
Johnson-Jahrbuch

Band 6/1999

Herausgegeben von
Ulrich Fries und Holger Helbig

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

Redaktion: Holger Helbig

Umschlagbild: Andreas Lemberg, Uwe Johnson III, Öl auf Leinwand

Die Deutsche Bibliothek – CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Johnson-Jahrbuch. –

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

Erscheint jährl. – Aufnahme nach Bd. 1. 1994

ISSN 0945-9227

Bd. 1. 1994 –

ISBN 3-525-20905-3

© 1999, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht in Göttingen. – Printed in Germany.
Alle Rechte vorbehalten. Das Werk einschließlich seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar. Das gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

Satz: Competext, Heidenrod

Druck und Bindung: Hubert & Co., Göttingen

Deborah L. Horzen

Fitting the News to the Novel

Uwe Johnson's Use of *The New York Times* in *Jahrestage*

The fact that Gesine Cresspahl is living in New York City in August 1967 is news to no one. But the significance of her »American experience« in *Jahrestage* is for the most part underappreciated. In Uwe Johnson's novel, Gesine's intensive effort at the reconstruction and reinterpretation of past events represents an exhaustive examination of twentieth century German history. Unfolding together with the reconstructive narrative are the political and social crises which shape the American Vietnam War era. Escalating US involvement in Southeast Asia is coupled with decreasing public support of the war effort. Racial tensions at home, along with increased crime and violence in the inner city, signal the disintegration of urban America to many observers. Just around the corner from her Riverside Drive apartment Gesine observes first-hand the debilitating effects of poverty, social and economic segregation, and urban crime. Her detailed descriptions of city life along with the current events culled on an almost daily basis from *The New York Times* convey a realistic, vibrant and often gritty portrayal of the U.S. during the late Sixties. The events and issues included in the narrative range from domestic problems to international developments in Cold War politics. Johnson does not intend them to be an accurate summation of the day's headlines, but instead a reflection of Gesine's own agenda.

While Gesine's devotion to *The New York Times* has been duly noted with varying degrees of enthusiasm, most critics have declined to undertake a closer examination of the newspaper's role despite Johnson's numerous invitations within the text to do so. Consistently, newspaper

items are accepted by critics at face value as citations rather than as narrative passages in their own right. In addition, the newspaper's national role and reputation during the late Sixties is more significant for the novel than the current state of *Jahrestage* scholarship would belie. The voluminous number of items taken from the pages of *The New York Times* and the unique role they play in the construction of Johnson's *Amerikabild* set this novel apart from other post-war works which address Germany's recent past. Removed from the web of political and social references provided by *The New York Times* and the American Vietnam War era, *Jahrestage* is just another historical novel.

Of particular importance to the novel's assessment is the striking difference between the newspaper items in their original documentary context and their narrative restatement in the text. While Johnson's extensive use of *The New York Times* implies a certain journalistic objectivity in describing events, nothing could be further from the truth when comparing his account with the original articles. The subsequent analysis of the newspaper's role in *Jahrestage* will attempt to correct this oversight in existing Johnson scholarship.

The incorporation of print and visual media, as well as the narrative techniques used to mimic them, is well-established in modern fiction. These techniques are especially distinct in the *Großstadtroman*,¹ a genre to which *Jahrestage* pays obvious tribute. Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and John Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer* both feature narrative devices adapted from other media to create an idiom which reflects the pace, fragmentation and alienation symptomatic of modern urban life. Two other novels published at roughly the same time as the first volume of *Jahrestage* also rely heavily on documentary materials to chronicle American political and social developments during the Vietnam War era. A variety of tabloids, including *The National Inquirer* and *The New York Post*, are quoted in Jürg Federspiel's *Museum des Hasses* (1969). Reinhard Lettau takes articles from *The Los Angeles Times* as his point of departure for America-bashing in *Täglicher Faschismus. Amerikanische Evidenz aus 6 Monaten* (1971). Both works use newspaper accounts to substantiate views which are intensely critical of the US. Johnson, however, sees his use of *The New York Times* as distinctly different in that the paper functions on

1 Bauschinger, Sigrid: Mythos Manhattan. Die Faszination einer Stadt, in: Sigrid Bauschinger/Horst Denkler/Wilfried Malsch (eds.), *Amerika in der deutschen Literatur. Neue Welt – Nordamerika – USA*, Stuttgart 1975, p. 382–397, here 390. See also Klotz, Volker: *Die erzählte Stadt. Ein Sujet als Herausforderung des Romans von Lesage bis Döblin*, München 1969.

a much more sophisticated level as an augmentation of Gesine's consciousness.² The novel's present-day narrative is dominated by Gesine's versions of items from *The New York Times* which allows Johnson to pick and choose only those items of thematic significance for the narrative. Gesine, it is implied, becomes an extension of the paper in its function as »das Bewußtsein des Tages.«³ However, the impression that the narrative reflects the broad spectrum of news events on any given day is a misleading one.

The general sentiment in criticism is that passages from *The New York Times* function within the novel both as a shorthand rendition of contemporary reality and as an objective landscape against which Gesine's examination of the past unfolds. In reality, they comprise a significant aspect of Gesine's subjective experience. In an interview with Manfred Durzak, Johnson denies that the paper functions merely as another »Erzählmedium« within the novel: »Das ist nicht etwas, was der Erzähler eingerichtet hat, um bestimmte Sachen der Wirklichkeit besser in den Griff zu kriegen.«⁴ Another misconception in criticism assumes the journalistic objectivity of *The New York Times* and of the items which are reported in the novel. It is clear from the editorial decisions Johnson makes in transcribing and translating passages from *The New York Times* that he does not intend them to be objective representations of reality. However, many analyses of *Jahrestage* unquestioningly accept these materials at face value. Kurt Fickert, for instance, considers the image of reality created by the paper to be an objective backdrop which enables a »projection of the individual conscience against the background of the moral neutrality of public events.« He further characterizes Johnson's »nonjudgemental« use of individual items within the text as a device with which the author can »pursue his theme of the individual in confrontation with the forces of history in his era.«⁵ But any »moral neutrality« on the part of the paper

2 According to Johnson: »Ich habe das [Material aus der *The New York Times*] eben nicht isoliert, sondern in das Subjekt mithineingenommen, während Dos Passos das seinen Subjekten gegenüberstellt als Interpretation, als Summary, als Zusammenfassung, wie Sie wollen.« Durzak, Manfred: Dieser langsame Weg zu einer größeren Genauigkeit, in: D.M., Gespräche über den Roman. Formbestimmungen und Analysen, Frankfurt am Main 1976, p. 428-460, here 447.

3 Stoehr, Ingo R.: »Mit verzögerter Phantasie.« Gespräch mit Eberhard Fahlke, in: Dimension². Contemporary German-Language Literature 1, 1994, p. 260-283, here 268.

4 Durzak, Dieser langsame Weg (note 2), p. 445.

5 Fickert, Kurt: Documenting the Novel: Uwe Johnson's Novel »Jahrestage,« in: Germanic Notes 18, 1987, p. 13-16, here 14f.

is highly questionable. Contrary to Fickert's contention, Johnson's incorporation of contemporary reality – accomplished primarily throughout the novel's many *New York Times* passages – produces a deliberately skewed view of the US in the late Sixties.

