

'I could have slapped myself': the ethics of the bystander perspective in sebastian haffner's memoir

Article

Published Version

Creative Commons: Attribution 4.0 (CC-BY)

Open Access

Pilsworth, E. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7379-0996>
(2023) 'I could have slapped myself': the ethics of the bystander perspective in sebastian haffner's memoir. Journal of Perpetrator Research, 5 (1). pp. 1-28. ISSN 2514-7897 doi: 10.21039/jpr.5.1.96 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/107431/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Identification Number/DOI: 10.21039/jpr.5.1.96
<<https://doi.org/10.21039/jpr.5.1.96>>

Publisher: Winchester University Press

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

'I could have slapped myself': The Ethics of the Bystander Perspective in Sebastian Haffner's Memoir

Ellen Pilsworth

Abstract: The second half of Sebastian Haffner's posthumously published memoir, *Geschichte eines Deutschen* (English translation: *Defying Hitler*), describes Haffner's experiences of the first years of Nazi rule. In my reading of key passages, I consider how the text works to highlight the discrepancy between Haffner's thoughts and actions as he is increasingly compelled to accept and even participate in Nazi activities, despite his hatred of Nazism. By presenting his case as typical, and drawing the reader into a sense of intimacy and trust with Haffner, his text elicits empathy for the 'ordinary Germans' who unwillingly became part of what Fulbrook calls the 'bystander society' under Nazism. After analysing the memoir, I consider its reception in the German and English-speaking worlds at the time of publication and reflect on the ethical implications of empathising with Haffner's bystander perspective.

Keywords: life-writing, memoir, bystander, National Socialism, empathy, ethics

Introduction: The Promises and Limits of Memoir

At the time of his death in 1999, Sebastian Haffner (real name Raimund Pretzel) had gained renown as an insightful and engaging commentator on German history and society. His post-war journalism for both left- and right-leaning German publications established his reputation as a shrewd political analyst who transcended party affiliations. By the end of his life in Germany he was best known for his biography of Hitler, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler* (Notes on Hitler, 1978), which made him so famous that he could no longer use public transport without being approached.¹ But Haffner

I would like to thank the British Academy and Wolfson Foundation for funding my project, 'Knowing the Nazis, Inside and Out', of which this research forms a part. Thanks also to Ute Wölfel, the anonymous reviewers at JPR, and to the participants at University College London's conference on 'Compromised Identities? Perpetration and Complicity, Past and Present' (2021), for their feedback on earlier versions of this paper. Final thanks to Susanne Knittel and Bilyana Manolova at JPR for their excellent editorial assistance and feedback.

1 Uwe Soukup, *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher: Sebastian Haffner. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2001) p. 281.



had first become known as a journalist during his exile in England, which is also when he adopted his pen name. Written for the English audience in 1939, his first published book, *Germany: Jekyll & Hyde* analysed the workings of the Nazi regime and offered suggestions for the Allies on how it might be brought to an end.

This article, however, is concerned with the incomplete memoir he wrote in 1939 before *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*, which was found after his death. It first appeared in German as *Geschichte eines Deutschen* ("The Story of a German") in 2000, and was reprinted with the addition of six new chapters in 2002.² That year also saw the publication of the text in English translation by Haffner's son, Oliver Pretzel, under the title *Defying Hitler*. According to an interview with Haffner which took place in 1989, he wrote the memoir during his first year in exile in England as a way of explaining what had happened in Germany:

Ich schrieb, was ich persönlich gesehen und erlebt hatte, Gespräche, die ich geführt hatte [...] wie das Leben so war in Deutschland, nämlich keineswegs so, daß alle Deutschen Nazis waren, aber auch wieder nicht so, daß es den Nazismus im Alltag gewissermaßen kaum gab. Ich beschrieb es so, wie ich es erlebt hatte, daß man so ein bißchen daran vorbeileben konnte.

[I wrote about what I had personally seen and experienced, conversations that I'd had, what life was like in Germany. It wasn't that all Germans were Nazis, certainly not. But neither was it true that Nazism hardly affected everyday life. I described it as I had experienced it, that it was possible to live in a way alongside it.]³

Though given many years later, this description accurately reflects the memoir's content and approach. It is a highly personal account, focusing on Haffner's formative experiences growing up in Germany to witness the First World War and Weimar Republic, before going into more detail regarding his experiences from 1933 onwards.

2 The chapters not included in the first edition are 35–40. In this article, I refer to the second, more complete edition. For further discussion of the publication history, see Oliver Pretzel, 'Nachwort', in Sebastian Haffner, *Geschichte eines Deutschen: Die Erinnerungen 1914–1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002), pp. 291–304.

3 Sebastian Haffner, *Als Engländer maskiert: Ein Gespräch mit Jutta Krug über das Exil* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004), p. 28; my translation.

Haffner was a young trainee lawyer when the Nazis took power. He quickly foresaw the destruction of the legal system as he knew it, but being neither Jewish nor politically committed, he was not among those that left Germany early on. Under pressure from his father, he agreed to complete his legal training before later changing career to something that would not involve complicity with the Nazis' crimes. He was forced to participate in a compulsory Nazi indoctrination camp for law trainees in 1933, and this section of the memoir is one of the key parts I will analyse below, although it was missing from the first edition of the memoir in 2000 (see footnote 2). He left the legal profession in 1936 for journalism, where he wrote primarily fashion and lifestyle articles, and avoided close associations with the regime.⁴ The decision to go into exile came in 1938. Haffner and his Jewish partner,⁵ Erika Landry (born Erika Hirsch), left Germany for England, where Haffner started work on his memoir before switching to *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*, which was soon published.⁶ Historian Dan Stone describes these two works as 'among the more remarkable contemporary analyses of Nazism and the Third Reich',⁷ and both were bestsellers when they were published in Germany in 1996 and 2000/2002 respectively. Why, then, has Haffner's memoir been largely overlooked by scholarship since its posthumous publication?

As a historical source, memoir is often mistrusted, and with good reason. As Roger Woods puts it, 'the usefulness of life writing' is often called into question because of 'its complex relationship with truth'.⁸ Memoirs are, by nature, written after an event has taken place, and may be shaped by hindsight, or affected by gaps in memory. Despite these limitations, however, Woods suggests that there is much a mem-

4 See Sebastian Haffner, *Das Leben der Fußgänger. Feuilletons 1933-1938* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006).

5 Though not a practising Jew, she was classified as Jewish under the 1935 Nuremberg Laws.

6 In the 1989 interview with Jutta Krug, Haffner explained his reasoning for abandoning the memoir: 'Als der Krieg ausbrach, hatte ich das Gefühl, jetzt ist die Zeit zu ernst für diese persönlichen, feuilletonistisch empfundenen Erinnerungen. Ich nahm mir vor, systematischer zu schreiben.' ('When the war broke out I felt that the times were too serious for these personal, feuilleton-style recollections. I decided to write more systematically.') Haffner, *Als Engländer maskiert*, p. 29; my translation.

7 Dan Stone, 'Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating It', in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. by Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 183-201 (p. 192).

