend into the realm of private life and leisure, as it focuses less - unlike class or stratification concepts—on the availability of resources (such as education or income), and more on how these resources are used. When a person's specific actions (consumption preferences, political attitudes, child-rearing practices, etc.) are explained through their lifestyle, this explanation refers to the goals and preferences that shape the use of available resources (for example, a disposition toward a domestic and withdrawn mode of living), and - unlike class-based or stratification-based explanations - does not focus on the sheer possession of these resources.

Furthermore, lifestyle is shaped by internal convictions and attitudes (for instance, a person's orientation toward domesticity) held by individuals or groups. Utility considerations also contribute to the coherence and external presentation of a lifestyle: it would be inefficient to make everyday decisions anew each day. Therefore, people routinize many everyday actions - from where to keep their toothbrush, to their daily commute, to their preferred shopping locations (cf. Hradil & Spellerberg 2011: 52).

The main driving forces behind this process are the individual's pursuit of identity, the efficient organization of daily life, and the differentiation from other social groups. The emergence of lifestyles can also be understood as an expression of the overal state and development of society as a whole (Hradil & Spellerberg 2011: 53).

Following Bourdieu's reflections on his theory of habitus, this concept directly corresponds with the social space in which lifestyles were first introduced. In his works, Bourdieu highlighted the significance of cultural genres for the perception, reproduction, and organization of the social order (ibid., p. 413). The already mentioned habitualization of life conditions thus leads to a symbolization of the social space. Lifestyles, in turn, exert a stabilizing influence on this social space. A structured and socially adapted life conduct is the prerequisite for the reproduction of social relations under stable conditions.

Lifestyles function in everyday life as organizing principles of a broad "economy," in the sense of modes of household management, consumption patterns, and interpersonal interactions. Through practices of upbringing, they reproduce the capital structure of the next generation within the social space - or at least prepare the ground for it (ibid., p. 136).

A variety of lifestyle forms and stronger influences of class position, rather than processes of individualization, can be expected. For example, the poor, the unskilled, and many people with a migration background face severely limited life and participation opportunities; they can often do no more than manage scarcity. Under such conditions, the freedom to shape or stylize one's own life scarcely develops. Likewise, in the increasingly insecure middle segments of society and within the shrinking middle classes, a stagnation of lifestyle pluralism can be assumed. Conversely, it may be expected that the growing number of well-off individuals enjoys greater freedom to shape and stylize their lives more autonomously than ever before (Hradil & Spellerberg 2011: 56).

Following Bourdieu's reflections on his theory of habitus, this concept directly corresponds to the social space in which lifestyles have already

been introduced. In his works, Bourdieu emphasized the significance of cultural genres for the social order, as well as for its perception and reproduction (ibid., p. 413). The previously mentioned habitualization of living conditions thus leads to a symbolization of the social space.

Lifestyles, in turn, exert a stabilizing effect on the social space. A structured and socially adapted mode of life represents the precondition for the reproduction of social relations under stable circumstances. In everyday contexts, lifestyles function as principles of an "economy" in the broad sense of the term - that is, as modes of household management, consumption behavior, and social interaction. Through practices of upbringing, they reproduce the capital structure of the next generation within the social space, or at least prepare the conditions for its reproduction (ibid., p. 136).

"Lifestyles" refer to patterns of behavior that exhibit a certain degree of continuity (therefore excluding purely spontaneous activities) and thus represent (part of) the expression of social milieus and their underlying value systems. Through clothing styles, the possession of consumer goods (brands, design), and leisure activities, individuals perform a social positioning - expressing both their actual and their aspirational status.

In Bourdieu's sense, everyday practices are often employed to symbolize and thereby reinforce or develop one's social position through their distinctive power (symbolic capital). This implies that patterns of social inequality are not solely determined by their material or structural dimensions, but are also reproduced and transformed through value-based practices. As Löw (2001) argues, this applies particularly to spatial practices: social inequality is not only reflected in spatial positioning (through residential location or activity spaces), but also in the ways public and private spaces are appropriated, used, and symbolically claimed. The ways in which social groups position themselves within (urban) space, in turn, actively contribute to the structuring and hierarchization of social inequality within society (see also Läpple et al. in this volume; Dangschat & Hamedinger 2007: 33).

A common German saying, "Clothes make people," embodies the symbolic notion that a person's attire shapes external perceptions and allows inferences about profession, taste, or social belonging. Clothing thus functions as a kind of social "calling card," conveyed through dress codes or fashion trends.

At this point, I wish to return, in a recursive manner, to Bourdieu's theory of habitus and the related process of habitualization, in order to connect it with social-constructivist sociology of knowledge. This approach examines social practices shaped by institutions and power relations, in which actors constitute knowledge — through language, symbols, and interaction - or transform it through moments of crisis. The symbolic dimension of our "second skin," composed of our clothing, also becomes a focal point of analysis within lived worlds.

The concept of habitus11 concerns practical, embodied knowledge: "Since it is an acquired system of generative schemes, the habitus makes possible all thoughts, perceptions, and actions, and only those, that are possible within the limits of the particular conditions of its production" (Bourdieu 1987: 102). On the level of

bodily consciousness, it constitutes "a history turned into nature, embodied or objectified in things, inscribed into the body itself" (Bourdieu 1985: 69). From this, lifestyles emerge that follow the logics of symbols.

The habitus, as Knoblauch (2003: 6, citing Janning 1991: 39) notes, is acquired through "socialization experiences mediated by educational and pedagogical institutions; formative are not one's own experiences, but rather the occupationally shaped modes of thinking and living of the authoritative agents of socialization." Space, objects, clothing, and language are all inscribed with an expressive intention (Knoblauch, cited in 2003: 5; Bourdieu 1982c: 283).