The role of *The New York Times* in *Jahrestage* has been largely dismissed as a simple structural mechanism or as a convenient shorthand for the inclusion of »die Wirklichkeit der weißen amerikanischen Mittelschicht,«⁶ which lies outside the realm of Gesine's immediate experience. One critic likens the *New York Times* passages to »Opium für exilierte Mecklenburger.«⁷ In his tepid review of the novel's English translation, Theodore Ziolkowski complains about the »relentless method« of Johnson's daily news recaps.⁸ Christian Gebert is not alone in finding Johnson's excessive penchant for citation unnecessary and somewhat presumptuous.⁹ Joachim Kaiser plainly exhibits relief at the paper's diminished role in the novel's concluding volume: »Jetzt darf freilich das Magazin ›Time‹ nicht mehr erwähnt werden, weil doch die im Band IV Gott sei Dank nicht mehr so dominierende ›New York Times‹ die einzige Informationsquelle sein soll.«¹⁰ In his review of the same volume even Johnson admirer Rolf Becker finally admits an amicable frustration with Gesine's newspaper addiction: »Schon damals hatten wir uns gewünscht, die gewissenhafte Leserin Gesine möge doch ab und zu eine Nummer der fabelhaften Zeitung überschlagen.«¹¹ In her comparative study, *Mythos Manhattan. Die Faszination einer Stadt*, Sigrid Bauschinger asks wryly: »Was

6 Storz-Sahl, Sigrun: Erinnerung und Erfahrung. Geschichtsphilosophie und ästhetische Erfahrung in Uwe Johnsons »Jahrestagen,« Frankfurt am Main 1988, p. 163.

7 Demetz, Peter: Uwe Johnsons Blick in die Epoche, in: Johnsons »Jahrestage,« ed. Michael Bengel, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 194–200, here 195.

8 Ziolkowski, Theodore: Living with Germany on Riverside Drive, *New York Times* 8 Nov. 1987, p. 61.

9 »Was wir so in diesem Roman über New York und Amerika erfahren, ist einmal die zumeist lediglich durch Zitation vermittelte und daher unverbindliche Realität [...] verspielte Zitatcollage aus der NYT [...]. Es scheint nur eine pflichtmäßige moralische Verbeugung vor dem Zeitgeist, wenn da ständig Vietnam, KZ-Prozesse in der Bundesrepublik, Studentendemonstrationen und Rassenunruhen bloß zitiert werden. ›Die NYT hält für nötig, daß wir dies wissen.‹ – Vor allem Johnson hält es für nötig, der sie für uns fleißig abschrieb. ›Süss hev'ck mi nich vel dacht.‹ Gebert, Christian: United States of Mecklenburg, in: Johnsons »Jahrestage« (note 7), p. 147–151, here 149.

10 Kaiser, Joachim: Für wenn wir tot sind, in: Johnsons »Jahrestage« (note 7), p. 168–176, here 175.

11 Becker, Rolf: Eine Bitte für die Stunde des Sterbens, in: Johnsons »Jahrestage« (note 7), p. 187–193, here 189.

jedoch wären die Jahrestage ohne die ›New York Times‹?¹² The novel's American setting and the prominent role of *The New York Times* are generally considered to be superfluous to Gesine's ›primary‹ story. One reader found the newspaper items in the first volume – ›dieses Zusammengeschnibbelte‹ – so tedious that he marked all the Jerichow passages in red, and proceeded to read what he considered the essential story in one sitting ›ohne den New Yorker Tagebuchballast.‹¹³

Oftentimes, statements regarding *The New York Times* and the US in the late Sixties are riddled with inaccuracies and bias, if not overt hostility. Roland Wiegenstein, for example, seizes Johnson's frequent mention of the Vietnam War as an opportunity to vent his political spleen: ›Zunächst sind das Begebenheiten aus dem Krieg in Vietnam, bis hin zum täglichen Body-count – man hat das ja rasch vergessen (in den USA will man es vergessen, darum auch hat man sich Ronald Reagan zum Präsidenten gewählt).‹¹⁴ In his characterization of Johnson's use of newspaper items as ›simple Eselsbrücken,‹ even Marcel Reich-Ranicki questions what, specifically, an American newspaper brings to Johnson's narrative.¹⁵ The end result is that the preponderance of *Jahrestage* criticism at best marginalizes, or at worst ignores, a significant portion of the novel.

Contemporary events that catch Gesine's attention frequently begin or end her daily entries. These newspaper passages provide access to events outside the realm of her immediate experience, which influences her personal life by providing a continuous impetus for discussion and reflection. As she often reads during her daily commute, items culled from the paper also physically mark her transition from home to work. On a physical level Gesine uses it to shield her from unwanted contact

12 Bauschinger, *Mythos Manhattan* (note 1), p. 389.

13 Mecklenburg, Norbert: Leseerfahrungen mit Johnsons ›Jahrestagen‹, in: text + kritik: Uwe Johnson 65/66, 1980, p. 48–62, here 62.

14 Wiegenstein, Roland H.: Johnson lesen. Vorschläge zu den ›Jahrestagen 1–4,‹ in: Johnsons ›Jahrestage‹ (note 7), p. 203–218, here 206.

15 ›Überdies hatte ich oft den Eindruck, daß Gesine Cresspahl erst während ihres Amerikaaufenthalts dazu kam, westliche Zeitungen zu lesen, weshalb sie die ›New York Times‹ insgeheim immer mit dem ›Neuen Deutschland‹ vergleicht. Denn was sie an der ›New York Times‹ verwundert und was sie mit offensichtlichem und nur zuweilen ironisch gedämpftem Respekt hervorhebt, gilt mehr oder weniger auch für einige westeuropäische Blätter. Und wozu hat Johnson seine Gesine nach New York geschickt, wenn das, was sie über Amerika notiert, zum großen Teil doch auf Zeitungslektüre beruht? In Düsseldorf läßt sich die ›New York Times‹ ebenfalls abonnieren und studieren.‹ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Uwe Johnsons neuer Roman, in: Johnsons ›Jahrestage‹ (note 7), p. 135–142, here 139.

on the subway, as an umbrella and as a club.¹⁶ The news items also function as transitional passages from the present-day to the retrospective narrative. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, *The New York Times* represents portable reference to a larger reality in which Gesine is an observer, not a player.

The issues of greatest interest to Gesine – Vietnam, urban crime and the news from Europe – are experienced almost exclusively through the newspaper, which even at best can only provide »an awesomely minuscule window on the world.«¹⁷ While the rest of the world has a ringside view of the »television war« from their sofas, she limits herself to this single news source, to which she is completely devoted: »Die Kundin kauft keine Zeitung als die New York Times.«¹⁸ A day without the paper hardly registers, »als sei nur mit ihr der Tag zu beweisen« (JT, 15). While Gesine also reads *Der Spiegel* regularly, and occasionally listens to the radio, these news sources play only a peripheral role in the narrative. And unlike the majority of middle-class New Yorkers, the Cresspahl's have no television in their apartment. When Marie gets one in order to watch Robert Kennedy's funeral, the maudlin coverage only confirms Gesine's prejudices against television (JT, 1302). Because Gesine depends almost exclusively on *The New York Times* for news, she forms a view of events patently different from mainstream America, for whom television is the primary source of information.