8 Roger Woods, 'Introduction: The Purposes and Problems of German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century', in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate, and Roger Woods (Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 1-24 (p. 6).

oir can tell us as 'the writer's construction of a life at a particular time and in a particular social context'.⁹ Historian Mary Fulbrook suggests that memoirs can be used to access 'history from within' through their capacity to 'explore collective subjectivities and processes of societal change, as well as to understand individual strivings and perceptions'.¹⁰ Like any other literary text, she argues, they should be read, 'as cultural productions, to be analysed with sensitivity to issues such as choice of language, role-casting and character construction, patterns of emplotment, and layers of meaning derived in part from the context of production and reception'.¹¹

Literary scholars and philosophers have likewise pondered the challenges of interpreting memoir in comparison with fiction. Between the author of memoir and his or her reader, there exists what Lejeune called an 'autobiographical pact'.¹² Unlike fiction, memoir claims to present an accurate account of past reality based on fact. There are, therefore, ethical dimensions to writing and reading memoirs that do not present themselves in the case of fiction.¹³ Not only do autobiography and memoir¹⁴ promise to present the truth (though 'few memoirs live up to the standard of truth that is guaranteed by the autobiographical pact'),¹⁵ they are inherently bound up with issues of morality through their construction of the author/narrator's self.¹⁶ Readers of memoir are, therefore, compelled to join the writer of memoir in assessing his or her moral self. In this vein, Judith Butler argues that attempts to give an account of oneself (e.g. in a memoir) are always addressed 'to another, whether conjured or existing',¹⁷ and that they

9 Ibid.

10 Mary Fulbrook, 'Life Writing and Writing Lives: Ego Documents in Historical Perspective', in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate, and Roger Woods (Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 25–38 (p. 34).

11 Ibid.

12 See Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 3–31.

13 See Paul John Eakin, ed., *The Ethics of Life Writing* (Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

14 The terms have become interchangeable in recent discussions of life-writing; see Katja Herge and Elisabeth Krimmer, 'Introduction', in Katja Herge and Elisabeth Krimmer (eds.), *Contested Selves: Life Writing and German Culture* (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2021), pp. 1–29 (p. 4).

15 Herge and Krimmer, p. 8.

16 Charles Taylor noted that the self is 'something which can exist only in a space of moral issues', see *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 49.

17 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 21.

presuppose the other's capacity to judge them, particularly regarding their behaviour towards others. Taking this further, Butler argues that such writing 'accepts the presumption that the self has a causal relation to the suffering of others'.¹⁸

I will argue in this article that Haffner's memoir can offer insights in two areas. First, it serves as a historical source, illustrating the development of what Fulbrook calls the 'bystander society'. Second, it offers a philosophical and literary case study for considering the ethics of engaging with the bystander perspective. Haffner creates a highly sympathetic narrative voice, drawing the reader into his perspective and sharing his critical reflections on his own past behaviour. In my reading of key passages, I hope to show how he draws distinctions between outer reality (what can be seen with the eyes) and inner reality (what is known in the heart), in an attempt to 'give an account of himself' (in the Butlerian sense) to an imagined reader, by whom he fully expects to be judged.

Haffner lays out this intention in the very beginning of his text. He explains that only a memoir, with its access to interiority, can reveal the 'varying degrees of intensity' with which historical events impact ordinary people's lives.

Wer etwas darüber erfahren will, muß Biographien lesen, und zwar nicht die Biographien von Staatsmännern, sondern die viel zu raren Biographien der unbekannten Privatleute. Dort wird er sehen: Das eine 'historische Ereignis' zieht über das private – d. h. wirkliche – Leben hin wie eine Wolke über einen See; nichts regt sich, nur ein flüchtiges Bild spiegelt sich. Das andere peitscht den See auf wie Sturm und Gewitter. [...] Ich glaube, Geschichte wird falsch verstanden, wenn man diese ihre Dimension vergißt (und sie wird fast immer vergessen.)

[To learn about that, you must read biographies, not those of statesmen but the all too rare ones of unknown individuals. There you will see that one historical event passes over the private (real) lives of people like a cloud over a lake. Nothing stirs, there is only a fleeting shadow. Another event whips up the lake as if in a thunderstorm. [...] I believe history is misunderstood if this aspect is forgotten (and it usually is forgotten).]¹⁹

¹⁸ Butler, p. 12.

¹⁹ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 13; Sebastian Haffner, *Defying Hitler*, trans. by Oliver Pretzel (London: Phoenix, 2003), p. 7. I generally use Pretzel's translation, unless I want to emphasize a different aspect of the original German, in which case I mark the translation as my own.

For Haffner, only life writing can provide access to 'the private (real) lives of people', and he presents his own text as providing a window into his own inner world, which exists in parallel to external reality. His memoir illustrates the dissonance between inner reality and external appearance, and offers this as the essence of life under Nazism.

In her readings of ego documents from the time, Fulbrook has come to the same conclusion, identifying insincere performance as one of the key hallmarks of the bystander society which made Nazism possible.²⁰ Her concept of the bystander society complicates the much used triad of victim, perpetrator and bystander²¹ by acknowledging that an individual's behavior is always contingent on circumstances, and may also change over time.²² Haffner's memoir illustrates this process, reflecting on his own behavior in different times and places, and exploring what made him comply with Nazi orders even when he found them abhorrent. Haffner's memoir resonates with Fulbrook's observation that everyday performance became a crucial aspect of the bystander society under Nazism: 'Everywhere, it seems, people were putting on an act – and were widely aware of it'.²³ She also highlights the 'the dulling of sensitivities'²⁴ which people experienced over time as a result of repeated compromises with the requirements of Nazism. My reading of Haffner's memoir focuses on the sections in which he reflects on his own compromises: during Hitler's first weeks in power, before the Jewish boycott in April 1933, and at a Nazi indoctrination camp later that year. By presenting his case as typical, and drawing the reader into a sense of intimacy and trust with the narrator, Haffner's²⁵ text elicits empathy for the 'ordinary Germans' who unwillingly became part of the Nazi bystander society, and illustrates how this process unfolds. My close readings of Haffner's text are followed by a discussion of his memoir's reception when it appeared in 2000 (first, incomplete

20 Mary Fulbrook, 'Private Lives, Public Faces: On the Social Self in Nazi Germany', in *Private life and Privacy in Nazi Germany*, ed. by Elizabeth Harvey, Johannes Hürter, Maiken Umbach, and Andreas Wirsching (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 55–80 (pp. 59–62).

21 See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

22 Fulbrook, 'Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi, or Crucial Clue?' in *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, ed. by Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (New York: Berghahn, 2019), pp. 15–35.

23 Mary Fulbrook, 'Private Lives', p. 69.

24 Ibid.

25 My understanding of the relationship between author and narrator follows that of Lejeune, who argued that the narrator, author and protagonist are all identical in a memoir—see Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, p. 5.

edition, see footnote 1) and 2002. I try to compare this *real* reception with the *imagined* reception of Haffner's contemporary reader in 1939, which never in fact took place, in order to reflect on how our historical positioning anachronistically affects our ability to empathise with the bystander perspective presented in Haffner's memoir.

Denial and Self-Deception: Responses to January-March 1933

A bystander society does not develop overnight. It begins slowly, with small acts of denial. Haffner shows how this process began as soon as Hitler came to power, exploring the conflicting ways in which people reacted to the news of his chancellorship. His language in these passages shows hesitancy and confusion, enacting the cognitive dissonance that arose as people entered into states of denial.

He recounts that many people refused to believe that Hitler was really in power, and instead convinced themselves that he was a mere puppet in the hands of others: 'Die Sieger des Tages waren, in der allgemeinen Auffassung, keineswegs die Nazis, sondern die Leute der bürgerlichen Rechten, die die Nazis "eingefangen" hatten und ihrerseits alle Schlüsselpositionen in der Regierung besetzten.' ('The general opinion was that it was not the Nazis who had won, but the bourgeois parties of the Right, who had "captured" the Nazis and held all the key positions in the Government.')

