

Sensory Perception and Identity Formation in Hans Fallada's *Kleiner Mann - was nun?* (1932)

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Abstract

Hans Fallada's novel Kleiner Mann - was nun? (Little Man - what now?), published in 1932, exemplifies the New Objectivity of the 1920s. However, scholars have not yet sufficiently examined the key role sensory perceptions play in the narration and their implications for illustrating the Zeitgeist of a time of political and economic turmoil, inflation, unemployment and the eventual fall of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). I show how Fallada utilizes sensory perception to emphasize the disorientation of the individual at the end of the Weimar Republic. I pursue the following questions in this essay: What is the significance of the use of sensory perception regarding identity formation processes in the novel? How is sensory perception used and abused to define one's own identity, or to understand others' identities? What is the connection between sensory perception, everyday life, and fictional media, such as movies, in the novel?

"All our knowledge begins with [sensory] experience" (Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason)

Hans Fallada's novel *Kleiner Mann - was nun?* (*Little Man - what now?*),¹ published in 1932, is highly ranked in the literary canon of German modernism and has received much scholarly attention, as it exemplifies the New Objectivity of the 1920s. Despite this attention, scholars have not yet sufficiently examined the key role sensory perceptions play in the narration. Furthermore, their implications for illustrating the *Zeitgeist* of a time of political and economic turmoil, inflation, unemployment and the eventual fall of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933) have been neglected. Lastly, scholarly investigations have so far also failed to look at the knowledge and insight we can gain by analyzing the use of sensory perceptions in this literary text.

My investigation of the text shows how Fallada utilizes sensory perception to emphasize the disorientation of the individual at the end of the Weimar Republic. Considering theories based on a phenomenological approach to sensory perception in literature, I pursue the following questions in this essay: What is the significance of the use of sensory perception regarding identity formation processes in the novel? How is sensory perception used and abused to define one's own identity, or to understand others' identities? What is the connection between sensory perception, everyday life, and fictional media, such as movies, in the novel?

I argue that the primacy of sensory perception in *Kleiner Mann - was nun?* is vital for the identity formation processes of its main characters. My analysis demonstrates how characters manipulate, as well as purposefully distort, sensory perceptions in order to define themselves or

to deceive others. Accordingly I establish how the protagonist, Pinneberg, even more so than others, suffers from the inability to distinguish between appearance and reality. To achieve this I focus on his sensory (mis-)perceptions and his struggle to define his identity. First, I introduce the basic theories and approaches regarding sensory perception and identity formation. Subsequently, I discuss some of the scholarly work on and reception of Fallada's novel, and provide a short summary of the storyline. Finally, I conclude by investigating sensory perceptions, and the relation of Self and Other in *Kleiner Mann - was nun?*. I focus on Pinneberg, showing his desired self-image – civilized, adroit and affluent – in relation to his actual Self – confused, insecure -, along with the impression he believes others perceive of him: a man who has nothing left, not even his dignity as a citizen.

Theories and Approaches

In recent years, literary and cultural studies scholars have established the study of sensory perceptions in connection with German literature and research on everyday life. Our senses allow for our first perception of the world (see Diaconu 7). The term “perception”, is thus not only an interpretation, or mental impression, but concretely linked to senses and a becoming aware of the world through sensory experiences. As Martin Fontius points out, the German term “Wahrnehmung” (perception) is “being applied in and related to the dimension of space, of time, and to the social dimension, which signals that the term operates on a relatively abstract level on the one hand, but can also be used for individual processes on the other” (Fontius, in Barck 436f.).² Perceptions, especially those related to the sense of sight, play an important role in Fallada's novel *Kleiner Mann - was nun?*. Sensory perceptions related to sight represent some of the most important sensory perceptions, but this experiencing of the world through seeing is also nothing but an interpretation of reality, as the human mind is only capable of experiencing the world through “filters of sensory-perception systems” and the “[s]uchness of these systems is determined by phylogenetic development” (Singer 71f.).³ For this reason, perception is not only subject to interpretation, but is also both individually and “intersubjectively different and [thus] always new again” (Luhmann 69).⁴ This is why we cannot perceive perceptions, we are perceptions and have to “perceive our own body if consciousness is to be able to distinguish self-reference and external reference” (Luhmann 28).⁵ It is thus worthwhile to not only consider the protagonists' perceptions in Fallada's novel, but also how others observe them, as well as the reader's own awareness.