For most of the twentieth century *The New York Times* has dominated the print media. What has consistently distinguished the paper from its competition is a commitment to reporting international news, along with a formidable reputation for accuracy and depth of reporting. *Der Spiegel* calls the paper »ein enzyklopädisches Blatt,« which consistently boasts detailed coverage across the globe. According to *Editor and Publisher*, »as nearly as a newspaper can be, (*The New York Times*) is a history of one day in the world of events.«¹⁹ The sheer volume of news covered by *The New York Times* is prohibitive. The newspaper's publisher during the 1960s, Arthur »Punch« Suzberger, claimed that »anybody who claims to read the entire paper every day is either the world's

16 Alber, Martin: Gesine Cresspahl und die »New York Times«. Zeitungstexte in Uwe Johnsons Roman »Jahrestage,« Diss. Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität 1990, p. 66.

17 Adams, William C. (ed.): *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, Norwood, New Jersey 1982, p. 4.

18 Johnson, Uwe: *Jahrestage*. Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl, Bd. I-IV, Frankfurt am Main 1970–1983, p. 14.

19 *Editor and Publisher* 29 May 1965, p. 8.

fastest reader or the world's biggest liar.«²⁰ For editor James Reston, columnist and former Washington Bureau Chief for *The New York Times*, the paper's significance transcends the boundaries of conventional journalism: »Unsere oberste Verpflichtung gilt dem Historiker, der in 50 Jahren leben wird. Die ›Times‹ ist – einmalig für eine Zeitung – Quellenmaterial, und wir dürfen den Brunnen der Geschichte nicht vergiften.«²¹ The significance of the paper's self-perceived role of historical chronicle was certainly not lost on Johnson, and had a profound influence on *Jahrestage*.

The newspaper's international reputation has resulted in some obvious misconceptions about the paper's reading audience. Durzak describes the paper as an »Intellektuellen-Zeitung« and an »Eitelblatt [...] fast eine Art Status-Symbol,« whose pages fuel the chit-chat of intellectual dilettantes at cocktail parties.²² There is a tendency to characterize *The New York Times* as an ideologically conservative and elitist newspaper, but during the Sixties it was perceived as the ringleader of a liberal and often antagonistic group of Northeastern newspapers. Its critics accuse the paper of elitism and of protecting the same establishment that it reports on,²³ but a recent CBS news segment describes the paper as historically liberal on social issues and middle-of-the-road in almost all other aspects. The paper did have a well-deserved reputation for stuffiness. In the late Sixties the eight-column-a-page layout was considered outdated. The paper was also criticized for mediocre pictures and editing, as well as copy which was considered »stilted, wordy and dull.«²⁴

Despite, or perhaps because of the paper's reputation, Gesine awards her medium of choice »die höchste Glaubwürdigkeit,«²⁵ according to Sigrun Storz-Sahl, especially when comparing it to other major papers such as the *Journal-American* and *The New York Post*. Gesine settles on *The New York Times* soon after her arrival in the United States, and remains a devoted – even obsessive – reader. Initially though, she is governed by sentimentality rather than intellectual considerations.²⁶ What Storz-Sahl

20 *The Kingdom and the Cabbage*, Time 15 Aug. 1977, p. 72-81, here p. 73.

21 *New York Times: Brunnen der Geschichte*, Der Spiegel, 13 May 1968, p. 140.

22 Durzak, *Dieser langsame Weg* (note 2), p. 444.

23 CBS Sunday Morning, CBS, WCPX Orlando, 30 Jun. 1996.

24 *The Kingdom and the Cabbage* (note 20), p. 74.

25 Storz-Sahl, *Erinnerung und Erfahrung* (note 6), p. 162.

26 »Als wir im April 1961 nach New York kamen, sie hatten für uns noch an Zeitungen die News, den Journal-American, das World-Telegram & Sun, die Post, die Herald Tribune, das Wall Street Journal, die Long Island Press, und die Times. Ich habe die Times gekauft wegen ihrer britischen Abstammung, und wußte noch nicht einmal,

does not mention is that when the novel begins *The New York Times* is the city's only major non-specialized newspaper still in existence. *The New York World-Journal Tribune* went out of business in 1966, preceding the demise of the *New York Herald-Tribune* by just a few months.²⁷ When the dust cleared, *The New York Times* was the only reputable daily city paper left standing.

The use of *The New York Times* as a narrative medium is a variation on Johnson's narrative model, in which multiple voices and sources are used to synthesize scenarios from which »eine Version der Wirklichkeit« emerges. His prose typically includes elements of documentary and pseudo-documentary materials. Earlier novels such as *Mutmassungen über Jakob*, *Das dritte Buch über Achim*, as well as his tribute to Ingeborg Bachmann, *Eine Reise nach Klagenfurt*, all include information gleaned from official or otherwise »objective« sources. Although the documentary materials included in the two earlier novels are manufactured by the author, their documentary character implies a certain incorruptible objectivity within the context of the work. The information is presented as both accurate and unbiased.

However, from the moment of their injection into the narrative these items are subjected to incessant reevaluation as circumstances change or new information surfaces. The relevance and verity of information within the narrative itself can only be speculated upon, since the narrative context is in constant flux. More often than not the introduction of a new documentary source necessitates the reevaluation of previous perceptions and conclusions on the part of the reader. The ensuing speculation then propels the narrative in a previously unconsidered direction. In some instances, contradictions remain intentionally unresolved within the confines of the narrative. This narrative stance, so intrinsic to Johnson's fiction, is further emphasized by the titles of the two earlier novels, as well as Johnson's working title for the Achim biography (i.e. »Beschreibung einer Beschreibung«).

Most critics agree that the newspaper items recounted in the narrative appear as they are comprehended by Gesine. Therefore, the items which capture her attention can be considered a direct reflection of her consciousness. The selected items ostensibly chronicle Gesine's present, but

daß sie zu der Minorität gehörte, die gegen Richard Nixon John Kennedy als Präsidenten gewünscht hatte« (JT, 513f.).

27 Dinsmore, Herman H.: *All the News that Fits. A Critical Analysis of the News and Editorial Contents of the New York Times*, New Rochelle N.Y. 1969, p. 23.

in addition reveal a great deal about Gesine herself. Often items from the newspaper furnish the impulse for further reflection and criticism, or trigger memories of the past. Storz-Sahl takes Johnson at his word that the *New York Times* passages are reported solely from Gesine's point of view: »in diesem Sinne ist die Auswahl der zitierten Artikel an Gesines Persönlichkeit gebunden.«²⁸ Bauschinger and Lennox, who both point to the limited scope of the *New York Times* material, are more inclined to ascribe the items ultimately to Johnson. Durzak, on the other hand, is tempted to assign this discourse its own narrative identity. In his detailed survey of various narrative devices in Johnson's fiction Fickert dismisses the complexity of the *New York Times* passages by characterizing the items as »excerpts from articles [...] translated by Johnson in his capacity as the novel's narrator.«²⁹ This filtered – or refracted – version of the day's news accounts for the fragmentary, unlinked presentation of the information. However, this explanation is not completely satisfactory. As Judith Ryan points out: »Gesine does not often comment on these extracts; her attitude, her political views, are deduced from recorded conversations and reminiscences.«³⁰ Presumably, if the reader is permitted to see the paper through Gesine's eyes, then the reader would also be privy to the opinions and associations evoked through reading. But in most instances, the reader has access to only half of this process.