²⁶ A page later, he differentiates his own response in a passage which suggests he knew, on a deeper level, that something terrible had happened:

Ich weiß nicht genau, wie die allgemeine erste Reaktion war. Die meine war eine Minute lang richtig: Eisiger Schreck. [...] Hitler – Reichskanzler... Einen Augenblick spürte ich fast körperlich den Blut- und Schmutzgeruch um diesen Mann Hitler, und ich empfand etwas wie die zugleich bedrohliche und ekelerregende Annäherung eines mörderischen Tiers – eine schmutzige scharfkrallige Pfote an meinem Gesicht. Dann schüttelte ich das ab, versuchte zu lächeln, versuchte nachzudenken, und fand in der Tat viel Grund zur Beruhigung.

26 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 105; *Defying*, p. 88.

[I do not know what the general reaction was. For about a minute, mine was completely correct: icy horror. [...] Hitler Reichschancellor ... for a moment I physically sensed the man's odour of blood and filth, the nauseating approach of a man-eating animal – its foul, sharp claws in my face. Then I shook the sensation off, tried to smile, started to consider and found many reasons for reassurance.]²⁷

The first paragraph evokes a sense of shock and disbelief as the syntax breaks down to become just two nouns in 'Hitler – Reichskanzler...'. The dash and ellipsis suggest the narrator, Haffner, is lost for words. The lines that follow are dominated by language of physical sensation: the foul smell and invasive sense of a clawed animal scratching at your face. This has the effect of taking us down to a subconscious level of awareness—Haffner's gut feeling—which is correct about the real significance of Hitler's coming to power. But in the orderly and succinct final sentence, which shows the return of the reasoning mind, Haffner suggests that he dismissed his true feelings about Hitler and found ways to avoid acknowledging his horror. Here, Haffner's account illustrates the kind of denial which Fulbrook describes as 'minimising or disregarding compromises made along the way',²⁸ which is fundamental to the bystander society.

Haffner recalls that a meeting with his father soon afterwards put his mind at rest completely: 'Nein, alles in allem genommen, war diese Regierung kein Grund zur Beunruhigung.' ('No, all things considered, this government was not a cause for alarm').²⁹ He describes a general widespread belief in the Press that the situation could not last long, and that Hitler would soon be gone. Everyone relied so heavily on this belief that nobody considered that 'it might, if the worst came to the worst, be necessary to *prevent* the disaster from happening'.³⁰ Haffner's original German passage here is marked by frequent dashes and ends with a question mark, showing a lack of conviction which does not come across in Pretzel's translation:

[...] weil wir alle so sicher waren, daß es nicht anders kommen könnte – und uns gar so fest darauf verließen – und so gar nichts ins Auge faßten, um es schlimmstenfalls zu *verhindern*, daß es anders käme –?

27 Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 106–07; *Defying*, p. 89.

28 Fulbrook, 'Private Lives', p. 62.

29 Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 107–08; *Defying*, p. 90.

30 Haffner, *Defying*, p. 90.

[We were all so sure that it simply couldn't turn out any other way, and we all relied on that so heavily, that we never even considered that if the worst came to the worst, we might have to *prevent* things from turning out differently...?]³¹

The repeated intensifier 'gar' in German evokes a sense of desperation here. But at the same time, the hesitant dashes and question mark suggest the moral weakness Haffner accuses himself and others of displaying, in their lack of decisive opposition to Hitler.

After the Reichstag fire on 27 February, Hitler suppressed all political opposition by arresting those known to be active in other political parties (as well as others he deemed undesirable, regardless of political affiliation), and imprisoning them in the first concentration camps. Parliamentary opposition was then outlawed by the Enabling Act (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*) of 23 March. At this point, then, the formerly passive critics of the regime had good reason to remain passive, as they could rightly fear for their freedom or even their lives if they offered any opposition.

Haffner recalls the situation of March 1933 as 'die alpträumhafte Umkehrung der normalen Begriffe: Räuber und Mörder als Polizei auftretend, bekleidet mit der vollen Staatsgewalt' ('a nightmarish reversal of normal circumstances: robbers and murderers acting as the police force, enjoying the full panoply of state power').³² Not only were the increasing acts of Nazi terror and murder encouraged by the state, but they were also denied by all official channels. Haffner records: 'Während sie systematisch Wehrlose folterten und mordeten, versicherten sie täglich in edlen und weichen Tönen, daß niemandem ein Haar gekrümmt würde.' ('While they were systematically torturing and murdering their defenceless victims, they daily declared in fine, noble words that not a single hair of anyone's head would be harmed.')33 To claim that atrocities ('Greuel') were taking place, even in the privacy of one's own home, was soon also made illegal. Haffner points out, though, that these bans on the discussion of Nazi crimes were not really intended to keep those crimes secret, but rather to add to the general sense of terror, and therefore submission of the population.

At the same time, as Haffner recalls, the Nazis ran a charm offensive of public celebrations to mark their now democratically elected

³¹ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 108; my translation.

³² Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 124; *Defying*, p. 104.

³³ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 125; *Defying*, p. 105.

government (who had still, however, achieved only 44% of the vote). According to Haffner, people took part in the celebrations initially from fear, but later by convincing themselves that they supported what the Nazis were doing.³⁴ To have participated under duress 'would have been mean and contemptible. So the necessary ideology was supplied. That was the spiritual basis of the victory of the National Socialist revolution',³⁵ he concludes. ('[...] das wäre ja gemein und verächtlich gewesen. So lieferte man die zugehörige Gesinnung nach. Dies ist die seelische Grundfigur des Sieges der nationalsozialistischen Revolution').³⁶ What began as performances of support, or what Fulbrook calls 'the rehearsal of new scripts',³⁷ over time stopped being performances and became expressions of genuine sentiment.

Haffner's phrasing here does not exonerate the ordinary people, rather he presents them as having willingly gone along with this psychological manipulation, as it meant they did not have to consider themselves 'mean and contemptible.' Haffner anticipates his reader's judgment here, concluding that the Germans showed a complete lack of substance, and calls out their 'moralische Wesensschwäche' (essential moral weakness).³⁸ However, he also defends himself and his fellow Germans. He insists that the process by which individuals embraced these tactics of self-deception and denial was 'wholly within the normal range of psychology' ('es liegt durchaus innerhalb des normalen psychologischen Funktionierens'),³⁹ and describes the population's submission as the result of a 'million-fold nervous breakdown' ('millionenfachen Nervenzusammenbruchs').⁴⁰ Haffner thus illustrates how these first months of Hitler's rule ushered in the bystander society by sufficiently wearing down people's moral agency and instilling a widespread sense of apathetic complicity, though he does not condone this response.

34 This idea of responding to cognitive dissonance by changing one's attitude is also explored by Leonard S. Newman: 'What Is a "Social-Psychological" Account of Perpetrator Behaviour? The Person Versus the Situation in Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*', in *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, ed. by Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 43-67 (p. 53).

35 Haffner, *Defying*, p. 106.

36 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 127.

37 Fulbrook, 'Private Lives', p. 62.

38 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 131; my translation.