While the concept of habitus emphasizes the socio-structural aspects of human action, the concept of habitualization'2 allows to outline the subjective genesis of the habitus. This also opens up a perspective on the dimension of subjectivity or consciousness,13 which is often neglected in Bourdieu's work. For the habitus is a generative principle of practice, it constitutes a "system of dispositions for practical action," which forms "an objective basis for regular behavior, and thus for the regularity of behavioral patterns." It is guided by practical or "information" schemata (cf. Hinw.). Following Bourdieu, habitus can be understood as a system of durable and transposable dispositions that is both the product of existing social structures and the principle of their ongoing reproduction. It shapes schemes of perception, thought, and action through which actors carry out their practices in a purposive manner, without these actions necessarily being grounded in conscious reflection or deliberate planning (Bourdieu 1976: 164f.).

One of Bourdieu's more detailed definitions (1976: 164f.) describes the habitus as "systems of durable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures - that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of the obedient observance of rules; which can be objectively oriented toward their purposes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or mastery of the operations necessary to attain them; and which can be collectively orchestrated without being the result of the organizing action of a conductor."

Habitualization, however, is not yet habitus. More precisely, it corresponds to hexis - a non-intellectual capacity for generating action. When we examine the notion of habitualization, we are first and foremost concerned with the preconscious aspect of the habitus, and only thereafter with habitualization itself. It accelerates both the decision and the performance of actions by providing cognitive and bodily relief. Only against the background of habitualized action does a foreground of creativity and innovation emerge - an aspect that has proven to be of great significance for human cultures (cf. Knoblauch 2003: 8). While habitualization constitutes a fundamental "law of habit" (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1984: 56), this law initially refers to "solitary" actions: here we are speaking only of a consciousness intentionally oriented toward the world, possessing a system of relevance within which it conducts typifications and sedimentations.

This consciousness is further embodied - it is linked to the body, such that all action possesses a corporeal character - yet other actors have not yet entered the picture. As noted, Gehlen's theory of habitualization also does not progress beyond this stage (ibid., p. 9).

At this juncture, it may be argued that the subjective formation of habitus - understood not as a reified entity but as an ongoing process - can be conceptualized as habitualization (ibid., p. 12). This perspective opens up the subjective dimension of habitus, which may be described as a form of

consciousness and examined within the framework of social constructivist sociology of knowledge.

"Aesthetically oriented" realities do not arise independently of colors and scents; both play a profound role in shaping human perception. For example, color tones such as red can influence physiological processes, including cardiovascular activity, by elevating blood pressure. The world of colors and fragrances is deeply embedded in human evolution. Throughout history, specific hues and scents have been employed not only in religious rituals but also as expressions of aesthetic awareness and as instruments for interpreting beauty and sensory pleasure. Fragrances can evoke intense emotional responses within the limbic system, generating sensations of pleasure or discomfort. The aromatic essences used in perfumes, for instance, may stimulate sensory perception in either positive or negative ways.

Within the domain of human perception, values such as beauty, aesthetics, and glamour are socially produced and open to multiple interpretations depending on group-specific cultural codings. Since classical antiquity, interest in the fine arts and in bodily cultivation has laid the groundwork for developments that eventually gave rise to fashion. Beauty, accordingly, is a social construct subject to continual processes of cultural renegotiation, as perceptions of what is presently beautiful - and what once was - shift over time and across contexts (Eco 2004).

Already in antiquity, the visual arts explored diverse meanings of human form and expression. The body thus came to occupy a central place as an object of devotion and aesthetic veneration (Thommen 2007). This invites reflection on how the body could be aesthetically shaped in accordance with moral and religious values, and what role human perception may have played in defining sensuality during the Middle Ages (Scheidel 2022).

Much later, medieval "fashion trends" delineated the ways in which individuals could convey specific social messages through appearance and signal their social rank, thereby codifying aesthetics and dress conventions. This normative determination of aesthetic values stands in contrast to the worldview of the Greeks, who regarded ideals such as youth, health, and beauty as intrinsic virtues. Yet, similar signaling effects are evident in both eras: clothing served to create social identities and to express cultural values, thereby initiating emergent socio-cultural dynamics.

13 Interview 10 Begging for a Medical Operation

Today, I am scheduled for my next interview along Düsseldorf's luxury mile, the Königsallee. I have a few minutes left, which I use to observe my surroundings. Suddenly, I hear a voice calling out to me, begging for alms.

I turn around and see an elderly beggar woman whose age is difficult to estimate - the traces of her existence seem inextricably woven into her outward appearance.

B (Beggar): "Please… donate something…"

KG : "How long have you been on the Kö?"

B: “Polako, Polako…”, whispers the old woman — a word that makes me pause.

The sound recalls a Latin or Italian term for “Pole.” Surprised, I continue:

KG: “Are you Polish?”

The beggar begins to speak, but her Polish is broken - a mix of dialect, accent, and the rough language of the street.

KG: “I can tell this isn’t pure Polish. Where are you from?”

B: “I come from Warsaw. But my roots are in Southern Poland, in the Gorlice region. I am a Polish Roma. I only lived in Warsaw briefly.”

KG: “…How long have you been here, on the Kö in Düsseldorf?”

B: “Five years…”

KG: “When did you last eat? Are you hungry? I’ll get you something to eat…” B: “No, no food. I need money for a leg operation..”

