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An egocentric freedom



CAROLIN AMLINGER,
OLIVER NACHTWEY
"Gekränkte Freiheit.
Aspekte des libertären
Autoritarismus"
available in German only;
Suhrkamp Verlag, 2022.
480 pages, CHF 42.90 /
e-book: CHF 30

"No to Bill Gates!" "No to forced vaccination!" "We want freedom from the Covid dictatorship!" Slogans like these, influenced by conspiracy theory, were heard in Switzerland at anti-Covid rallies in 2020 and 2021. As in other countries, the marches attracted a mixed crowd – from ageing hippies, yoga teachers and local green alternative-left politicians, to self-styled nation-loving libertarians and the avowed far right.

On the back of the pandemic arose the "Querdenker" movement, a protest group that defies conventional political categorisation. Many who took part in the demonstrations identify as "Querdenker" (literally "lateral thinkers"). Not only do they vehemently oppose government policy on Covid, but they also dissent on other matters like the Russia-Ukraine war and climate change. They dismiss the "mainstream media" and rail

against the scientific community and the shadowy "elite" (governments and multinationals) who supposedly control us. "Querdenker" view themselves as the enlightened ones. The rest of us are docile sheep for wearing masks and getting vaccinated.

How should we interpret this movement? Sociologist of literature, Carolin Amlinger, and sociologist professor Oliver Nachtwey, both of whom lecture at the University of Basel, searched for answers while the pandemic was still ongoing. In a study entitled "Gekränkte Freiheit" (Offended freedom), which they published at the end of 2022, Amlinger and Nachtwey surveyed over a thousand "Querdenker" in Germany and Switzerland, a dozen of whom they interviewed at length. They witnessed anti-Covid demos first hand and monitored social media, coming to the conclusion that what we are seeing is "libertarian authoritarianism".

Not that the "Querdenker" cling to any leader. "If anything, many of them tend to be anti-authoritarian in outlook," Amlinger and Nachtwey write. Their individual freedoms are non-negotiable, on the other hand. And they defend these with strong-arming, "anti-authoritarian authoritarian" aggression. Unlike other freedom fighters, continue the authors, "Querdenker" view freedom not as a shared social condition but as a form of individual self-realisation without social responsibility.

According to Amlinger and Nachtwey, theirs is an egocentric freedom. When the promise of individual self-realisation is unfulfilled, this harbours potential for offence that can turn into frustration, resentment and a sense of impotence. What can we do to prevent people from repudiating society in this way? Freedom needs to be seen and conveyed "as being something profoundly social", this insightful book concludes.

SUSANNE WENGER

Electropop – dreamy, experimental and flowing



ANNA AARON
"Gummy"
Hummus Records, 2022
www.annaaron.com

The title evokes gummy bear sweets and the album cover is pastel coloured. But the music is like a stream of water: slightly choppy now and again, meandering at the edges, but always flowing in one direction. "Gummy" is Anna Aaron's sixth record since 2011. And like the two albums that preceded it, it is the result of a fruitful collaboration with the legendary Young Gods drummer Bernard Trontin. Guitarist Nicolas Büttiker was also involved.

Aaron, who is 38 years old and comes from Basel, recorded "Gummy" in her own studio as well as in the same Alpine chalet in which she and Trontin produced the ambient track "Moonwaves". This unlikely musical alliance with Trontin has culminated in an album filled at once with inviting warmth and oppressive background tones. It is an eclectic sound, but it arguably works. In any case,

it is brave and surprising in its experimental moments.

Aaron's vocals are as dreamy and fragile as usual, revealing multiple layers of complexity here and there. "Gummy" is a break-up album. The lyrics explore the later stages of a broken heart – "the moment when you have already begun to meet new people and regain your emotional space", says the singer, whose real name is Cécile Meyer, on her website. Synthesisers, a bubbling bassline and Trontin's prevalent drums provide the backdrop.

The luxuriant undercurrent and incisive rhythms of Aaron's electropop are reminiscent of 1990s trip-hop in places – without sounding outdated or old-fashioned. Other moments recall the electronic music of much earlier days.

These elements combined feel effortless and joined up. The instrumentals, which feature the extended "Birthday" and the concluding title track – are particularly mesmerising, incorporating layers of hypnotic repetition. Then there is a sudden whiff of 1970s krautrock.

"Gummy" is a most interesting and pleasurable journey through the Aaron-Trontin musical cosmos. It is a record in constant flux. A stream of sounds and moods, carried along by some unashamedly good pop melodies.

MARKO LEHTINEN