All of the many disparate elements which make up the daily news – from the paper's banner to the classified ads, and ranging from headlines to everyday minutiae – find their way into the narrative at some point. The paper provides an authentic channel of information about current events, and creates at the same time a virtually infinite narrative background for her reflections and reconstructions. Johnson finds the standard perception of the paper's role, despite its obvious structural and thematic importance in the novel, limited. In his interview with Durzak, Johnson discusses *The New York Times* at length and addresses some misconceptions about its function in *Jahrestage*. Durzak, who characterizes it as »Hilfsmittel des Erzählens,« tries to differentiate between Gesine's private, subjective experiences in New York and a larger, objective reality conveyed through the paper. For Johnson, they are two aspects of the same narrative viewpoint: »die ›New York Times‹ ist kein Erzählmedium,

28 Storz-Sahl, *Erinnerung und Erfahrung* (note 6), p. 165.

29 Fickert, Kurt: *Dialogue with the Reader: The Narrative Stance in Uwe Johnson's Fiction*, New York 1995, p. 91.

30 Ryan, Judith: *The Uncompleted Past*, Detroit 1983, p. 156. See also Bauschinger, *Mythos Manhattan* (note 1), p. 390.

sondern ein Aspekt des subjektiven Zustandes.«³¹ He insists that, by directly incorporating the paper in her daily routine, this alternate version of daily events is likewise subordinate to Gesine's particular version of reality. As Ulrich Fries points out, the items in *The New York Times* are not, strictly speaking, documentary: »das Sprachmaterial, das von dem Ausdruck ›dokumentarisch‹ erfaßt werden kann, existiert überhaupt nicht in seiner ursprünglichen Form, sondern nur als Übersetzung.«³²

The primary role of documentary materials is to substantiate a version – or perhaps multiple versions – of reality. In *Jahrestage*, Johnson synthesizes an accurate and detailed depiction of New York City and life in the United States during the late 1960s. His *Amerikabild* is based in large part on his own first-hand observations and are further authenticated by items from *The New York Times*. By firmly anchoring Gesine's story in a familiar and exceedingly well-documented reality, the disparity between fiction and nonfiction, as well as that between history and subjective reality, is in large part suspended.

Gesine's selection process is the natural extension of the paper's editing practice which evaluates, selects, places and shapes daily events. In almost all instances the news items that appear in the narrative are succinct paraphrases of at times quite lengthy articles. There are no passages in the novel which directly cite *The New York Times* in English. Indeed, there are only a handful of items in the narrative which can be considered verbatim translations, the longest of which is Gesine's own translation of the Prague Manifest (JT, 1437f.). Interestingly enough, it is not copyrighted. These passages range from weather reports to articles on acts of violence which in the text are followed with a copyright notice. Weather reports are the most common. The statistical rendition of reality contained in such passages – temperature, humidity, precipitation, cloud cover – is a matter of record. There is only one version of events which are indisputable and historically verifiable – either it rained or it did not. Similarly, in his role as the »Genosse Schriftsteller« Johnson easily looks up weather data needed for Gesine's historical narrative. The January 5 entry consists primarily of copyrighted material, including a numerical tally of losses for the week and the previous year in Vietnam (not copyrighted), the results of a ninety minute battle near Saigon, a notice of American weapons sales abroad, and the sentencing of black activist writer LeRoi Jones (JT, 552f.). The entry gives the impression

31 Durzak, *Dieser langsame Weg* (note 2), p. 445.

32 Fries, Ulrich: *Uwe Johnsons »Jahrestage.« Erzählstruktur und Politische Subjektivität*, Göttingen 1990, p. 110.

that the reader is privy to all the same information as Gesine and that the narrative reflects their relative news value. However, the first item is not cited in its entirety and the second is apparently taken from the »Daily News Summary and Index,« usually located on the back page of section A. While the other two items are only one paragraph in length, the LeRoi Jones article takes up over two pages. Even then, the article is dealt with in its entirety. Gesine apparently skips a portion, and notes cryptically in her abridged version, »... will be filed« (JT, 554). This one of the more obvious instances where the narrator points to the paper as a text independent of the novel and prods the reader to do his or her own research.

In general, Johnson's use of *The New York Times* items in the novel is usually much more sophisticated in terms of translation, content and form. The final narrative form represents Johnson's own interpretive translation, although the newspaper passages are tentatively credited to Gesine in the text. In numerous instances Johnson's scrapbooks, which contain the original articles, show his translation notes in the margins. These are later incorporated verbatim into the narrative. In all aspects, the version of reality which emerges in *Jahrestage* in the guise of paraphrased articles from *The New York Times* is highly distilled. Although the material is based on a single documentary source, it is subject to the filters of selection, paraphrase, translation and transposition. The newspaper, as it is utilized in the novel, maps the interior landscape of Gesine's psyche at the same time that it discloses the sociopolitical terrain of the late 1960s.

Due to the sheer volume of information found daily in *The New York Times*, the majority of items understandably fall by the wayside. It is in this respect that Johnson's narrative agenda is the inverse of the newspaper's. The paper's focus is on events of national and international consequence. Articles on individuals are limited to the »movers and shakers« of public life. Other reports, such as those detailing violent crimes and trial proceedings, become newsworthy only because they are unusual and/or sensational. While it is important to report »All the News Fit to Print« (the paper's own mission slogan), the priority is to sell papers. Gesine is well aware of how placement and editing affects perception of daily news: »Auf fünfzehn mal dreiundzwanzig Zoll, acht Spalten, bietet sie über zwanzig Geschichten zur freien Auswahl. Sie nennt einen Angeklagten noch nicht schuldig. Von den täglichen zwei Morden in der Stadt erwähnt sie nur die lehrreichen. Sie nennt den Präsidenten nicht bei seinem Vornamen, allenfalls das Opfer eines Mordes.« (JT, 39) Whether

in *The New York Times* or in *Jahrestage* itself, what emerges from the overload of information is an agenda delineating particular areas of interest. The version of the day's events that emerges in *Jahrestage* is a distillation of the total daily news output, as Gesine focuses on stories which have particular significance for her. With regularity Gesine's interest is captured by seemingly minor incidents and the individuals affected by them, which are by no stretch front-page news. Often the subjects are the victims of violent crime, whose duly reported story is buried deep in the A Section.

While *The New York Times* is intimately linked to Gesine's process of reconstruction and reevaluation, it is most importantly the concrete manifestation of the modern-day sociopolitical reality with which Gesine must either come to terms or reject. The positioning of newspaper items in the narrative points to their importance. Their proximity in the text to the historical narrative initiates a continuous friction between the two narrative strands. However, the relationship between the past and present is rarely stated. In more than one instance, the separation between past and present becomes indiscernible. When Gesine first arrives in New York in 1961 she quickly becomes discouraged in her search for an affordable apartment, as she is repeatedly brought face to face with blatant racial discrimination. Finally, she locates a promising prospect in Queens but is appalled by the agent's unabashed prejudices. He tells the Cresspahls, whom he assumes to be Jewish: »Haben Sie keine Sorge, wir halten die shwartzes schon draußen.« In an uncharacteristically dramatic moment she storms out of the room, but not before spitting out, »you bastard of a Jew« (JT, 21). This confrontation precipitates Gesine's hurried decision to return to Germany: »Unter solchen Leuten ist nicht zu Leben« (ibid.). It has long been assumed that Gesine is at the airport, waiting for her flight, when she reads: »Die westdeutsche Regierung will die Verjährung für Morde und Massenausrottung in der Nazizeit ganz und gar aufheben, vielleicht« (ibid.). However, the article is actually part of the contemporary narrative and appears in the August 24, 1967 edition of *The New York Times*. The statute of limitations for Nazi capital crimes is set to expire in 1969. The bill, originally approved by the Adenauer government five years earlier, is currently in committee. Culpability for war crimes would be extended through 1979, although the Minister of Justice, Gustav Heinemann, still finds this unsatisfactory.³³ The placement