KG: “I can take you to a doctor — there are many practices nearby…”

But the elderly woman refuses, nods perceptibly, and slowly walks away. Somewhat surprised by her rejection, I stand still for a moment before hurrying to my appointment — already slightly late.

2.3. Infrastructure: Segregation as a Medium of Social Opportunities and Constraints

A patch of concrete along a pedestrian street near Düsseldorf’s main train station represents a kind of “non-place,” where makeshift “air dwellings” emerge — spaces without roofs, improvised by the homeless. These are

"paradises" of a grim kind, assembled from scraps and refuse. Apart from soiled blankets and filthy belongings, nothing remains in such a "shelter" that could be associated with a dignified human existence. When I first moved to Düsseldorf nearly thirty years ago, such "paradises" were rarely seen; today they have become ubiquitous.

The postmodern "risk society," with its advantages and disadvantages, contributes to these scenarios through a fluid stream of uncertainty and constant change. In his sociological work "Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity"(1986), Ulrich Beck characterizes postmodern society as a "risk society." Beck analyzes the transition from industrial society — centered on the production of wealth — to a risk society, in which modern technology and science generate global, uncontrollable hazards. Among these hazards is the increasing poverty that persists even in a still affluent Europe.

The "second modernity" is shaped by uncertainties that can no longer be calculated or fully controlled by human actors. Homelessness around Düsseldorf's main train station could, in Beck's terms, be seen as an expression of precarization - a process arising from individualization and the socio-economic side effects of modernity.

The main station lies not far from another kind of urban "paradise": the exclusive boulevard of the Königsallee. Turning from this tastefully gleaming shopping street, where luxury jewelry and high-end textiles are traded, to a sociological perspective, one may ask: How are social distinctions produced within society, and who possesses much or little?15 The dichotomy of rich and poor, sociologically speaking, can be explained by mechanisms of distributive justice, institutional structures, and life-course processes — for instance, in education or employment.

Within the social field, the differentiation between what is understood as "wealth" and "poverty" generates two counter-horizons that determine how resources are accessed and distributed. On the macro level of societal structure, we find diverse modes of resource distribution - including private assets, income, and social or cultural capital. These categories of "rich" and "poor" represent simplified constructions, since intra-class differences and intersectional factors such as gender, generation, and ethnicity significantly shape conditions of wealth or deprivation.

Hence, social inequality must be conceived as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be captured by a simple dichotomy. Patterns of resource allocation and access are conditioned by social, political, and economic frameworks, which themselves influence dynamics such as social mobility and exclusion.

The analysis of wealth and poverty - thus, one of the most central dimensions of social inequality - can be regarded as a principal pathway of socio-scientific, social, and economic-historical research. As Schulz writes in his book "Rich and Poor: An Introduction" (2015), disparities in distribution, social stratification, and class conflict have long represented the "social question" since the era of industrialization. In this sense, poverty remains a highly pressing issue in modern societies.

In this context, a street-talk experiment — for instance, observing behavior and interaction on playgrounds in disadvantaged neighborhoods - can shed light on how children play and how mothers instruct them about social conduct. In his argument, Hradil refers to an old German proverb stating that "everyone is the architect of their own fortune." Since poor people in affluent societies are often left with no alternative but to hold themselves responsible for their circumstances, poverty is frequently

accompanied by self-contempt and a diminished sense of self-respect (cf. Hradil 2015: 17). Conflicts surrounding poverty mark the boundaries between political parties and worldviews. The disputes are seldom about facts, which are fairly well known; rather, they concerr the perceptions and evaluations of modern poverty, which diverge significantly.

In modern societies, "relative" poverty is considered typical. It is termed "relative" because it is measured against the living standards and norms of the respective society (ibid. 15). Anyone who defines a fixed poverty threshold - whether based on the social-assistance level or a percentage limit — implicitly assumes that all individuals manage money equally well. Otherwise, it would be unjustifiable to designate everyone below a single income level as poor. In reality, however, some people manage their finances rationally and economically, while others behave inefficiently or irresponsibly. The concrete living conditions of those with low incomes who, for example, spend substantially on alcohol or electronic entertainment, are self-evidently worse than those of more frugal individuals. Hence, any fixed poverty line offers limited insight into actual living conditions.

Considerations like these have led the European Union and the German Federal Government, in their most recent poverty reports (2015: 17), to describe

individuals earning less than 60 percent of median income not as "poor" but as at risk of poverty.

Opinions differ considerably on whether the poor in Germany constitute a distinct social stratum. Existing views can be classified into four levels of increasing radicalism (ibid.). From the standpoint of empirical social research, the stigmatizing diagnoses and corresponding demands are not entirely unfounded but largely exaggerated. On the one hand, the phenomena described are quantitatively limited and cannot be generalized to large segments - let alone all - of the approximately ten million low-income individuals in Germany. On the other hand, the degree of voluntariness or agency in behavioral choices is considerably constrained among those in precarious circumstances (ibid. 21).

In recent years, the spatial concentration of poverty in specific urban neighborhoods has gained particular significance (so-called "social hotspots" or areas with special development needs"; cf. Friedrichs & Blasius 2000). These territorial concentrations are attributed with a negative reinforcement effect arising from structural and material deprivation: developmental problems increase, children perform worse in school, integration of immigrants deteriorates, and xenophobia rises (cf. Heitmeyer 1998). Furthermore, juvenile delinquency, drug trade and consumption, and vandalism tend to expand, while poor housing conditions and inadequate infrastructure amplify the marginalizing and exclusionary impacts. Long-term unemployment, spatial clustering of poverty, and social exclusion collectively contribute to enduring patterns of disadvantage. Moreover, within the German-speaking context, the underclass debate has also intensified (cf. Dangschat 1995; Dangschat & Hamedinger 2007: 35).