39 Haffner, *Defying*, p. 111; *Geschichte*, p. 133.

40 Haffner, *Defying*, p. 112; *Geschichte*, p. 133.

Haffner remembers his daily life going on as usual during these months: 'Dennoch war es, seltsam genug, auch und gerade dies mechanisch und automatisch weiterlaufende tägliche Leben, was es verhindern half, daß irgendwo eine kraftvolle, lebendige Reaktion gegen das Ungeheuerliche stattfand' ('Yet strangely enough, it was precisely this mechanical, automatic continuation of daily life which helped to prevent any powerful, lively reaction against the horror from taking place').⁴¹ His wording here might suggest that the German people suffered a loss of humanity by taking on a machine-like existence. Simultaneously, it also partially excuses their behaviour, which (Haffner suggests) was not deliberate, but automatic. He includes himself when, anticipating his imagined reader, he considers the question of why so few individuals stood up to oppose the injustices going on around them: 'Ich übersehe nicht, daß diese Frage auch einen Vorwurf gegen mich selbst einschließt' ('I am not blind to the fact that this charge applies to me as much as to anyone else').⁴² Having thus considered the broader social response to Hitler's take over, Haffner then conducts a more focussed self-examination when describing how he responded to the enforcement of the Jewish boycott at his legal chambers, as I explore in what follows.

Becoming a Bystander: The Jewish Boycott of April 1933

The chapter containing Haffner's description of the enforcement of the Jewish boycott in his legal chambers is short (just five pages), but highly crafted. It begins and ends with the same image of the law chambers, which stands 'grau, kühl und gelassen wie immer, vornehm abgerückt von der Straße, hinter Rasenflächen und Bäumen' ('cool and grey as always, set back from the street in a distinguished setting behind lawns and trees').⁴³ The law chambers are shown here as a constant, unchanging presence, yet between the opening and closing images they are changed irrevocably. Forcefully removing all Jews from the law chambers undermines the very laws that they were made to uphold. Though the building may look the same at the end of the chapter, both Haffner and the reader know that it is not. This dissonance between inner reality and outer appearance is, I argue, one of the key effects in Haffner's memoir.

⁴¹ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 135; my translation.

⁴² Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 135; *Defying*, p. 114.

⁴³ Haffner *Geschichte*, p. 145, and similarly on p. 149; *Defying*, p. 122.

In this scene in the law chambers, Haffner's narrative highlights the differences between what is visible and what is not. The silence in the room changes as soon as distant sounds are heard, though the change is invisible: 'ihr Wesen war verändert: keine Arbeitsstille mehr, vielmehr die Stille des Schrecks und der Spannung' ('The room was still utterly quiet, but the quality of the silence had changed. It was no longer the silence of concentrated work. It was filled with alarm and agitation').⁴⁴ The narration continues to be filtered through Haffner's senses. The tension mounts as we hear the sounds of the SA men approaching, through a series of nouns and verbs describing the commotion: '[...] Getrappel, vielschrittiges grobes Laufen die Treppen herauf, dann fernes unentwirrbares Getöse, Rufen, Türeenschlagen' ('[...] a clatter of footsteps [...] the sound of rough boots on the stairs, then a distant indistinct din, shouts, doors banging.')⁴⁵ We hear, as through Haffner's ears, the arrival of the SA men and the comments made around him about the removal of the Jews. When a fellow lawyer laughs at the Jews' expense, the narrative suddenly re-enters Haffner's inner world as he recounts his thoughts: 'es ließ blitzhaft denken, daß ja auch in diesem Raum, wie sonderbar, Nazis saßen.' ('With a start I realised that there were Nazis working in this room. How strange.')⁴⁶

Haffner's inner world is juxtaposed with his surroundings in what follows, and the reader of the memoir has access to both his inner and outer realities. His description of the palpable tension, powerlessness, and unspoken feelings as this event transpires is one of the most powerful in the book:

Die Arbeitenden standen auf, versuchten irgendetwas zueinander zu sagen und gingen langsam und sinnlos hin und her. Ein offenbar jüdischer Herr schlug schweigend seine Bücher zu, stellte sie sorgfältig in die Regale zurück, verstaute seine Akten und ging raus.

[Readers got up, tried to say something to one another, paced about slowly to no great purpose. One man, obviously a Jew, closed his books, packed his documents and left.]⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 146; *Defying*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 146–47; *Defying*, p. 123.

⁴⁶ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 147; *Defying*, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 147; *Defying*, p. 124.

Nothing effective is said or done, but we might read the lawyers' directionless pacing as a reflection of their inner turmoil. This is certainly what Haffner suggests through the insights into his own inner world, where we feel his heartbeat and hear him wracking his brains for an appropriate response:

Mir schlug das Herz. Was konnte man tun, wie wahrte man seine Haltung? Ignorieren, sich gar nicht stören lassen! Ich senkte mich auf mein Aktenstück. [...] Indem kam eine braune Uniform auf mich zu und machte Front vor mir: "Sind Sie arisch?" Ehe ich mich besinnen konnte, hatte ich geantwortet: "Ja." Ein prüfender Blick auf meine Nase – und er retirierte. Mir aber schoß das Blut ins Gesicht. Ich empfand, einen Augenblick zu spät, die Blamage, die Niederlage. [...] Versagt in der ersten Prüfung! Ich hätte mich ohrfeigen können.

[My own heart beat heavily. What should I do, How keep my poise? Just ignore them, do not let them disturb me. I put my head down over my work. [...] Meanwhile a brown shirt approached me and took up position in front of my work table. "Are you Aryan?" Before I had a chance to think, I had said, "Yes." He took a close look at my nose, and retired. The blood shot to my face. A moment too late I felt the shame, the defeat. [...] I had failed my first test. I could have slapped myself.]⁴⁸

He writes that he responded to the Nazi's question regarding his 'race' 'before [he] had a chance to think', which suggests that his response was automatic and unthinking. His thoughts arrive a moment too late, when he is filled with shame, but this emotional turmoil remains on the inside and there is no external expression of his inner distress.

Haffner makes no attempt to present this failure as anything other than a personal weakness, though he describes it as nearly universal among the Germans, even among those who were being victimised. Rather than dwell on the significance of the day's event, that night Haffner and his partner (who had also just lost her job on account of Jewish ancestry) simply sought distraction from their worries by going to a cabaret: 'das mag sehr kaltblütig und unerschrocken aussehen, ist aber wahrscheinlich doch ein Zeichen einer gewissen Gefühlsschwäche und zeigt, daß wir, wenn auch nur im Leiden, nicht auf der Höhe der Situation waren.' ('That may seem cold-blooded and daring, but it really

48 Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 148–49; *Defying*, p. 125.

only indicates a weakness of the emotions. We were not equal to the situation, even as victims').⁴⁹ Pretzel's use of the loaded word 'victims' in the translation here raises an interesting question. Haffner's original does not use the German word 'Opfer' (victim), but merely claims that he and his partner were suffering ('im Leiden') under the Nazis' new policies. However, the implication is the same: that both he and his nominally Jewish partner were suffering (though unequally), under the new rules, and that neither was able to retaliate in any effective way. This blurring of the line between the traditional concepts of 'victim' and 'bystander' is worth bearing in mind when we consider who makes up the bystander society.

Haffner identified strongly with the Jewish community and was loyal to his Jewish friends. His memoir describes a twenty-four-hour period after the introduction of the boycott in which he helped his childhood best friend, Frank Landau, to prepare for his sudden emigration. His lack of support for Jewish colleagues in the law chamber does not imply a lack of solidarity with Jews in general. In these individual cases, context is everything. We might then wonder what happens when a bystander is removed from all social ties, and placed in an entirely new context? Haffner's memoir self-critically explores this situation as well.