Aristotle, in his 384-383 B.C. writings *On the Soul* discussed sensory perceptions in connection to the concept of feeling (Diaconu 15). He categorized five types of sensory perceptions: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling (Diaconu 16). While the topic of senses was less present in philosophy before the 17th century, René Descartes rediscovered it for his scholarly research. Equally, in modern history, philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Gottfried Leibnitz were important scholars of epistemology, analyzing and exploring sensory perceptions in their works. Furthering these ideas in the 18th century, George Berkeley and David Hume analyzed the human mind and explored the principles of human epistemology, and Immanuel Kant's critique of reason marked a turning point in the history of philosophic research and laid the foundation for modern philosophy (for a more detailed historic review, see Diaconu

14-25).

Lydia Maria Arantes illustrates how the differentiation of senses into “close” and “far” senses “in the western thought tradition” was originally based on the “distance to the perceived” and how it correlates to the more hierarchical differentiation into “higher” and “lower” senses in the philosophical and epistemological discourses of the late 19th and early 20th century (see Arantes 24).⁶ Bettina Beer also notes that, according to the neo-Kantian Georg Simmel, “higher” and “lower” senses were connected to the developmental stages of cultures (Beer 7). Moreover, she elucidates how, according to Simmel, the further a culture was advanced the more important visual and acoustic (and to an extent olfactory) perceptions were regarded (ibid.)⁷. Edmund Husserl broke with the teachings of “psychologism” and in 1913 founded a new philosophy based on his ideas on phenomenology (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*). Simmel’s distinction into “higher” and “lower” senses however needs to be considered, regarding the rise of Nazi ideology in Germany during the writing of the novel. Especially the linking of “lower” senses to “lower” socio-economic class in Fallada’s work seems important (see section Analysis).

The question of how we perceive our own reality as well as our own identity is one of philosophy’s earliest questions. Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca argued the central cosmic role of humans due to their sensory perception systems and their resulting self-awareness, as Fontius points out (see Fontius, in Barck 442).⁸ Immanuel Kant, in the 18th century, explored and “observed [the] ‘transition from the sensory stimulus to the habitual moral interest’” (Fontius, in Barck 439).⁹ He eventually established a theoretical framework of identity and identity formation. A century later Sigmund Freud developed this approach further, while also writing about senses and sensory perceptions¹⁰. In the 20th and 21st centuries, notable scholars (q.v. Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall) built on these previous works, taking the theories beyond the frameworks of traditional Western research. Most 21st century scholars currently agree that the process of identity formation is ongoing.

The central issue addressed in my investigation is the relationship between “Self” and “Other” and their relation to sensory perceptions. In any (imagined or constructed) community, whether a family, a (peer) group, or a nation, there is an idea of “Self” which is defined by the idea of “Other”. The group identity is largely uniform but simultaneously, these groups are exclusive and restrictive “because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries” (Anderson 7). While Anderson refers to nations in the above quote, this idea of boundaries, beyond which lie other groups and identities (ibid.), is of importance here, as it illustrates the demarcation between “Self” and “Other”. Through defining the “Other’s” identity, the “Self” is established. Fallada’s novel *Kleiner Mann - was nun?* focuses on this dichotomy to track the identity-formation process of the protagonist Pinneberg. However, it also had an inter-textual effect on the readers in Germany at the time of the Weimar Republic who might have recognized their own situation reflected in the book, and related to the sensory perceptions described.

Reception and Background Information

Kleiner Mann - was nun? was published in Germany the year before Adolf Hitler came to power. In his novel, Fallada explored the effects of economic downtime, unemployment, and the political as well as social shifts in society on the average citizen at the end of the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). Fallada provided a detailed description of the living conditions of the average citizen during the end of the Weimar Republic. Equally, if not more importantly, he also exemplified how people of the same social and economic standing were pitted against each other through their own and others' materialism, and the political and social regime of the time. Various scholars have investigated and evaluated the works of Fallada over the years. Pablo Wittenbrink-Nordenhem (2013) illustrates the consumerism and status thinking in the novel, as well as the desire for "culture" and social rise. Moreover, he notes the main character's lack of ideological fix points which could have helped him in the vortex of the time and the daily struggle for economic survival (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 26).¹¹ Similarly, Jürgen Manthey (1963), Graham Bartram (1991), Geoff Wilkes (2002) and others have explored central concerns in the text such as partisanship for the socially weak and social criticism (Manthey, 88),¹² the "economic, social, and emotional plight of white-collar workers in the Germany of the late 1920s and early 1930s" (Bartram 929), or the connection of the novel to Siegfried Kracauer's *Die Angestellten* (see Manthey 88f. or Bartram 929).