Social inequality within spatial contexts can be observed in three interrelated dimensions:

a) Materially, through the availability and usability of existing resources, considering the constraints experienced by individual actors within a given space; b) Regulatively, through the spatial gov-

ernance conditions that either amplify or compensate inequalities; and

b) Symbolically and structurally, through the inequality-driven modes of deand reconstruction of places - expressed in their functional qualities, lifestyles, and symbolic representations of social position, all of which influence the extent and manner of spatial appropriation (ibid.: 3).

In Germany as well, socially produced inequality manifests spatially, leading to the concentration of disadvantaged population groups in urban neighborhoods requiring special development attention. Individuals with high incomes tend to separate themselves spatially from those with low wages or dependent on state benefits. The steadily widening income gap has resulted in unequal access opportunities within the housing market. Consequently, processes of residential segregation have intensified - evident both in the emergence of "affluent quarters" and "disadvantaged neighborhoods" (ibid., cf. Dangschat, Hamedinger & Noack 2018: 1).

The classification and evaluation of poverty concentration in particular regions and neighborhoods are strongly influenced by classical segregation analysis. As early as the late 1920s, studies conducted in Chicago revealed strong positive correlations between poverty, illness, deviant behavior, poor building structure, and high population turnover. The growing concentration of specific social groups within particular urban areas was interpreted as an indicator of increasing disintegration within urban societies. Within the invasion-succession cycle between migrant and resident populations, researchers identified "critical thresholds" of minority concentration — the tipping points — at which higher-status residents tended to move away, thereby accelerating the "turnover" or social decline of the neighborhood (Dangschat & Hamedinger 2007: 36).

In the case of labor migration to Germany, accompanied by complex forms of hardship, all parties initially assumed that migrants' stay in the Federal Republic would be temporary. Accordingly, migrants primarily sought simple and inexpensive housing close to their workplaces - that is, accommodation within the lower segments of the housing market. Selective housing demand, coupled with discriminatory and exclusionary supply conditions, contributed to the widely noted processes of segregation. Migrants lived, and continue to live, predominantly in non-modernized inner-city buildings, former working-class districts, and large housing estates constructed during the 1960s and 1970s. The housing conditions available to these labor migrants, as well as the quality of nearby open spaces, were accordingly of a low standard. However, with the onset of family reunification and the consequent transformation of temporary residence into long-term settlement, expectations regarding housing quality, residential environment, and dwelling size also increased.

The major challenge for the housing sector, urban planners, and architects lies in linking general milieu-specific needs with the requirements of local contexts while simultaneously developing flexible and future-oriented housing models (cf. Berding 2009: 312).

The housing needs and aspirations of migrants have become largely similar to those of the majority population. This convergence indicates that it is no longer appropriate to speak of distinct or uniform "migrant-specific" housing and openspace needs. Nevertheless, particular aspects can emerge where specific and divergent preconditions become apparent. These may stem from religious or cultural backgrounds, or from the particular social and economic circumstances shaping migrants' living

conditions. Especially the interplay of these two dimensions can result in a concentration of particular demands and preferences (ibid.: 309 f.).

For community life, spaces that allow both children and adults to gather informally and autonomously are of central importance. Community centers can provide play areas, meeting places, and even prayer rooms. Furthermore, there is demand for specific facilities that help close local supply gaps — such as sports and fitness rooms, laundromats, or kiosks. Examples from Hanover (Habitat) and Vienna (interethnic neighborhood housing model) demonstrate that such diversity and quality of communal facilities can indeed be successfully

realized within migrant-shaped urban quarters (Berding 2009, cf. Hansen 2003; LudI 2003).

The luxury boulevard Königsallee stretches only a short distance from Düsseldorf's main train station. Yet, in another kind of "paradise," groups of people inhabit dwellings without roofs. Phil Collins's 1989 song "Another Day in Paradise" calls attention to homelessness and poverty in large cities, appealing to our social awareness.

Train stations, above all, are symbolic spaces of arrival and departure - places of greeting and farewell. In Düsseldorf, the capital of North-Rhine Westphalia, the central station lies adjacent to the so-called Japanese Quarter, home to numerous Japanese businesses, offices, and banks. I recall how this station looked some thirty years ago. What has returned to the present-day scene, in 2025, are increasing numbers of homeless people who spend their nights - carrying "all the attributes of vagrancy" - on the margins of society. What has certainly changed are their numbers and their age structure: there are ever more homeless individuals, often visibly women struggling with drug addiction and engaging in prostitution to sustain their habit.

14 Interview 11 Armani Store "...Under the Spell of Circe..."

Can the seduction of beauty through clothing, colors, and scents lead to selfdetermination? Enchanting oneself through the power of aesthetics or to selfdeception? The world of Greek myths could hardly have been more colorful.

Today, my next interview takes place in the atelier of the Armani fashion house. I stand at the threshold and am greeted courteously by the security staf; then my conversation partner S. hurries down the stairs. She greets me warmly with a smiling face and invites me to follow her to the first floor of the fashion house. The rooms of this fashion world are flled with fragrant notes; to me, they evoke sandalwood and vanilla undertones.

My conversation partner asks whether I would prefer a cup of coffee or tea. I order tea. Within a minute, the lady of the house heads to the room where hot beverages are prepared.