'This doesn't count': Everyday Performance in an Indoctrination Camp

Though Haffner recalls already wishing to leave the legal profession by the summer of 1933, he still sat his *Assessor* exams—the final qualification needed to practice law—and went on to work as a lawyer until 1936.⁵⁰ In order to do so, he had to participate in a Nazi camp for 'ideological training', which was held in a military barracks in Jüterbog, Brandenburg. His description of life at camp highlights the centrality of performance to the Nazis' hold on power, and even suggests the comic absurdity of these performances.

The narration of the camp experience begins by describing a situation that, in Haffner's words, contained 'the Third Reich in a nutshell'

49 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 153; *Defying*, p. 128.

50 See Haffner, *Defying*, pp. 190–91; and Soukup, *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher*, pp. 49–52.

('Sie enthielt in einer Nußschale das ganze Dritte Reich').⁵¹ The passage is highly visual, describing the image of Haffner in boots and uniform with a swastika armband, marching with a column of others dressed like him, carrying a swastika flag, and singing Nazi songs. Yet the passage also highlights the dissonance between appearance and truth, and between actions and thoughts. As Haffner's marching column passes by neighbouring houses, the inhabitants stand at their doorways and raise their arms in salute. Haffner comments, 'sie taten dies, weil sie gelernt hatten, daß wir, also ich, sie verprügeln würden, wenn sie es nicht täten.' ('They did this because they had learned that that if they did not, we, that is I, would beat them up.')⁵² By this stage in the narrative, however, the reader is so familiar with the narrator, Haffner, that the suggestion of his beating anybody up is completely absurd. The reader is invited into Haffner's perspective: *we* know that he has no intention of beating up the passers-by, but *they* cannot know that. Haffner's behaviour may only be a performance, but it seems to have the desired effect on the audience, making them feel genuine fear: 'jetzt marschierten wir hinter ihr [der Fahne] und wirkten damit allein als stillschweigende Prügeldrohung auf jeden Passanten.' ('Now we were marching behind the flag and, so, without saying a word, we appeared as a violent threat to every passer-by.')⁵³ Of course, some of the onlookers may also have been genuine Nazi supporters. Yet Haffner's perspective projects his own beliefs onto them. The impossibility of knowing a person's true convictions based on their actions applies both to the marchers and to the onlookers.

The narrative of Haffner's arrival at camp continues to present the camp activities as a series of performances, and highlights the comical absurdity of his situation. He describes their lining up to march into camp as 'ein symbolhaltiges Bild' ('a picture full of symbolism').⁵⁴ The law students are inducted with a medical examination, distribution of uniforms, swastika armbands, and rations. Because he knows nobody there, he cannot tell which of the others are convinced Nazis, and which are there under duress, like him. His description highlights, instead, only what he can see with his eyes: they all look the same and are performing a kind of song and dance: 'Man konnte es nicht mehr unterscheiden, sie trugen alle dieselbe graue Uniform mit

51 Haffner, *Defying*, p. 210; *Geschichte*, p. 253.

52 Ibid.

53 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 253; my translation.

54 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 254; *Defying*, p. 212.

Hakenkreuzarmbinden und sie sangen alle gleich zackig.' ('one could no longer tell the difference. They were all wearing the same grey uniforms with swastika armbands and they all sang equally jerkily.')⁵⁵

Haffner's narrative highlights the comic absurdity that a group of law trainees should be inducted into what is clearly a military-style training camp without the slightest acknowledgement of this discrepancy: 'das Komische war dabei nur, daß wir ja eigentlich gar nicht Soldaten werden wollten, sondern unser Assessorexamen machen.' ('The funny thing was that we didn't actually want to become soldiers, we just wanted to pass our Assessor exams.')⁵⁶ The narrative repeatedly presents the camp experience as one of learning to read visual signs and performing consciously adopted roles. He and the other new arrivals are greeted by someone whom Haffner learns to recognise as a senior SA man because of the three stars on his collar, but who was otherwise just another junior lawyer like them ('im Übrigen ein Referendar wie wir.')⁵⁷ This presents the man's SA uniform as a costume for his role. The suggestions of theatricality are even stronger when Haffner describes the SA man as speaking:

mit einem vernünftig-zuredenden Unterton, etwa als wolle er sagen "Wir spielen nun mal hier ein Spiel, in dem ich zu kommandieren habe, also seid keine Spielverderber und folgt mir." Und so taten wir ihm also alle den Gefallen.

[gently cajoling, [...], as though he were saying, "Look, we are playing a game here, and in this game I have to give the orders, so don't be spoilsports and do what I say." So we did him the favour of obeying him.]⁵⁸

The word 'game' ('Spiel') has connotations of fun and child's play, but this contrasts severely with the real significance of Haffner's actions here, and he is fully aware of this horrible dissonance, as becomes increasingly clear. That night, after hearing Hitler's speech announcing Germany's re-armament on the radio, the group of new recruits are called on to sing the national anthem with their arms raised in the Nazi salute, which Haffner finds an excruciating experience:

⁵⁵ Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 255–56; *Defying*, pp. 212–13.

⁵⁶ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 256; my translation.

⁵⁷ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 257.

⁵⁸ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 257; *Defying*, pp. 213–14.

Ein paar mochten, gleich mir, zögern. Es hatte so etwas scheußlich Entwürdigendes. Aber wollten wir unser Examen machen oder nicht? Ich hatte, zum ersten Mal, plötzlich das Gefühl so stark wie ein Geschmack im Munde – das Gefühl: "es zählt ja nicht. Ich bin es ja gar nicht, es gilt nicht." Und mit diesem Gefühl hob auch ich den Arm und hielt ihn ausgestreckt in der Luft, ungefähr drei Minuten lang. [...] Ich bewegte ein wenig die Lippen und markierte Gesang, wie man es in der Kirche beim Choralsingen tut.

[A few hesitated like me. It was so dreadfully shaming. But did we want to sit our examinations or not? For the first time I had the feeling, so strong it left a taste in my mouth: "this doesn't count. This isn't me. It doesn't count," and with this feeling I too raised my arm and held it stretched out ahead of me for about three minutes. [...] I moved my lips a little and mimed singing, as one does with hymns in church.]⁵⁹

In Pretzel's translation here, Haffner's repeated insistence that 'this isn't me' and 'it doesn't count' has an air of desperation and comes across as an attempt to convince himself. As well as suggesting self-persuasion, in the original German, the modal particle 'ja' in the phrase 'es zählt ja nicht. Ich bin es ja gar nicht' also has a different emphasis. The particle 'ja' can imply that something is self-evident, a bit like saying 'of course' in English, or, more colloquially, 'obviously'. So Haffner's original language here has the effect of further drawing the reader into sharing his own view: that this behaviour obviously does not mean anything because it is just a performance. However, of course, our shared knowledge that Haffner does not mean what he's doing is not shared by the other people around him. They have to go solely on appearances, and by all appearances, Haffner is playing along. This example shows how hesitant individuals were compelled by their surroundings into performing small 'gateway' acts of complicity. Once this threshold had been crossed, however, the individual could then be encouraged to engage in more serious acts of complicity:

Und darin bestand unsere weltanschauliche Schulung. Indem wir uns auf das Spiel einließen, das da mit uns gespielt wurde, verwandelten wir uns ganz automatisch – wenn nicht in Nazis, so doch in brauchbares Material für die Nazis.

59 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 263; *Defying*, p. 218.