More recent analyses focus on *Kleiner Mann - was nun?* as a social portrait of society during the latter years of the Weimar Republic (Ucar 2016), the "sense of community" in post 1914 Germany (Church 34) and Fallada's work, or on gender and interior space, particularly "the interactions within domestic spaces" in the novel (Farner Budarz 15). In addition to this, scholars have investigated Fallada's life as an author, who in his time was "wooed by both the Nazi and the Soviet cultural authorities" (Williams xvii). While some works on Fallada focus on the author as the "avowed spokesman of members of that social class which occupies the lower section of the diversified social scale, which constitutes the German *Bürgertum*" (Schueler 13). Indeed, Williams notes in her biography of Fallada that he was "a remarkable man – among other things an alcoholic, drug addict, womanizer, jailbird and thief [...] – who in his novels chronicles the fate of a social class in a period of great upheaval and makes a plea for ordinary human decency" (Williams xviii).

Additionally, the novel itself became a success before and during the rise of the Nazi regime, and also post-World-War-Two. Yet, "[t]he popularity of the novel on its publication was not confined to Germany" (Williams xxiii). Instead it became successful in England and the United States alike. This further illustrates how the novel offers readers from various social, cultural and political backgrounds the possibility of recognizing their own situation reflected in the book, and related to the sensory perceptions described in the narration by identifying with and distinguishing themselves from the main characters. Fallada's work portrays a variety of individual fates lots of people of his time could identify with. However, he neglects and purposefully omits complex social issues and connections in this novel. The actions remain fragmented, adding to a sense of uncertainty. Additionally, Fallada equivocates at times and the fictional characters in the book represent diverse political and ideological beliefs that only partially come to light here and there. These fragments of life during the Weimar Republic further

exemplify the Zeitgeist of the period. Moreover, the novel refers to the possibility of both a communist and a Nazi radicalization in the ensuing period without ideological judgment. In addition the text further elaborates on experiences of life by including romantic elements in the personal realm. These elements allow for positive interpretations and views of the future and can be ideologically (re)interpreted; i.e. they can be used and misused by various political regimes for propaganda purposes and further contribute to the experience of uncertainty and turmoil the novel aims to create.

Summary

Johannes Pinneberg and Emma “Lämmchen” Mörschel are the protagonists of *Kleiner Mann - was nun?*. Pinneberg starts out as a book-keeper, which is a white-collar but nonetheless not “upper-class” job, whereas Lämmchen is a member of the proletariat. The novel focuses on their romantic relationship in the beginning, including the discovery of Lämmchen’s pregnancy along with Pinneberg’s subsequent marriage proposal, but the “happily ever after” fails to appear. Shortly after their wedding, Pinneberg loses his job amidst the economic crisis in Germany. Their move to Berlin only worsens their problems. The couple is able to stay with Pinneberg’s mother, a hedonistically depicted character. Yet they soon suspect, and later see it confirmed, that she is still working as a madam.

Nonetheless, it is through his mother’s intervention that Pinneberg is able to secure work as a salesman for Mandel, a large clothing store in Berlin. However, he struggles to provide for his family and ultimately falls increasingly behind on his sales quota. In his desperation, he begs a movie star, Franz Schlüter, who has wandered into the store, to buy clothes from him. Schlüter misleads Pinneberg into believing he will buy something. The actor becomes increasingly annoyed by Pinneberg’s pleading and reports him to his manager. Consequently, Pinneberg is fired. Eventually, a former colleague of Pinneberg’s allows him to move into his garden shack at the outskirts of town, where Pinneberg, Lämmchen and their son ‘Murkel’, as he is lovingly referred to, live together illegally. Despite their dire situation, Lämmchen forbids Pinneberg to steal. After visiting his former colleague in Berlin, Pinneberg is chased away by the police due to his shabby appearance. When he feels as if he does not deserve to return home to his wife, who has started to make a living for the family as a seamstress, Pinneberg waits in the shadows in front of their small hut. It is because of Lämmchen however that he realizes all that matters to him is inside their home. Fallada attempts to give the narration a positive outlook in the end by suggesting that love is the only thing necessary for true happiness.