33 Binder, David: Extension Sought for Trying Nazis, in: *New York Times* 24 Aug. 1967, p. A11.

of the item in the narrative both justifies her decision to stay in the US and at the same time her remark becomes a much broader condemnation of racial prejudice wherever it surfaces. »Solche Leute« exist in both societies, along with those who passively tolerate such attitudes. According to Johnson: »Die guten Leute wollen eine gute Welt; die guten Leute tun nichts dazu.«³⁴ The final news item hints at Gesine's own thoughts as she reflects on the day's news as a whole: »Die leichte Artillerie kann man mit der Post bestellen, aber für eine Pistole braucht man einen Waffenschein, und sie traut sich nicht zur Polizei« (ibid.). The statement, which comes almost as an afterthought, alludes to H. Rap Brown's prophecy of the coming racial war and the »private Patrioten« armed to the teeth against vague enemies. The link between past and present – if apparent at all in the narrative – is at best loosely associative. The primary link is through Gesine who is simultaneously the subject and object on both levels.

It is important at some point to distinguish between the visual and thematic relationship of various items in their original newspaper format and their new context within the narrative itself. Like the original editor, Gesine's views and interests affect her selection, placement and portrayal of news. Once the item is removed from the original context of competing stories or side-bar articles, and is placed in its new context, the story's significance and slant can and often does change significantly. Differences in editorial viewpoint account for differences in front-page content from paper to paper. Another factor is the role of translation, and differences both subtle and overt between the narrative and its source. Gesine's viewpoint, as exhibited in the seemingly minute editorial and translation decisions she makes on a regular basis, is an integral aspect of the narrative.

There are certain topics which regularly, and somewhat predictably, catch Gesine's eye, all of which are logical in context of her personal experience and current environment. Events in Europe, New York City, and Vietnam as well as those which come under the aegis of socialism loosely define her areas of interest. Her attention to some items stems from her personal history. Items documenting the resurgence of the Neo-Nazis in the Federal Republic, former Nazis in government, and the continuing war trials reinforce the necessity of Gesine's confrontation with the past. At the same time West Germany's failure on a national

34 Johnson, Uwe: Über eine Haltung des Protestierens, in: U.J., Berliner Sachen, Frankfurt am Main 1985, p. 95f.

political level to come to terms with National Socialism and its atrocities, lends credence to Gesine's own lack of political involvement. Articles on Europe – especially those dealing with the Prague Spring, Cold War tensions and seemingly minor confrontations between individual and government within the Eastern Block – are frequently incorporated in the narrative regardless of their length or placement in the paper itself. Another area of interest are those reports which deal with issues affecting her immediate environment. This includes such serious topics as urban crime, racial tensions and the justice system as well as metropolitan minutiae from subway construction to garbage strikes. Still other articles capture cataclysmic national events such as the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Senator Robert Kennedy.

Along with the role of the Prague Spring in Gesine Cresspahl's personal story, the Vietnam War is one of the novel's most pervasive and influential thematic and structural components. Of all the issues which figure in the novel, the *New York Times* items concerning the war recur with greatest consistency and frequency. Vietnam's dominance of the news is reflected by the headlines and its unvarying high profile position on the front page of *The New York Times*. More often than not the first item in the paper to catch Gesine's eye has to do with Vietnam. Gesine's concern over the war in Southeast Asia reflected in the text mirrors its prominence in the American psyche as well as the national press.³⁵

For a variety of reasons the importance of the Vietnam War, and the »Vietnam era« as a whole, in *Jahrestage* is frequently eclipsed by the role of the Prague Spring in criticism. As a practical consideration, the failed attempt at reform and the subsequent Russian intervention of Czechoslovakia was of greater relevance to Germany than the Vietnam conflict, in which Germany had no political or military involvement. Critics also point to an apparent drop-off in the news from Southeast Asia in the novel's fourth volume, as Gesine's personal and professional lives become ever more intertwined with the evolving political situation in Czechoslovakia. Another point of contention is that the novel's portrayal of the war from a predominantly mainstream American perspective runs counter to prevailing attitudes among the German intellectual left. Until 1967, polls indicate that the American public generally supported the

35 According to the Gallup Poll, the Vietnam War is also cited above other competing issues as the most important problem facing the U.S. during the years 1966–72. See further William L. Lurch/Peter W. Sperlich: American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam, in: *Western Political Quarterly* 32, 1979, p. 21–44, here 21.

government's policy in Vietnam. Lunch and Shipman describe this lack of public concern as a textbook example of the relationship between the administration and its constituency as long as the situation is perceived to be going well: »As long as the administration seems to have foreign affairs in hand, and nothing seems unduly alarming, the vast majority of citizens are content to follow the President's leadership.«³⁶ Since Gesine turns to *The New York Times*, which has a prominent role in communicating administrative policy and shaping national attitudes, for almost all of her information on the war, the perception of the Vietnam War which is described in *Jahrestage* is very different from that found in *Kursbuch*, or, for that matter, in the writings of Johnson's friends and contemporaries such as Günter Grass and Martin Walser among others.

The Johnson administration's official policy in Vietnam was to wage »a war of attrition and punishment« against the North. To avoid provoking the Chinese, there were no plans for invasion or the bombing of anything other than military targets. However, within these parameters »the punishment was unlimited.«³⁷ The administration sought to prevent any widening of the war, while at the same time forcing the North to the conference table in order to bring about an end to the punishing air war. President Lyndon B. Johnson assured national and international audiences: »We will not be defeated. We will not grow tired. We will not withdraw.«³⁸ His administration, it seemed, was prepared to wait it out. Otherwise, US policy in Southeast Asia was unclear, if not downright misleading. The American public was still in favor of escalation in order to bring the war to a quick conclusion. The year 1967, although it marked a transition both in terms of the level of US involvement and public support, was »the year of the hawk« according to Lunch and Sperlich,³⁹ who base their conclusions on national polls.

It is apparent from the comparison between the original articles and Johnson's narrative that the newspaper passages reflect Gesine's personal agenda rather than the paper's format. However, when it comes to Vietnam, Gesine's personal interests coincide with the paper's priorities, unlike other issues such as the Prague Spring and ongoing Nazi war crimes trials. These accounts are almost always found on the interior pages of the A section. With very few exceptions war news is usually located in

36 Ibid., p. 22.

37 Berry, Nicholas O.: *Foreign Policy and the Press: An Analysis of The New York Times' Coverage of U.S. Foreign Policy*, New York 1990, p. 31f.

38 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 31.

39 Lunch/Sperlich, *American Public Opinion* (note 35), p. 30.

the front page upper outside column, which is reserved for the day's lead article. Here Gesine habitually begins her daily perusal of *The New York Times*: »Am Bahnsteig faltet sie das Blatt einmal und noch einmal längs, damit sie es im Gedränge durch die Uahntür behält und in der Enge zwischen Ellbogen und Schultern die erste Seite des achtspaltigen Stabs von oben bis unten lesen kann« (JT, 14). But accounts of Gesine's reading habits and the implied character of the news passages (i.e. stream-of-consciousness), is at odds with the content of the passages themselves. In the text, they read like headlines and contain few concrete details. Descriptions of first page photos further emphasize the stream-of-consciousness illusion conveyed by the narrative. Supposedly, Gesine's initial impression is derived from the headlines: »sie versucht die Titelzeilen der New York Times zu lesen, wenn sie die Zeitung unter dem Gewicht hervorzupft« (ibid.). Although the items which are included in the narrative are often the same as those which dominate the front page, they are rarely taken from the headlines or even the lead paragraph. When compared with the original edition, it is clear that Gesine's news highlights differ markedly from those of the paper.