[That was the sum of our ideological training. By acceding to the rules of the game that was being played with us, we automatically changed, not quite into Nazis, but certainly into usable Nazi material.]⁶⁰

Haffner's analysis here aligns with Harald Welzer's description of the pathway to genocide as a 'continuum' of 'qualitatively different thresholds'.⁶¹ His identification of life under Nazism with a game highlights its performative nature, and acknowledges the dissonance between thought and action that can be extremely powerful, while remaining totally invisible.

His description of life at camp illustrates the slow grinding down of an individual's agency within a criminal system. He recounts hearing people around him say things he found utterly appalling, and not knowing how to respond effectively:

Als das neulich gesagt wurde mit dem "Paris zertöppern", ging es dir nicht wie ein Messer durchs Herz? Warum sagtest du nichts?
Was hätte ich denn sagen sollen. Etwa: Es wäre schade um Paris? Vielleicht habe ich es sogar gesagt. Habe ich? Ich weiß es nicht mehr genau. Jedenfalls hätte man unfehlbar geantwortet: "Natürlich, schade wärs schon." Und was weiter? So etwas Milde zu sagen, wäre feiger und verlogener als ganz zu schweigen. Was hätte ich denn aber wirklich sagen sollen? "Grauensvoll, unmenschlich, du weißt nicht, was du redest..."? Wirkungslos, ganz wirkungslos. Sie wären nicht mal böse gewesen. Nur befremdet. Sie hätten gelacht. Oder die Achseln gezuckt. Was hätte man sagen können, was wirklich gepaßt hätte. Wirksam gewesen wäre, den Panzer von Taubheit zerschlagen hätte, die eigene Seele gerettet hätte?
Ich strengte mich an, etwas zu finden. Ich fand nichts. Es gab nichts. Schweigen war besser.

[When that was said about "flattening Paris", didn't you feel a stab in your heart? Why didn't you say anything?
What should I have said? Perhaps "that would be a pity"? [...] Saying something as mild as that was more cowardly and dishonest than silence.

⁶⁰ Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 266; *Defying*, p. 221.

⁶¹ Harald Welzer, 'On Killing and Morality: How Normal People Become Mass Murderers', in *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers, Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Jensen Szejnmann and Olaf and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 165-81 (p. 179).

What should I really have said? "That's dreadful, it's inhuman. You don't know what you're saying ...?" That would have had just as little effect. They wouldn't even have been angry, just irritated. They would have laughed or shrugged their shoulders. What should I have said that would really have been appropriate, really effective, that would have broken through their armour of deafness, and saved my soul?

I strained to find something, without success. There was nothing. Silence was better.]⁶²

The repeated questions in this passage evoke a sense of despair and give the reader an impression of inner mental chaos. They also, however, have the effect of questioning Haffner's imagined reader, who is drawn in and asked what he or she might have done in Haffner's place. Since the reader cannot answer, she is forced to share Haffner's predicament of endless self-questioning. The narrative here thus compels the reader to share in the responsibility for Haffner's passivity, and the reader herself becomes a kind of bystander. After two more chapters, detailing Haffner's experience of meeting up with his fellow campmates after returning to normal life in Berlin, the incomplete memoir breaks off. The last words of the memoir indicate the lingering sense of shame that is felt by the narrator, and offer the reader no sense of closure or redemption:

Die Gruppe stand noch, wo sie gestanden hatte. Ich habe keinen je wiedergesehen. Der Bus trug mich schnell davon, und ich fühlte mich frostig, beschämt und befreit.

[I left the group standing around. I never met any of them again. The bus carried me swiftly away. I felt cold, ashamed and relieved.]⁶³

Conclusion: The Reception of Haffner's Memoir and the Ethics of the Bystander Perspective

In this article I have suggested that Haffner's memoir can help us to understand the conditions of life under Nazism in two ways, both as a historical source, and as an ethical case study. As a historical source,

62 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 276; *Defying*, p. 229.

63 Haffner, *Geschichte*; p. 290, *Defying*, p. 240.

the memoir can be seen to illustrate the process by which the German population was transformed under Nazism into what Fulbrook calls a bystander society. Haffner's account of the first days and weeks of Hitler's chancellorship documents the processes of self-deception and denial which allowed many ordinary people who did not actively support the Nazis to remain focussed on their private lives and go about their business, rather than attempting opposition.⁶⁴ His subsequent accounts of his experiences of the Jewish boycott and the time spent in an indoctrination camp illustrate how he became increasingly accustomed to witnessing violence and obeying orders barked by Nazis in uniform. In Fulbrook's words, he learned to perform 'new scripts', although he felt that his behaviour 'didn't count' (Haffner's words) because it was only a performance. To the external viewer, however, there was no way of distinguishing between sincere and insincere performances of Nazism. Eventually, the conditions of Nazi Germany required the repeated performance of new scripts until they were no longer performances.

To close, I will consider how the memoir can serve as an ethical case study for engaging with the bystander perspective. As 'an account of oneself' in the Butlerian sense, Haffner's memoir seems to anticipate his reader's judgment. But at the same time, the memoir's language and narration invite a highly empathetic reading, even compelling the reader to feel implicated in the narrator's actions. The unanswered questions posed to the reader cited above, and the unpolished nature of the memoir's ending (breaking off, as it does, in *medias res*) both create a sense of uneasy entanglement for the reader, rather than critical distance and satisfying closure.

I wonder if Haffner's memoir gains in ethical value because of its incompleteness, and the lack of resolution that it offers. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler posits that 'any effort "to give an account of oneself" will have to fail in order to approach being true',⁶⁵ because the self is ultimately never fully knowable. Haffner's memoir seems to exemplify Butler's call, not for judgement, but for 'an ethics based on our shared, invariable, and partial blindness about ourselves'⁶⁶ and

64 Of course, there were exceptions. For example, see the memoir by communist Jan Petersen, *Our Street: A Chronicle Written in the Heart of Fascist Germany* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). It depicts how resistance activists were driven underground, or faced brutal punishment.

65 Butler, p. 42.

66 Ibid.

for 'a disposition of humility and generosity alike'.⁶⁷ He certainly presents his experiences in the memoir as thoroughly typical. In the first chapter, he describes himself as 'einfach ein Durchschnittsmensch mit vielen Schwächen', ('just an ordinary man with many weaknesses').⁶⁸ Indeed, the English title *Defying Hitler* seems inappropriate for the narrative, as Haffner is at pains throughout to highlight his lack of heroic defiance. Yet by exploring the dissonance between Haffner's thoughts and actions in the key passages I study above, the narrative explains his actions and inactions, eliciting both judgment *and* empathy from the reader.

At this point I want to think about how the reader's own historical positionality informs her response to Haffner's bystander perspective. For Haffner's intended, contemporary reader, admitting to feelings of empathy with a bystander to Nazism would have been far less problematic than it is for readers today. Although Haffner warned about the potential for 'allgemeinen, befohlenen und disziplinierten Mord und Totschlag' ('deliberate, general, disciplined murder and slaughter')⁶⁹ under Nazism, this is not the same as knowing for certain that such things would come to pass. Had he known then what readers know today, his narrative may well have been different.

