



Jumping into the unknown

*Hört ihr den Klang der Trommeln?
Fühlt ihr, wie der Bass vibriert?
Wie jede Note unseren Status
Immer weiter zementiert?¹*

¹ Nachtmahr (2021): *Nicht wie sie*.

The music carries me away and I surrender to it. The bass captivates me and I smile quietly to myself. For a long time, I hesitated before going to a concert. I thought about the incidents in Bâle and Hanover² – places whose shadows held me back. But now I am standing here and I am glad I bought tickets and came. For years, L'Âme Immortelle was a familiar name to me, a constant companion through dark soundscapes since the early 2000s. Then I danced to I Hate Berlin at the after-show party of my first concert and was fascinated. The fact that it was also my birthday somehow seemed fitting. And now I'm celebrating into the night on this 13th of December.

The band, with which I have many memories from my youth (even though I only saw them live for the first time this year), weaves lyrics that I find intriguingly beautiful. Nachtmahr, on the other hand, captivated me from the very beginning: it was the music, fused with Thomas Rainer's unmistakable voice, that made everything vibrate – full of energy, raw and immediate.

I am most fascinated by songs that see themselves as countering the norm. Although this is understandably a fundamental attitude of the gothic scene, the songs penned by Thomas differ from this once again. The epitome of this counterposition, also to the 'gothic norm,' is the piece *Antithese*.

In order to understand the antithetical pulsating explosion in musical form, and to understand my approach, it must first be noted that the verses quoted at the beginning from *Nicht wie sie* are synonymous with the feeling that grips you when you hear the first notes of many of Nachtmahr's songs.

The driving force of the music also captures the lyrics, which form an 'unbequeme Wahrheit'³ for the listener. Anyone who hears the piece is inevitably confronted with their own ideas about life, but not everyone is able to look into this mirror. In fact, very few are. It is much easier to stare at a distorted image that makes life a little easier and allows one to follow the crowd without subjecting their motives, actions and ideologies to closer scrutiny. It is so much more comfortable.

We live in a society that likes to punish those who are different or who choose to follow their own path. How easy it is to push all the grey and lifeless figures we call

² In both cases, the topos of uniform fetishism was interpreted as a symbol of right-wing extremist ideology and thus assumed to have a political orientation, which subsequently led to violent clashes. In interviews and on his social media channels, Thomas Rainer takes a stance, sometimes explicitly, sometimes subtly, against any form of extremism, especially right-wing and left-wing populism. Against this backdrop, the uniform aesthetic appears to be a deliberate counterpoint in the contexts in question. For more on this topic, please refer to an interview with Oswald Henke, frontman of the band Goethes Erben, which was published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* on 5 June 2017 (read [here](#)). In it, Henke explains his views on the issue of uniform aesthetics within the scene. A further statement on the concert cancellation in 2024 is available on Nachtmahr's [official Facebook account](#).

³ If not stated otherwise, the following quotes are taken from the song *Antithese* (2019).

humans around in their designated lanes. We have become powerless puppets in a dull, uninspired world, following strings that we would rather deny than cut with vehemence. We prefer to fragment our souls in favour of a conformist and supposedly secure existence.

We accept moments of inner discomfort because they are easier to bear than rejection by society. It is easier for most people to ignore themselves than to take a stand and risk being excluded from everything. For example, someone may not dare to risk their job just to take a public stand on political, social or environmental issues, because this could result in them losing their job.

At the end, Thomas Rainer criticises the fact that the 'Rockstarmasken' are only worn at the weekend, while during the week people selling 'Bausparverträge'. These verses bring together thesis and antithesis: while the antithetical, the wild, is embodied in the form of rock star masks, for most people they are just masks; their true selves are revealed in everyday bourgeois life, in the sale of 'Bausparverträge'. The song opposes this very bigotry, accusing the mask wearers of hypocrisy.

However, if we consider the average person, as described too by Schopenhauer⁴, it is impossible for this person to break out of their 'emptiness and monotony' other than by conforming and rebelling just enough to remain socially acceptable and appear charming. For Schopenhauer, average means that the person in question has only a moderately warm inner fire, but then again, Schopenhauer was also an extremely pessimistic person.

However, when taking external circumstances into account, a different picture of mediocrity emerges. Caught in the sticky threads of mediocrity – spun from money, political and social engagement, desires and the compulsion to submit to an order that one fundamentally rejects – one adapts, just to prevent the net in which one has long been entangled from tightening. Meanwhile, the fat spider rubs its legs: relishing, patient, ready to envelop its prey with more strands. And so our struggle ends: motionless, caught in the web of our own self-deception.

In many professions, you become a corporate goth and conform, because somehow you have to finance your rock star persona at the weekend. This is the case for most people who do not build their artistic existence as their main profession. At the same time, these circumstances also require that behaviours and attitudes considered marginal by society be discarded. In my profession, for example, it is essential to behave neutrally in everyday life and not to take a political stance.

⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer (1851): *Die Parabel von den Stachelschweinen*.

And that is necessary in this case, because any influence here must be limited to empowering learners to develop their own attitudes. These two worlds can only be tolerated with a mask. Nevertheless, in this case it is of central importance to separate the two worlds. Here, 'restrained licentiousness' is the driving force behind achieving small-scale change in society so that no 'misfortune happens'. So there are several paths to the moment of feeling the elation and grandeur of a society that has dared to take the leap to change.

Mediocrity, as described by both Arthur Schopenhauer and Thomas Rainer, manifests itself in different ways, 'with controlled controversy and limited rebellion' as well as in the fundamental calculation of all eventualities. We calculate how far we can lean out of the proverbial window without risking a fall. We avoid breaking rules, and dancing outside the norm is not even considered. «weil sich das [nun einfach] nicht gehört».

However, the song clearly takes a stand against this: cowardice and fear are replaced by their antithesis, the nemesis of the ordinary comes in the form of hard bass and the excess to which *Nachtmahr* is committed.⁵ The work should break ranks, should disturb, break rules, tear down the world of lies that those who had carefully constructed it behind the mask of social norms.

But what if the furious dance around boundless rebellion leads to a catastrophic collision? Not everyone is equipped to seek confrontation. Those who pursue seemingly conventional professions during the week are not always merely cowardly or fearful.

Some people seek out small but significant acts of rebellion within the confines of control, which may seem insignificant as individual entities but can make a difference when taken as a whole. Not everyone can be an exceptional person according to Schopenhauer. These people may nevertheless try to do their part and wear corporate suits as a masquerade. They are unable to break away completely.

Nevertheless, they all contribute to our society and help to make change possible – even for those who disrupt society by being different. The world, especially now, needs fundamental change – one would wish for the complete demolition of the world of lies as it presents itself to us today, one would wish for a newly defined framework, «damit kein Unglück passiert».

But none of this is possible in a world that needs change as much as it rejects it. Behaviour such as that presented in the song's conclusion would be doomed to failure. That is why rebellion that is limited and controlled may have a better chance

⁵ See lyrics of *Nicht wie sie*.

of success than escalation. The truth is too uncomfortable for people to want to hear it these days. They prefer to escape into their world of lies. And it is precisely this world that must be unmasked piece by piece.

For only then will it be possible to learn to fly again:

*Mit den Füßen auf dem Boden
Bleibt der Weg zum Himmel weit
Denn wer fliegen will, muss springen
Doch dazu seid ihr nicht bereit.*

To prevent it from becoming a leap into nothingness, the ground must be prepared. And the average person needs someone to take them by the hand and jump with them. Only then can we grow wings with which to span the world.