S: "Please take your time to check out our current fashion collection…'

She does not need to ask me twice. I have never before set foot in an Armani store; my curiosity intensifies to feel the textiles and examine the cuts designed for the winter season. What immediately strikes me: the fashion speaks of winter with its holidays and celebrations. Black, silver, and gold dominate. Some garments evoke the early 1920s, the era of the

Belle Epoque. Flowing silhouettes meet intricate patternwork, rendering each piece a unique entity imbued with its own vitality.

S: "Please have a seat…"

KG: "Thank you. Is the tea Armani-brand as well?"

S: "Yes, everything here is Armani.." We laugh. "Allow me: to introduce you to this fashion house. I have worked here for about 30 years and have witnessed the Königsallee's transformations time and again. The clothing you see here is designed by artists; let me show you a few pieces so you can appreciate their weaving and stitching. Each garment requires months of labor and numerous production steps. Armani was the first designer to fuse East Asian clothing styles with Western aesthetics. Let me show you this men's shirt: its collar incorporates a style worn in ancient China."

KG: "Which generations do your clientele represent?"

S: "We serve relatively young customers, but also older ones who form our loyal base. They live near our branches or are international tourists."

KG: "Your price range surely positions your clientele as a distinguished elite capable of affording garments costing several thousand euros."

S: "Yes, our customers include film stars, politicians, business leaders, and people from show business…

KG: "With a few minutes still free before our appointment, I encountered an elderly Roma beggar in front of your store requesting financial donations. From your professional vantage point, how do you perceive the street realities unfolding on the Königsallee…?"

S: "Yes, I know exactly what you mean. Poverty at our doorstep was already present when I started working here 30 years ago. Yet, it has intensified over the last five years. There are far more beggars on the streets now. Incidentally, our manager often donates cups of coffee to these individuals. For me personally, it is a sad street scene, as I represent a different segment of society. Moreover, I was raised with strong social values at home. The growing poverty on our streets does not leave me indifferent."

KG: "These are mechanisms of distinction, enabling people to differentiate themselves from one another. Those who possess create their own worlds, inaccessible to those who have nothing. In Düsseldorf, begging has undoubtedly increased… I have lived here for 27 years as well…"

S: "Our customers, by purchasing Armani clothing, aspire to appear distinctive. They want to be unique, and to feel beautiful and comfortable in these creations.'

KG: "I notice a fragrance in your store — it immediately stands out to me and simultaneously attracts me. May I ask what substances it contains?"

S: "Yes, this is a new perfume. The substance you are probably perceiving is incense."

KG: "So the Armani store almost feels sacred…"

S "Yes, that fragrance note is indeed very beautiful" (we both laugh)

KG: "It was also beautiful to be here - in this glittering world that is both aesthetic and exclusive. I was pleased to be your guest and will return to deliver the printed version of the essay containing your interview in person."

S: “Yes, absolutely. I also thank you for allowing me to speak about our Armani house.”

15 Interview 12 The Social Depth of Homelessness

A vivid encounter in urban chaos reveals the stark social contrasts near Düsseldorf’s main station. Amid construction delays and faltering public transport, everyday acts of exchange highlight the proximity of affluence and precarity.

Urban Infrastructure Decay

The city’s aging infrastructure - outdated roads and unreliable buses - evokes a Sleeping Beauty slumber, paralyzing mobility and amplifying daily frustrations. Ebikes become scarce lifelines as residents improvise to reach work, underscoring infrastructural segregation that constrains social opportunities for the mobile while marginalizing the immobile.

16 Dialogue with Homelessness

Near the station, a new bio-bakery thrives. Outside, a young woman claims street space beside my bike.

Homeless Woman: “Do you perhaps have something for me?”

KG: “Yes, I’ve just bought fresh pastry. Please take it — it’s baked with fine spelt flour. Would you like a cup of coffee too..?”

Homeless Woman: “No, thank you. I’ve had coffee all day already. But the pastry is really delicious. You’re a fine lady.”

KG: “Have you been homeless long - if I may ask?”

Homeless Woman: “Of course you may. At least someone is asking. I’ve lived on the streets without fixed housing since I was 18. I know it’s no beautiful life, but I don’t want to live like most people - locked in four walls. On the street, there’s always something happening; at home, it’s loneliness and desolation. I’ll probably die out here one day, but I’m not afraid of that. Nothing matters to me anymore anyway…”

KG: “That sounds very harsh, what you’re telling me. Unfortunately, I must continue on now. I wish you that one day you might still find a stable shelter— and above all, good health”

The young woman waves goodbye. She thanks me once more for the spelt pastry.

2.3.1. Social Milieus and Their Societal Logics

Since the 1990s, a further shift has become discernible. The mass-medial thematization of lifestyles (Müller 1992; Hölscher 1998), the rising reflexivity of social orders, and the collective reflection of collective behaviors can be described as a trend toward the discursivization of lifestyles. The emergence of new social milieus and new social movements cannot be explained without accounting for the mass-medial mediation of lifestyle-related discourses (Schulze 1992; Eckert 1999). Mass-media forums constitute a significant infrastructure for the formation, representation, and integration of these collectives.

This development coincided with a renaissance of the sociological classics Max Weber (1988a) and Georg Simmel (1989), who had already recognized lifestyle and the style of living as sociological structural categories at the outset of the 20th century. Examining lifestyle-related knowledge (i.e., in Schulze's terms, existential, non-technical knowledge) reveals its distribution across three distinct levels. This distinction prompts rearrangements in sociological theories toward new principles of constitution. The shift from the production paradigm to the communication paradigm (Habermas) exemplifies this. The sociologies of Luhmann (1984, 1997), Foucault, and Habermas (1981, 1984) place the order of knowledge, discourse (with varying conceptualizations), and communication processes at the center of their societal analyses (cf. Diaz-Bone 2010: 124). Here, mundane everyday experiences (the profane) and experiences of the extraordinary (the sacred, metaphysical, or ideological) converge within lifestyles (ibid.: 134).