This discrepancy between the account's originally imagined readers (ca. 1939) and its post-war readers at the time of actual publication warrants some further reflection. The work was intended as an attempt to explain the circumstances of the present, yet it was received in its eventual publication within the realm of German *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung* (coming to terms with the [Nazi] past'). Kathryn Sederberg's study of wartime diarists can be illustrative here. Sederberg notes the importance of paratexts in re-situating war-time texts within a post-war context, when 'the imagined reader of the diary [has] changed'.⁷⁰ According to Sederberg, most wartime diaries by non-Jewish Germans were only published for the first time 'during the 1980s and 1990s, coinciding with the "era of the witness"'⁷¹ and the interest in understanding contemporary wartime accounts as an

67 Ibid.

68 Haffner, *Geschichte*, p. 10; *Defying*, p. 3.

69 Haffner, *Geschichte*, pp. 150-51; *Defying*, p. 127.

70 Kathryn Sederberg, "Confrontation with my Complicity": Paratextual Self-Encounters in Diaries of the Second World War', in *Contested Selves: Life Writing and German Culture*, ed. by Katja Herges and Elisabeth Krimmer (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2021), pp. 147-66 (p.150).

71 Sederberg, p. 153.

aspect of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. Sederberg argues that diarists used paratexts to reframe their narratives for readers in the 80s and 90s, entering into a triangular relationship with the reader on the one hand and their past self on the other. She notes that many such paratexts describe the diarist's feelings of shame on encountering their past selves, and fully anticipate the reader's negative judgement, or perhaps attempt to escape this through defensive mechanisms.⁷²

I wonder how Haffner would have prefaced his memoir, if he had published it during his post-war life in West Germany. After his return to West Berlin in 1954 (as foreign correspondent for the English *Observer*), his presence there was always seen in light of his former status as an émigré, and he never felt at home in West Germany.⁷³ In the eyes of other non-Jewish Germans who had stayed in Nazi Germany, former émigrés were thought to have taken the easy way out of a difficult situation. On the other hand, returning émigrés could boast that they had not submitted to the Nazi regime, unlike those who had stayed, and were less complicit in Nazi crimes.⁷⁴ Perhaps it was this moral tension which discouraged Haffner from ever publishing the memoir during his lifetime; it would have been impossible not to stir up resentments in one camp or another.

Though he did not publish his memoir in its entirety during his lifetime, Haffner did publicly share his account of the Jewish boycott (chapter 25), in *stern* magazine on 1 April 1983, which marked fifty years since the events took place.⁷⁵ His decision to share his account at this time may have been partly motivated by the same contemporary interest in *Zeitzeugen* (contemporary witnesses) which encouraged non-Jewish German wartime diarists to publish their diaries in the 1980s and 1990s. But while those diarists took a great risk in sharing their 'life narratives now reframed by guilt and shame',⁷⁶ Haffner had his reputation as a former émigré and an established critic of the Nazi regime to protect him from any possible negative judgment. Haffner's fame was so great by this point in his life (seven years after the publication of *An-*

72 'Some individuals adopt a "conversion" narrative and feel shame or guilt as they read their wartime diaries, while others react more defensively and minimize what they know or could have known.' Sederberg, p. 163.

73 See Ulrich Schlie, "'Geschichte Deutschlands als Teil privater Lebensgeschichte". Ein Rückblick auf die Haffner-Welle', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 278.2 (2004), 399-415 (p. 402).

74 See Soukup, *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher*, pp. 54-55.

75 Unfortunately, at the time of this article's publication I have not yet been able to access the relevant edition of *stern*.

76 Sederberg, p. 165.

merkungen zu Hitler) that he had little to lose. The 1980s even witnessed what Soukup has called a 'Haffner-Boom', in which earlier articles and interviews given by Haffner were re-published.⁷⁷ Though I have not been able to examine the paratext of this published excerpt, Haffner's decision to publish the chapter describing his reaction to the Jewish boycott of 1 April 1933 must still be understood within the context of his contemporary fame and popularity.

Turning to the memoir's publications after Haffner's death, we find that the paratext to the 2000 edition was extremely sparse. The first edition included no form of editorial commentary which might have steered the reader's interpretation of the narrative towards any moral judgment. It has only a brief 'editorische Notiz' (editorial note) explaining that the text was found in Haffner's papers after his death, that it can be dated to the beginning of 1939, and that an English translation had been created for publication in England at the time, though the text was never published before. The brevity of this editorial note created room for some readers to doubt its authenticity. The bitterness and anger which, in places, coloured the ensuing public debate about the authenticity of the memoir in the summer of 2001 shows that the text was still seen within the emotionally charged context of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*.⁷⁸

Despite the few accusations of inauthenticity (which were quickly disproved), the first edition became a bestseller in Germany. Many contemporary reviews highlighted the memoir's argument that those born around 1900 were unprepared for, and particularly vulnerable to, the temptations that Hitler offered.⁷⁹ But the most universally valued aspect of Haffner's memoir was its ability to weave political and personal history together, making the story of the Nazis' rise relatable for every reader ('für jeden Leser nachvollziehbar'), as Ulrich Schlie points out in his review of Haffner's posthumous fame.⁸⁰ It is precisely this character of relatability which I have noted in my own reading of Haffner's text, but this arises from the narrative itself, rather than from any

77 Soukup, *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher*, p. 287.

78 See Uwe Soukup, 'Ein paradoxes Leben', in Haffner, *Als Engländer maskiert*, pp. 67–111 (pp. 99–111).

79 See Martin Meyer, 'Lesezeichen; Elend der Geschichte; Sebastian Haffners Erinnerungen 1914–1933', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28 September 2000, p. 65; Klaus Bittermann, 'Das Gesicht eines Krokodils', *Die Tageszeitung*, 5 September 2000, p. 17; Volker Ullrich, 'Eine fulminante Entdeckung: Sebastian Haffners Erinnerungen *Geschichte eines Deutschen aus dem Jahre 1939*', *Die Zeit*, 7 September 2000.

80 See Schlie, p. 408.

paratextual steering in this edition. (It is also worth remembering here that the first edition did not include the chapters describing Haffner's experiences at the Jüterborg training camp, which are perhaps the most morally damning in the memoir.)⁸¹

The 2002 edition bore an introductory note on the paperback edition, as well as a much longer editorial afterword ('Nachwort') by Oliver Pretzel, verifying the text's authenticity with reference to more details, and also citing the first edition's market success explicitly within the context of *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. In the afterword, Pretzel does not address his father's complicity with Nazism (that is, before his emigration), but instead draws attention to Haffner's early prognosis of Nazism's ultimate outcomes, and the lack of any attempt on his behalf to claim ignorance of the facts:

Das Buch beantwortet [...] die Frage, "Wie konnte es dazu kommen?", eine Frage, die die Folgegeneration der Vorkriegsgeneration immer gestellt und darauf meistens die Antwort erhalten hat: 'Wir haben nichts gewusst.' Das Buch entkräftet diese Antwort ganz eindeutig: Wer nichts sah, tat es, weil er nichts sehen wollte.

[The book answers the question of 'how could it come to that?', a question which the post-war generation was always asking the pre-war generation, which was usually answered with, 'we didn't know anything about it.' The book quite clearly refutes that answer. Those who saw nothing, did so because they did not want to see anything.]⁸²

Without explicitly using the term 'bystander', then, this section of Pretzel's 2002 afterword clearly identifies the value of Haffner's account as an illustration of the bystander perspective, while simultaneously precluding any attempt to see the narrative as a justification for bystander behaviour. The paratextual framing of the 2002 edition thus steers the reader towards appreciating Haffner's text for its clear-sightedness and moral honesty, but does not attempt to morally excuse Haffner for his bystander behaviour.

Christina Morina has pondered the ethical implications of the rise of the bystander perspective among historical studies of the Holocaust.

81 According to the foreword to the 2002 edition of the memoir, these chapters were still in handwritten form when they were discovered after Haffner's death, suggesting he never got as far as typing them out.