From the opening line of the first dated entry in *Jahrestage*, the topic of Vietnam is rarely absent for more than a day or two. Often, articles detailing the war are so devoid of actual content as to be meaningless, as reports are full of statistics and euphemisms. The articles incorporated into the narrative cover a range of issues which make up traditional war coverage: battle reports, assessments, administrative policy, body counts, congressional debate and political posturing. These items through their very repetition often border on the mundane, despite their disturbing content. Gesine's frustration with war reporting is apparent: »Die New York Times nennt heute die Namen der amtlich in Viet Nam getöteten Soldaten aus New York und Umgebung, aber sie gibt nicht an, wieviele aus dem ganzen Lande gefallen sind« (JT, 393). After its thematic importance is well established in the first few weeks, the frequency of Vietnam War items from *The New York Times* falls off somewhat since the news tends to be repetitive. In the novel, the war's prominence diminishes somewhat after August and September. Thereafter the war forms a regular, rhythmic component of narrative structure until the Tet Offensive early in the spring of 1968, when Gesine along with the rest of America is shocked out of her complacency.

The first entry in Gesine's diary begins with a typical header, »21. August, 1967 Montag,« followed by two front page news items from *The New York Times*:

Aufklärendes Wetter in Nordvietnam erlaubte der Luftwaffe Angriffe nördlich von Hanoi. Die Marine bombardierte die Küste mit Flugzeugen und feuerte Achtzollgranaten in die entmilitarisierte Zone. Im Süden wurden vier Hubschrauber abgeschossen. Die Unruhen in New Haven gingen gestern weiter mit Bränden, eingeschlagenen Schaufenstern, Plünderung; weitere 112 Personen sind festgenommen. (JT, 11)

It is not immediately apparent from the text itself that *The New York Times* is the source of this information. Not until the next day does Gesine's newspaper obsession become a matter of record. Initially, it is the issues which are the narrative's focus, rather than the source. These issues are fundamental to the thematic thrust of the novel, and tell the reader a great deal about Gesine herself.

To illustrate the transformation of the *New York Times* items, it is necessary to return to the original edition. All three topics figuring in the narrative on August 21 (i.e. Vietnam, the New Haven riots, and Charles Jordan) appear on the front page of the paper. Their order of mention in the narrative reflects the hierarchy of importance established by their position in the front-page format. The lead Vietnam article appears in column 8, the outside column reserved for the day's most important story. The other items follow on the front page from right to left and down. The articles are more or less adjacent to each other on the page. Gesine's perusal of the paper follows the format's established priorities, as intended by the editor. Only the article on Charles Jordan's murder in Prague, which differs significantly from the other items in how it is transposed into the text of *Jahrestage*, is from the bottom half of page one (i.e. the third of four »panels«). Deemed less important by virtue of their placement on the front page are the articles appearing on the page's perimeter, such as those reporting a student anti-draft demonstration and new links between smoking and disease. These items are ignored by Gesine. The only other international items in the news on August 21 note escalating tensions between the British and Chinese governments and coming democratic elections in South Vietnam, which are incorporated into the narrative a few days later. Other articles which are included in Johnson's *New York Times* scrapbooks, but do not appear in the text itself, are: »Copter Crew Takes 3 Wounded GIs from the Vietcong,« »A Police Candidate Held in Heroin Case,« »Police Start Prostitution Drive; 121 Arrested in Midtown Streets.«⁴⁰ Inner-city crime is the

40 See Johnson's *New York Times* scrapbook, 21 Aug. 1967.

only one of the novel's dominant themes that does not appear in this first »official« entry of Gesine's diary, although it appears in the scrapbook.

The first sentence is an almost literal translation of the lead statement in the paper's high-profile column eight. An examination of the original article reveals two telling changes in the transposition of material from paper to text. The article's lead-off actually reads: »Clearing weather in the North permitted American pilots to attack targets near Hanoi yesterday for the first time in a week.«⁴¹ Gesine's emphasis is different in two noticeable instances. While she adheres to the grammatical structure of the opening, all references to time are omitted. The article itself emphasizes the week's lull in both the headline and the lead sentence. Its placement shows that it is the most newsworthy item of information. Instead of stressing the resumption of activity after a significant break, the novel instead starts with a process already underway where clearing skies are the only distinguishing characteristic. This is in direct contrast to the article itself, which stresses in the headline the resumption of bombing after six days, and is repeated almost verbatim in the lead sentence. Gesine's translation emphasizes instead a change in weather, enabling the continuation of the status quo. Weather and weather reports are common in *Jahrestage*, and in this instance the weather reference takes on a particularly sinister role. Ironically, clear skies are an invitation to destruction. A second similar phrase exactly one week later on August 27, »Und das Wetter in Nordvietnam war wieder gut genug für Bombenangriffe« (JT, 29), reinforces this initial impression of unrelenting American opportunism.

There is another telling manipulation of the original material in the opening passage. The phrase »near Hanoi« becomes »nördlich von Hanoi« in the text. These changes have a significant impact on how the information is perceived by substituting vague generalities for the specifics detailed in the original article. The substitution of »nördlich« for »near« emphasizes the incursion into North Vietnam, rather than the perception conveyed by the paper that the bombings were restricted to military targets around the capitol.

The statements pertaining to Vietnam are actually a loose summary of the day's news, and neatly condense a wide range of actions into three succinct lines. The next two sentences incorporate information from different articles. Bombing raids on the coast and »Achtzollgranaten« in

41 U.S. Jets Attack Near Hanoi Again After Week Lull, in: New York Times 21 Aug. 1967, p. 1.

the demilitarized zone are linked by a coordinating conjunction, which in the newspaper represents a spring of five pages. The fact that four helicopters had been shot down in the South is first mentioned on page three. There is no mention of casualties in the narrative, in contrast to the actual articles. The first sentences show the Americans on the offense with bombing incursions into the demilitarized zone. The impression is of an offensive along the coast and in an area stretching from north of Hanoi south to the demilitarized zone, with only the loss of four choppers. Such summarization and cross-referencing belies the impression of a quick read on the way to work. The placement is not the result of stream-of-consciousness style narration, but is instead a deliberate and thoughtful collage of material.⁴²

All in all, the impression conveyed by these three lines on Vietnam is in keeping with the prevailing American perception of the war. Despite the different arenas in which the action takes place, the government press releases – dutifully reported in the national news – imparted an overall picture of military progress. After the Tet Offensive, however, it became clear that the war was being conducted in widely separate, isolated areas. This change in national perception of the war also marks a significant turning point in the narrative. In the spring of 1968, the frequency of war related items from *The New York Times* in the novel falls off noticeably, reflecting the trend in coverage in the paper itself.