Following Bourdieu's reflections on habitus theory, this corresponds directly to the social space in which lifestyles are already embedded. Bourdieu emphasized the significance of cultural genres for the perception and reproduction of social order in his works (ibid.: 413). The habitualization of living conditions thus leads to a symbolization of social space. Lifestyles exert a stabilizing effect back on the social space. A structured lifestyle, adapted to living conditions, serves as the prerequisite for its reproduction under stable circumstances. Lifestyles manifest in everyday life as principles of an economy in the broadest sense - as modes of household management, consumption behavior, and interaction with others. Through educational practices, they reproduce the capital structure of subsequent generations in the social space or prepare the opportunities for it (ibid.: 136).

"Lifestyles" constitute behavioral patterns exhibiting a certain degree of continuity (thus excluding purely spontaneous activities) and thereby serve as (a component of) the expression of social milieus and the underlying value systems. Through choices in clothing, possession of consumer goods (brands, styles), and modes of leisure activity, a societal positioning is conveyed - via the interpretation of one's actual or aspired status. In Bourdieu's sense, everyday practices are frequently employed to symbolize (and thereby consolidate or cultivate) societal positioning through their distinctive power (symbolic capital). This implies that patterns of inequality are not solely determined by the material dimensions of structural inequality; rather, they are also deconstructed and reproduced through the replication of value systems governing action.

According to Löw (2001), this dynamic applies particularly to spatially oriented action. Social inequality is thus not only reflected in spatial positioning (via residential locations and activity spaces) but also shapes -

and is reciprocally shaped by - the manner in which (public) space is appropriated and utilized, as well as how social groups position themselves within (urban) space. In turn, these processes co-determine the structuring and hierarchization of social inequality within society (Dangschat / Hamedinger 2007: 33).

17 Interview 13

Queer People

Theological narratives in the Bible and literary papyrus scrolls from ancient Egypt represent some of the earliest documented expressions of love as an artistic and emotional phenomenon. Ancient cultures, such as those in Greece and Rome, produced extensive works exploring diverse forms of love: familial, pragmatic, self-love, and divine eros.

Plato exemplifies this in his "Symposium", where he uses same-sex love as a starting point for philosophical inquiry into the nature of desire, akin to Sappho's wedding songs. He portrays homoerotic love as a natural attraction that ascends from the physical to the spiritual, culminating in the contemplation of the Form of Beauty. Key elements of Platonic eros,16 as recapitulated from the "Symposium"

and "Phaedrus", include its ethical dimension: eros educates toward a virtuous life, linking the pursuit of beauty to moral goodness and the divine. Lovers mutually cultivate virtue, striving for the Good, as Phaedrus observes.

Sappho's poetry, often framed as an epithalamium, captures her passionate attachment to a bride - her student — articulating personal, intense same-sex desire within a specific ritual context. The essential characteristics of Platonic Eros have been clearly outlined and are now summarized in the following recap of the central statements, which are referred to in this paper as elements of the concept of Eros. The "Phaedrus" speech in the "Symposium" illustrates that Eros educates toward a good, praiseworthy life. The ethical relevance of Eros already becomes apparent here, as it is placed in direct relation to the Beautiful and the morally Good. Its profound significance is revealed through an analysis of the "Symposium" and "Phaedrus", as for Plato it is morally relevant and inseparably linked with ethics and religion (love is divine), as well as what a person desires or strives for, and with what goals and means. The lovers educate each other by striving for virtue. Phaedrus already recognizes in Eros a pursuit of the Good (cf. Kayling 2008: 39).

Sappho's poem is considered a wedding song, an epithalamium (Sappho was famous for her epithalamia), set in a unique and specific situation in which she directs the verses to a student, the bride, for whom she felt a particularly intense and passionate affection. In this song, Sappho expresses her own passionate love for the girl. This ancient Greek lyric poetry seems to make the "new and unique" its theme by addressing the new intellectual conquests of same-sex love.

This ancient Greek lyric poetry appears to center on the "new and unique" by intertwining the new intellectual conquests of same-sex love with the "domains of the soul," the "ambivalence of the soul," and the "tension of feeling" (cf. Nishina 2005, 105f).

Modernity creates pragmatic "paths" that shape the search for the true feeling of love through dating apps and online matchmaking platforms

in the 21st digital century - emphasizing selection and interchangeability. One of the most renowned sociologists of the 20th century, Niklas Luhmann, analyzed modern love in his book "Love as Passion" (1982).

In the society described by Luhmann, romantic couples are possible who are not strictly fixed to the rigid subject positions of lover and beloved (cf. 19). Instead, they are attributed according to the "definition" of love, with love functioning as a code. A code is a (implicit) social framework that provides the actors with guidelines for their actions and simultaneously allows them to "read" (interpret)

the actions of others correctly. The love code, therefore, serves both as a guide and as a symbolic language or semiotics of love. "The code encourages the formation of corresponding feelings" (cf. ibid. 17).

For Luhmann, the feeling of love is not to be understood as such; rather, it is a medium of communication that makes intimate relationships between the genders possible in modern societies. From a sociological perspective, love comes into focus as a social relationship with its respective historical rule systems: it allows for an insider's view of love, which insists on the fundamental social non-conformity of this emotion (cf. ibid. 23).