82 Pretzel, 'Nachwort', p. 303; my translation.

She sees this rise not only as a result of generational shifts (as those with living memory of the era pass away), but also as one aspect of the 'social turn' in Holocaust studies. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's idea of the implicated subject,⁸³ she writes that historians' work 'can become problematic if a sense of *identification* is driving this new "empathy", or rather productive if a sense of *implication* is being negotiated, openly and critically.'⁸⁴ I agree that identification with a bystander becomes problematic when this implies excusing the bystander of his or her moral failing, and it is possible that some of the popularity of Haffner's memoir around the year 2000 stemmed from this kind of exculpatory empathy. Perhaps some readers felt relief to see that even Haffner, a respected critic of the Nazi regime, had been a bystander to some acts of Nazi wrongdoing. However, I think that such a response would be a misreading of the memoir. We should recall that it was written for English readers in 1939 to explain the behaviour of Germans, but not to excuse them. Haffner's narrative does not shirk his own responsibility for complicity with Nazi acts, and nor does it ask for forgiveness. Pretzel's afterword in the 2002 edition, cited above, also rejects any kind of exculpatory interpretation of Haffner's account. To conclude, then, I suggest that Haffner's memoir can be of much value in eliciting *both* empathy for the bystander perspective *and* a negative moral judgment of bystander behaviour. Such a dualistic approach to Haffner's memoir demands the reader's humility, in the sense proposed by Butler in *Giving an Account*.⁸⁵ Empathising with Haffner's bystander perspective can, therefore, be productive in the way that Morina suggests: 'not only [to] render more precise historical knowledge but also [to] help scholars to adequately address and (self-)critically engage with [...] personal and cultural biases'.⁸⁶ We can understand and empathise with Haffner the bystander, whilst still holding him accountable for his actions and inactions. Finally, we can respect his courage in daring to explore his own moral compromises with Nazism, even before the Holocaust.

83 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2019).

84 Christina Morina, 'In Search of the Bystander: Some Reflections on the social turn in Holocaust studies – and its Ramifications', in *Perpetration and Complicity under Nazism and Beyond: Compromised Identities?*, ed. by Stephanie Bird and others (London: Bloomsbury, in press). Many thanks to Christina Morina for sharing this work with me in advance of publication.

85 Butler, p. 42

86 Morina, 'In Search of the Bystander', in press.

Works Cited

- Bittermann, Klaus, 'Das Gesicht eines Krokodils', *Die Tageszeitung*, 5 September 2000, p. 17
- Butler, Judith, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005)
- Eakin, Paul John, (ed.), *The Ethics of Life Writing* (Ithaca, N.Y.: London: Cornell University Press, 2004)
- Fulbrook, Mary, 'Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi, or Crucial Clue?' in *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, ed. by Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (New York: Berghahn, 2019), pp. 15-35
- , 'Life Writing and Writing Lives: Ego Documents in Historical Perspective', in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate, and Roger Woods (Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 25-38
- , 'Private Lives, Public Faces: On the Social Self in Nazi Germany', in *Private life and Privacy in Nazi Germany*, ed. by Elizabeth Harvey, Johannes Hürter, Maiken Umbach, and Andreas Wirsching (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 55-80
- Haffner, Sebastian, *Als Engländer maskiert: Ein Gespräch mit Jutta Krug über das Exil* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2004)
- , *Defying Hitler*, trans. by Oliver Pretzel (London: Phoenix, 2003)
- , *Germany. Jekyll & Hyde. Deutschland von Innen betrachtet* (Berlin: Berlin 1900, 1996)
- , *Germany: Jekyll & Hyde*, trans. by Wilfrid David (London: Abacus, 2008)
- , *Geschichte eines Deutschen: Die Erinnerungen 1914-1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2002)
- , *Das Leben der Fußgänger. Feuilletons 1933-1938* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2006)
- Herges, Katja and Elisabeth Krimmer, 'Introduction', in *Contested Selves: Life Writing and German Culture*, ed. by Katja Herges and Elisabeth Krimmer (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2021), pp. 1-29
- Hilberg, Raul, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992)
- Löw, Andrea and Frank Bajohr, 'Beyond the "Bystander": Social Processes and Social Dynamics in European Societies as Context for the Holocaust', in *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics*, ed. by Andrea Löw and Frank Bajohr (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 3-14
- Lejeune, Philippe, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul John Eakin, trans. by Katherine Leary (University of Minnesota: Minneapolis, 1989)
- Meyer, Martin, 'Lesezeichen; Elend der Geschichte; Sebastian Haffners Erinnerungen 1914 -1933', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 28 September 2000, p. 65
- Morina, Christina, 'In Search of the Bystander: Some Reflections on the Social Turn in Holocaust Studies – and its Ramifications', in *Perpetration and Complicity un-*

- der Nazism and Beyond: Compromised Identities?*, ed. by Stephanie Bird and others (London: Bloomsbury, 2023)
- Newman, Leonard S., 'What Is a "Social-Psychological" Account of Perpetrator Behavior? The Person Versus the Situation in Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*', in *Understanding Genocide: The Social Psychology of the Holocaust*, ed. by Leonard S. Newman and Ralph Erber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 43-67
- Petersen, Jan, *Our Street: A Chronicle Written in the Heart of Fascist Germany* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009)
- Pretzel, Oliver, 'Nachwort', in Sebastian Haffner, *Geschichte eines Deutschen: Die Erinnerungen 1914-1933* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2002), pp. 291-304
- Rothberg, Michael, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2019)
- Schlie, Ulrich, '"Geschichte Deutschlands als Teil privater Lebensgeschichte". Ein Rückblick auf die Haffner-Welle', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 278.2 (2004), 399-415
- Sederberg, Kathryn, '"Confrontation with my Complicity": Paratextual Self-Encounters in Diaries of the Second World War', in *Contested Selves: Life Writing and German Culture*, ed. by Katja Herges and Elisabeth Krimmer (Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2021), pp. 147-66
- Soukup, Uwe, 'Ein paradoxes Leben', in Sebastian Haffner, *Als Engländer maskiert: Ein Gespräch mit Jutta Krug über das Exil* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2004), pp. 67-111.
- , *Ich bin nun mal Deutscher: Sebastian Haffner. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2001)
- Stone, Dan, 'Anti-Fascist Europe Comes to Britain: Theorising Fascism as a Contribution to Defeating It', in *Varieties of Anti-Fascism: Britain in the Inter-War Period*, ed. by Nigel Copsey and Andrzej Olechnowicz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 183-201
- Taylor, Charles, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1989)
- Ullrich, Volker, 'Eine fulminante Entdeckung: Sebastian Haffners Erinnerungen *Geschichte eines Deutschen* aus dem Jahre 1939', *Die Zeit*, 7 September 2000
- Welzer, Harald, 'On Killing and Morality: How Normal People Become Mass Murderers', in *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers, Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. by Jensen Szejnmann and Olaf and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 165-81
- Roger Woods, 'Introduction: The Purposes and Problems of German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century', in *German Life Writing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Birgit Dahlke, Dennis Tate, and Roger Woods (Rochester, N. Y.: Camden House, 2010), pp. 1-24

Ellen Pilsworth is Lecturer in German and Translation Studies at the University of Reading. She has published articles on German literature and culture from the eighteenth-century to the present, and is co-editor of *Nationalism before the Nation State: Literary Constructions of Inclusion, Exclusion, and Self-Definition (1756–1871)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

Ethics Approval was not required for this article.