The repetitive nature of the news from Vietnam is emphasized both by *Jahrestage's* structure and content. Through repetition the outrageous becomes mundane, as illustrated by the many items referring to body counts. Language also contributes to the alienation between reported events and the reality they describe. The body count items repeatedly use phrases such as »die amtlichen Toten,« »Kriegstote,« or »die Nachrichtentoten« for fatalities in order to emphasize the aseptic language of the original articles, which invariably refer to them simply as »killed in action.« In another instance Gesine notes the coining of a new phrase: »In der Schlacht um Corinthien haben die amerikanischen Marineinfanteristen einen neuen Ausdruck für den Tod unter Artilleriefeuer: man wird »weggeblasen« (JT, 133f.). On August 22, Gesine notes: »Das

42 Since all topically related articles are pasted together in Johnson's scrapbooks, links between items are easy enough to follow. This process is solely the arena of Johnson as narrator, and not Gesine as reader, since this secondary text is not a part of her character. This undermines the assumption that the *New York Times* articles are simple manifestations of – or windows into – her consciousness. It also raises questions as to the line of demarcation between Johnson as narrator and his subject.

Kriegsministerium erklärt 32 Mann für amtlich tot in Viet Nam. Das Marinekorps hat 109 tote Vietnamesen aus dem Norden gezählt« (JT, 13). The original source of this information is a very short article on page four of *The New York Times*. Gesine's version includes only half of the original lead sentence. In the paper, the article goes on to name seven young men from the New York-New Jersey area who were killed in action. The list of names, or even the fact that such a list exists, is omitted by Gesine. However, subsequent diary entries document a progressive shift in her focus from the meaningless numbers quoted by the government to the war's toll in terms of individual lives. The systematic progression from statistics to increasingly individual portrayals during the first week of *Jahrestage* would indicate that this is something of which she is acutely aware. As the news from Vietnam vary little from day to day, this change indicates a shift in Gesine's perception of the war and how it is covered by the news media.

Through the juxtaposition of news items and photo descriptions, Gesine subtly calls into question the editorial decisions taken by *The New York Times* which impact how a news event is packaged and subsequently perceived by the reader. The information, or lack thereof, conveyed by news photographs is as problematic as the statistics she quotes earlier. One such photo is of a supposed crash site of an American plane (JT, 15). Several Vietnamese soldiers are probing the wreckage. A second, and far more visually informative, picture of another downed plane on page three shows a dead pilot lying atop the plane's fuselage. This photo is not mentioned in the text. Interestingly, Gesine first describes a photo in which she points out there is very little discernible information. Instead she notes the absence of facts. It is impossible to determine from the picture if the wreckage is that of an airplane, much less if it is that of an American. The caption is pure hearsay, yet the photo garners the premier front-page slot.⁴³ As it answers none of the basic questions of journalism, it is clear that the photo is included for its dramatic impact, rather than for its journalistic merit:

Die Luftwaffe flog gestern 132 Angriffe auf Nordvietnam. Die Zeitung setzt unter ein Bild von den Trümmern eines Flugzeugs in Hanoi, daß die Kommunisten dies für ein abgeschossenes Flugzeug erklären. Das Foto war wichtig

43 »WRECK OF U.S. JET, HANOI SAYS: Official Communist source that released picture says it shows a U.S. plane that crashed near the Soviet Embassy. The caption material did not indicate when the photograph was made«, in: *New York Times* 23 Aug. 1967, p. A1.

genug für die erste Seite, aber erst auf der sechsten, verstellt von Neuigkeiten aus Jerusalem, finden wir die amtlichen Todeserklärungen für vierzig Soldaten, nur die Toten aus New York und Umgebung namentlich genannt, fünfzehn Zeilen Lokales. (JT, 15f.)

The lack of news conveyed by the photo is only one of Gesine's concerns. The brief daily body count, which lists only five local men by name, is significantly further down on the scale of news priorities. As Gesine implies, the fifteen line article is buried on page six underneath a chatty human-interest story about the dismantling of the Mandelbaum Gate, which is described in the article as the »symbol of divided Jerusalem.« Gesine pointedly ignores any contemporary political parallels, as well as the adjacent article with news from the BRD and refers to them in the text only as »Neuigkeiten.« With the continued use of »verstellt« Gesine takes issue with the paper's implied value judgment. Viewed in context of the paper's original format, the deaths of another forty American soldiers in Vietnam is hardly front-page news. Gesine underscores this perception through mention of the article's placement, priority, and length. The other thirty-five »amtlichen Todeserklärungen« are consigned to anonymity. She implies that the real significance of such items is that they are no longer considered newsworthy, as indicated by their low-priority position in the format equivalent to a journalistic no-man's land: »Muß einer aus New York und Umgebung sein, damit sein Tod in Viet Nam persönlich verzeichnet wird in der nützlichsten Zeitung, die er hätte lesen können?« (JT, 649). Her sustained emphasis in war casualties often constitute a challenge to both the paper's dutiful reporting of military press releases and their sterile bureaucratic language: »Die amerikanischen Verluste seit amtlichem Beginn des Krieges standen gestern bei 17 696 Toten, 109 922 Verwundeten und ungefähr 1000 Vermißten oder Gefangenen« (JT, 732). A few weeks later she notes: »Für die amtlich in Viet Nam Getöteten aus der new yorker Gegend nimmt die Times heute nicht mehr die normale, sondern die aller kleinste Type« (JT, 827). The number of casualties, removed from their original context, or perhaps further distorted by rhetoric, are rendered essentially meaningless: »Wenn ein Stützpunkt in Viet Nam leichte Verluste meldet, können von 3,000 Mann gut und gern 100 umgekommen sein, die zählen in dieser Sprache noch nicht« (JT, 1203). Well before the end of the novel such reports have lost all credibility for Gesine: »Amerikanische Truppen unter Maschinengewehrfeuer wollen nur zehn eigene Tote verloren haben, schreiben den anderen fünfhundert an. Solche runden Zahlen«

(JT, 1876). It seems to Gesine that nothing will prod America out of its complacency as far as Vietnam is concerned: »13 643 amerikanische Kriegstote bis heute in Viet Nam. Kann es sein, daß sie den 200 Millionen Bürger der U.S.A. noch nicht ausreichen im Verhältnis der Zahlen?« (JT, 149).⁴⁴ As Gesine notes with grim irony: »Ein westlicher Korrespondent beobachtete am Dienstag im Gebiet von Haiphong (Viet Nam) drei Luftangriffe, sieben Bomberwellen, zahlreiche Einzelflüge der Amerikaner und weitere acht Luftalarme; der Tag wurde ihm als normal beschrieben« (JT, 201).

The general consensus among critics is that the fall-off in war coverage in the *Jahrestage's* concluding volume represents a failure on Johnson's part to sustain the theme throughout the course of the novel. The Vietnam issue is seemingly jettisoned in favor of the Prague Spring. But I would argue that Gesine's growing interest in Czechoslovakian affairs is unrelated to the war's diminished role as the narrative draws to a close. Instead, a closer look at the novel and documentary sources clearly shows that the novel merely reflects a national trend as embodied in *The New York Times* and other media following extensive and intense emotional coverage during the Tet offensive. Even the national weekly news magazine, *Der Spiegel*, whose coverage of US news is overwhelmingly dominated by the war, official policy and political fallout, exhibits a marked decrease in articles on Vietnam after the Tet offensive. This is especially noticeable during the months of July and August, the same two months chronicled in the novel's final volume. Further, Gesine's loss of interest in the Vietnam conflict is one of appearance only. Although the number and frequency of newspaper items in the novel does fall off markedly beginning in late June 1968, the interrelationship between Gesine and Vietnam is reinforced in key passages during July and August, especially in the novel's closing pages where she looks back on her stay in New York City in which war events appear as milestones (JT, 1877f.).