The dilemma of love has emotionally moved people for millennia - it will likely always occupy us, as love is one of the most elemental human emotions. In the following sentences, I will refer to my interview partners. Marc is the chairman of International LGBTQIA+ Düsseldorf e.V. (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual). I meet him today at the Altstadt Café to exchange views on the perception of the city of Düsseldorf.

Marc has lived for many years as a Spanish migrant in the city of Düsseldorf, surrounded by colleagues and friends who support and advocate for the vibrant LGBTQlA+ community. I arrive first at the meeting place for our interview: a small café in the heart of the old town. My interview partner walks in, and without us knowing each other, we communicate with glances, which we reflexively interpret as a greeting. I briefly introduce myself, and then Marc does the same. He is a Castilian migrant in Düsseldorf, where he has lived for many years and supports and manages the queer community.

KG: "What does your engagement in your community consist of?"

M: "Together with many volunteers, I organize numerous group activities that motivate people to meet, exchange, and communicate with each other. Even in Düsseldorf and the surrounding area, we already have 70 active WhatsApp groups that regularly meet in person, not just interacting in an anonymous cyberspace. In the context of our group activities, we have barbecues, meeting points, bars, clubs, and pubs where we come together as a community. PRADl, for example, offers counseling sessions for homo- and bisexual men of all ages with a migration background. Additionally, we provide specific couple counseling for lesbians. For social issues, our services focus on topics such as referral and, if needed, accompaniment to other institutions, preparation for court situations, legal support, and finding self-help groups."

KG: "You came from Spain to Düsseldorf. What kind of experiences have you had in this city?"

M: "Generally, the experiences have been positive. Düsseldorf is an open-minded German city. We are very well-networked here. We ensure that no one feels lonely in our community. The networks we are active in are

transnational. We regularly meet with our foreign partners and organize events such as the Christopher Street Day celebrations."

In the middle of our conversation, a friend of Marc's joins us. Her name is Luisa, and she briefly explains what she is responsible for within the community and mentions that she is from Thailand and moved to Düsseldorf from a small town in Saxony-Anhalt.

KG: "How are you involved in the events and life of your community?"

L: "I am mainly responsible for the continuation of our clubs/bars and organize musical performances and gatherings for our various celebrations."

KG: "Do you feel comfortable in Düsseldorf?"

L: "Very much so. It's a big difference compared to the social climate I escaped from. I lived for many years in East Germany, in a small provincial town. Traditionalism is the reflection of everyday life I experienced there. Düsseldorf is a liberal city where diverse cultures coexist, and real exchange between different social groups is possible without prejudice."

M: "Yes, I can confirm that. As a queer community, we rarely encounter discrimination. The most affected are our transgender members. Due to their transformation processes, they often experience exclusion, especially in the workplace. They are the ones who most often end up without a job and are marginalized by society. Otherwise, most of us can live our lifestyles freely in the diversity of the big city."

KG: "I wish both of you meaningful encounters with all the people of Düsseldorf and thank you for agreeing to this interview."

18 Conclusion

Sociologically speaking, the "organism" of a metropolis - such as Düsseldorf, the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia — reacts in the 21st century with growing intensity to normative relativism. This relativism denies the universal validity of societal values, rules, and norms. Yet, the engine of urban dynamics draws precisely from the interchangeability of lifestyles and the absence of fixed benchmarks for diverse life forms.

Dogmatic orientations or clear value systems positing a universal canon of social order recede into the background. Cultural attributions appear too unstable to generate enduring normative guidelines. On the contrary: in 21st -century metropolises, life strategies and concepts unfold through accelerating rhythms, market logics, and hybrid forms of cultural self-programming. This produces a structure of social practice where adaptability and flexibility emerge as central categories of urban coexistence.

The impression arises that not arbitrariness, but contingent contingencies govern societal processes. These contingencies stem from ever-shifting collective practices that continuously generate new, multifaceted modes of human communication. The inner "engine" of urban centers follows an evolutionary logic: adaptation and selection drive long-term transformations of social and economic structures, interpretable as phases of progressive change.

These processes simultaneously reorder interpersonal relations and durably shape the dynamics of modern urban societies.

Ultimately, reflecting on the questions posed by the text, I wonder whether the desires and dangers carried by great human concentrations revive that distinctive mood I felt as a teenager in the 1980s while enjoying the Scorpions' song "Big City Nights" (1984). Has the urban sociotope truly changed since its release? Probably not in essence. It remains a site of excitement, momentum, thrill, and human passions - a world that attracts us partly like the gambler to the game.

The metropolis endures as a space of boundless unfolding, yet also as the locus of its own destruction, capable of transforming people into restless beings. The punchline of the film "Vanity Fair" — an adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's novel - vividly illustrates this: we witness social ascents and descents, mirroring the dynamics omnipresent in today's multicultural urban life. Thus, the concluding statements above encompass those experiences of city dwellers - whether in Europe, Asia, or elsewhere - that remain comparably universal.

Clear value systems or dogmatic orientations that posit a universal canon of social order recede into the background. Cultural attributions appear too unstable to produce enduring normative guidelines. Conversely, in 21st -century metropolises, life strategies and concepts unfold through accelerating rhythms, market logics, and hybrid forms of cultural self-programming. This generates a structure of social practice in which adaptability and flexibility become central categories of urban coexistence.

The impression emerges that societal processes are steered not by arbitrariness, but by contingent contingencies. These arise from constantly shifting collective practices that continuously produce new and multifaceted modes of human communication. The inner "engine" of urban centers follows an evolutionary logic: adaptation and selection drive long-term transformations of social and economic structures, interpretable as phases of progressive change.

These processes simultaneously reorder interpersonal relations and durably shape the dynamics of modern urban societies.

As this discursive endpoint might suggest, even the earliest city-states of antiquity already exhibited binary forms of coexistence. Positively framed, this development accounts for the emergence of urban metropolises up to the present — characterized by diverse employment and educational opportunities, leisure offerings, cosmopolitan worldviews (restaurants, bars, clubs, parks), as well as processes of inclusion and multicultural identities. Yet, amid the alluring effects of metropolitan "life", the shadow sides of urbanity must not be overlooked: the rise of violence, vandalism, homelessness, hedonism, and narcissism, which can escalate into epidemics of modern globalization.

With near-prophetic insight, sociologist Ulrich Beck (1986) delineated in "Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity" a developmental trajectory of second modernity that elucidates civilizational progress and its encumbrances in highly developed nations. Beck frames the assiduously achieved progress of recent decades within a space-time continuum marking the shift from industrial to risk society. His theses assert that modern societies generate not only prosperity but also economic crises, environmental degradation, and martial conflicts. These phenomena transcend simple geographic boundaries today, operating globally and resisting control (e.g. Chernobyl). Thus, progress has morphed into a "Golem" - technology and science unmoored from ethics and critique - itself constituting a hazard zone.

The repeatedly cited Bourdieu demonstrates in one of his most celebrated works, "Distinction" (1982), how individuals, through habituated "programming", embody specific origin classes and strata. In the social field, this engenders distinctions that are not merely economic but equally cultural. Lifestyles across social groups - including attire, fashion consciousness, and embodied practices (Reinecke 2017: 378) - alongside artistic tastes and other collective practices, serve as symbolic markers of class affiliation. Bourdieu thereby constructs multidimensional, layered "portraits" of social actors that illuminate processes of differentiation.

Social distinctions, the author stresses, emerge from complex, often fragile mechanisms whereby affiliations to origin strata are reproduced, perceived, and socially validated. Historically, Bourdieu depicts a dissolving, now antiquated form of class society. French historiography recurrently interprets the mid-1960s to mid-1980s as a phase of accelerated sociocultural transformation. The

gradual departure from traditional class structures, "embourgeoisement", individualization, and globalization's mounting influence figure as pivotal elements. Bourdieu's 1979 study merely intimates these shifts - at most (ibid.: 381). Overall, his analysis appears doubly era-bound: first, in its depiction of a class society where gender, race, sexuality, or age differences seemed as marginal as identity experimentation; second, in the specific taste hierarchies and social configurations described (ibid.: 383).

An addition to Beck, Zygmunt Bauman and Manuel Castells have developed sociological theories addressing the negative consequences of (post)modern societal developments. Bauman's theory of "liquid modernity" — articulated in "Liquid Modernity" (2020) — critiques the societal uncertainties accompanying accelerated progress. Relationships and fixed identities lose stable, reliable structures. Such problems - as observable on numerous streets in Düsseldorf, such as vagrancy and homelessness increasingly intertwined with drug dependency - are no longer framed as collective societal issues but frequently individualized as personal failures. Consumption patterns exacerbate polarizations between social origin strata; non-participants in consumption are excluded from the common sense. It appears that heightened liberalization - state, more individuality - engenders precarious living conditions, chronic uncertainty, and widening social inequality. Castells examines the technological and economic ramifications of postmodernity through the lens of modern communication media, conceptualized as information and network societies (Internet, global economy). The so-called flexible capitalism - what Max Weber regarded as a fixed constant - yields insecure, increasingly time-limited employment forms. Traditional values erode; digital temporality stratifies individuals into groups with easier access to knowledge and thus power, while others falter amid these dynamics. The new era of mediated coexistence thereby generates exclusions. In the majority of the conducted interviews, brief vignettes can be identified that provide insights into the interviewees' worldviews and interpretations of everyday life. All respondents hail from diverse ethno-social spectra across various societal formations, as commonly found in most global metropolises. At first glance, what stands out to an outsider is that Düsseldorf, too, has evolved into an urban form of multicultural exchange. Migration does not represent an exceptional phenomenon in human history but rather an anthropological norm. Homo sapiens as a migratory population - despite all attempts at sedentism - has never become fully place-bound. This is particularly pronounced in the North Rhine-Westphalia region, especially in the Düsseldorf metropolitan area and the Ruhr area. The latter has

developed since the 19m century into an immigration hub for millions from Eastern Europe and Asia. The earliest artifacts of industrialization were shaped by Polish laborers; Poles long dominated the economic ascent of the Ruhr region. As Slunecko (2013) elaborates, the "breakout from the environment" afforded Homo sapiens decisive moments of self-constitution as a species. Humanity's modus operandi — tearing open the environmental envelope to enter the "clearing" of the possible transforms the history of human becoming into a praxis of rupture from

entrenched everyday structures. This constitutes the central concept of human action and self-realization (cf. 128f).

However, I would like to dedicate the concluding reflection on the topic addressed in this paper to Immanuel Kant. Over 300 years ago, the most renowned philosopher of the European Enlightenment lived and taught in Königsberg. His groundbreaking maxim - ".Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" . (Kant [1785], (1990:51), — has lost none of its relevance, as the dignity of every human being remains inviolable. Humanity must not be treated as a means to an end, but always as an end in itself.

The German Basic Law (Grundgesetz, GG) and the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights are profoundly influenced by Kant's categorical imperative, particularly its formula of humanity, which places the inviolable dignity of every person at the center. Article 1 of the German Basic Law states: "..Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority..." Similarly, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proclaims: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". This aligns with Kant's conception of rational beings as autonomous lawmakers who give themselves maxims within a "kingdom of ends".

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