The examples given above, which are representative of Johnson's use of *The New York Times*, address a largely unexamined aspect of *Jahrestage*. The prevalent assumption that Johnson, in his scribe-like role as the »Genosse Schriftsteller,« simply cites information verbatim from the newspaper is patently false. Instead he deliberately crafts elements from the articles into integral narrative components, which establish both the

44 In an earlier passage, Gesine notes bitterly: »Aus der Liste der amtlichen Toten führt die Zeitung nur zwei an, die zufällig aus dem Staat New York waren, als verschlüge die genaue Gesamtzahl ja doch nichts gegen einhundertfünfundneunzig Millionen Landesbürger« (JT, 36).

structure and thematic content of the novel. Individual elements, word choice and omissions color Gesine's interpretations of events. Often items presented as seamless units of information are actually taken from different articles in different sections in a process hidden from the reader. The position and length of the article in context of the paper also reveals a great deal about Gesine's interests and priorities. Omitted information and events are also significant, although this topic is not addressed here. All of these factors combine to bring about a very specific version of the day's events. Far from being a shorthand for contemporary sociopolitical reality, the *New York Times* items reveal as much, if not more, about Gesine and her priorities than they do about New York and America in the late Sixties.

The role of *The New York Times* is clearly not so black and white as many would imply. Consistently, the newspaper items have been characterized in overly simplistic terms as quotes, excerpts, citations or excisions, all of which are quite misleading. Otherwise careful textual and narrative analyses perpetrate this erroneous characterization of what are, in reality, quite sophisticated narrative passages.⁴⁵ From selection to placement, the news items included in *Jahrestage* seem to be determined entirely by Gesine.

The newspaper's famous slogan, »All the News Fit to Print,«⁴⁶ which appears in the front page banner, belies the reality of the news business. And like any newspaper editor, Johnson considers his narrative just one possible version of reality.⁴⁷ He himself stresses the deliberately subjective aspect of the *New York Times* excisions in their fictionalized narrative form.⁴⁸ By filtering documentary material through a specific percep-

45 Kurt Fickert, for example, makes no distinction between items that are copyrighted and those that are not. Fickert, *Dialogue with the reader* (note 29), p. 91.

46 Johnson avoids translating the well-known *New York Times* slogan. The translation in *Der Spiegel* (»Alle Nachrichten, die es wert sind, gedruckt zu werden«) doesn't convey the same clear-cut statement of mission. See *New York Times: Brunnen der Geschichte* (note 21), p. 140.

47 See Uwe Johnson: *Vorschläge zur Prüfung eines Romans*, in: Rainer Gerlach/Mathias Richter (eds.), *Uwe Johnson*, Frankfurt am Main 1984, p. 30-36, here 35.

48 »Die Beschäftigung mit der amerikanischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte, der Soziologie, der Mafia, das Auffischen der in der Arbeit versäumten Wirklichkeit der Stadt mit Ausschnitten aus der *New York Times*, es hatte ausgesehen wie das leicht renegate Selbststudium eines Gaststudenten; tatsächlich war es hinausgelaufen auf den Versuch, von der Stadt New York und den Staaten U.S.A. annähernd das zu lernen, was Mrs. Cresspahl widerfahren war in ihren sechs Jahren Anwesenheit; übrigens war hinkünftig aus der *Times* statt objektiv subjektiv zu schneiden, mit Mrs. Cresspahls Augen, mit

tive consciousness, Johnson reinforces the idea that objectivity, like his concept of »Wahrheitsfindung,« is ultimately unattainable. Judith Ryan observes that, »by subordinating document to fiction, Johnson divests it of its objective reality and makes it as impenetrable as subjectivity itself.«⁴⁹ In fact, in their textual renditions, documentary materials are not divested of the inherent objectivity implicit in the original media context, but comprise their own fictive discourse. The inclusion of everyday reality in the form of *The New York Times* is an apparently seamless insertion of non-fictive material into a fictional narrative. The topics and events which prompt Gesine to self-reflection and judgment are identical (albeit in condensed form) with those of the reader. Johnson thereby deftly narrows the gap between »die private und gesellschaftliche Existenz unserer Zeit« and his perceived audience.

Although *The New York Times* is presented as an objective source in *Jahrestage*, it is obvious that Johnson manipulates documentary materials to fit his narrative purpose. The narrative implies through both language and format that the cited newspaper items are accurate representations of the source material, when in fact they are highly edited versions of the original event. In numerous instances Johnson takes deliberate liberties with translation, juxtaposes elements from different articles, and places exaggerated emphasis on items buried in the depths of the paper. Comparisons between original and narrative versions of the news emphasize the fact that in Johnson's narrative all events, whether real or fictional, unfold in a highly orchestrated context. What emerges from the examination of the *New York Times* passages in the novel is a deliberately slanted version of the day's events, which, according to Johnson, is a function of the narrative process.⁵⁰ In *Jahrestage* highly crafted and seamless versions

Aufmerksamkeit für Berichte von Ereignissen, die ihr auffielen, die sie aufbrachten, mit denen sie zufrieden war.« Johnson, Uwe: *Begleitumstände*. Frankfurter Vorlesungen, Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 412f.

49 Ryan, *Uncompleted Past* (note 30), p. 160. See also Lennox, Sara: *History in Uwe Johnson's »Jahrestage,«* in: *Germanic Review* 64, 1989, p. 31-41.

50 »Solange die Arbeit an einem literarischen Text dieser Art sich mit der Wahrheit befaßt, muß ihr Gegenstand also geprüft werden an zwei gegensätzlichen Tendenzen der Wahrheitsfindung. Einige einfache Fehlerquellen bei der Herstellung und Übermittlung von Information sind bekannt: da haben die Augenzeugen nicht genau hingesehen, was sie nicht gesehen haben, können sie nicht sagen. Sie erfinden etwas, was ihnen den Vorfall abzurunden scheint. Oder sie haben die Situation schlicht nach ihren gewohnten Bezugspunkten geordnet, die mögen privat sein oder von sektenhafter Moral oder parteipolitisch. [...] Sie schädigen alle die Realität.« Johnson, Uwe: *Berliner Stadtbahn*, in: *BS*, p. 7-21, here 11.

of news items are presented in the text as apparently objective documentary material, while the item's presentation, relevance and impact are all choreographed by the narrator behind the scenes.

Clearly, *Jahrestage* is a novel about German history and the historical process. What makes the novel unique is the fact that Gesine undertakes her narrative project of a historical reconstruction in New York City, who's role as Jerichow's temporal, thematic and structural opposite has been largely underestimated. If the paper itself cannot be considered an objective window on the world, Gesine's consciousness provides an even more prejudiced view. The analysis of the *New York Times* passages in *Jahrestage* contradicts Bernd Neumann's description of Johnson's realism: »Die naturalistische Detail-Genauigkeit soll die realistische ›Wahrheit‹ des Ganzen gewährleisten.«⁵¹ In the end, these details call into question both the newspaper's objectivity in reporting and the validity of Gesine's own assessment of the hand-picked events she sees fit to mention in the narrative.

Prof. Deborah L. Horzen, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Central Florida, P.O. Box 161348, Orlando, Florida 32816-1348 USA

51 Neumann, Bernd: *Utopie und Mimesis: Zum Verhältnis von Ästhetik, Gesellschaftsphilosophie und Politik in den Romanen Uwe Johnsons*, Kronberg 1978, p. 294.