Analysis: Sensory Perceptions and their Relation to Self and Other

Striking in Fallada’s work are instances in which he reduces episodes to one or two specific sensory perceptions. To give an illustration of this, there are scenes in which the focus is on what can be heard, while the other sensory perceptions appear to be turned off; for example: “Suddenly, in close proximity - both are startled - a roaring laughter, followed by exclamations, hooting, giggling” (Fallada 190).¹³ Significantly, this allows for interpretation and causes

uncertainty in the reader which is only sometimes resolved. In other instances, things can be seen, but not heard. Notably, when Pinneberg returns home at the end of the novel and looks inside through the window, visual perceptions are closely related to emotions. These are complex and convey information about his environment. Feelings do not only help the individual to find orientation, but also to develop a coherent self-image. Pinneberg's constant uncertainty and worries characterize how he lacks focus and the ability to create a coherent idea of "Self". Importantly, the reflections of Pinneberg's fears manifest themselves in his self-perception; for instance, at the end of the novel he regards himself as broken and worthless. He is unable to reach out to his wife and can only watch her converse with another suitor (whom she turns down due to her love for Pinneberg) through the window, unable to hear their conversation, unsure about its content.

Similar scenes appear throughout the book in which Pinneberg believes to be less efficient, weaker, and worse than others, while he is, for the most part, perceived very differently by his surroundings. Evidence of this can be found in the interactions with his colleagues at Mandel's. They see him as a danger to their own employment, due to his impetus, as well as the fact that he is the only employee who fulfills his sales quota, even though Pinneberg himself is unaware of this fact. It is only after he has been fired, and through a coincidence, that he finds out about his co-workers' perception of him, and their resulting actions: framing him to seem responsible for the anti-Semitic graffiti in Mandel's bathroom. Compellingly, this turns out to be one of the main reasons why Pinneberg was fired; the actor's complaint against him merely functioned as a pretense. It was not, as Pinneberg assumed, because he did not fulfill his sales quota, or because he was too pushy with the actor. Instead Mr. Mandel, the owner, was trying to find a pretext to fire Pinneberg after he suspected him to be responsible for the graffiti. Being a Jewish clothing store, the owners could not fire Pinneberg on the (not certainly confirmed) grounds of anti-Semitism, thus risking offending the National-Socialist party, which gained momentum at this time. Taking these facts into consideration, it can be said that Pinneberg's misperceptions of reality are primarily based on his inability to distinguish between appearance and authenticity. Furthermore, they are due to the carefully directed attempts of his fellow workers, and others, to manipulate reality to their advantage and exploit Pinneberg's goodhearted nature and simplemindedness.

In addition to Pinneberg's general inability to distinguish fact from fiction, there are situations in which these clear-cut lines are purposefully distorted. One instance is the scene with the actor Schlüter, in which Pinneberg, as well as the reader, is misled to assume certain stereotypes about the actor. Pinneberg supposes that the actor understands the needs and troubles of the common man because he played one in a movie, which Pinneberg and his wife saw recently. Pinneberg is unable to differentiate between the aspects of fiction and reality; for him there is no difference between the various levels and structures of the filmic universe and reality, as the actions in the film seem as real as his own daily experiences (Fallada 378). Likewise, Pinneberg and the reader are both led to believe that the actor must be wealthy for a variety of reasons. First, he recently starred in a movie, and therefore was probably paid well. Secondly, he came to the clothing store, talked to Pinneberg and tried on different clothes for a new movie role he supposedly would be playing soon. Thirdly, the readers' own ideas, stereotypes, and characteristics attributed to actors make them believe that they are better off

than the common man. Lastly, some of the comments made by Schlüter, his appearance and actions, and Pinneberg's observations of him further the notion that he is a wealthy actor (374f.).

However, there is no actual indication of the actor's wealth other than sensory perceptions and interpretations of what can be observed. Instead there are hints to the contrary, specifically comments during the movie by Jachmann, who is Pinneberg's mother's lover. Jachmann suggested the movie would not be successful due to various observations, "'Proper movie heroes,' Jachmann explains, 'should never have any hair on their legs. This film for sure is a bust'" (336).¹⁴ It therefore remains unclear whether the actor is actually wealthy or not. The question of truth and illusion remains unanswered, not just for Pinneberg, but also for the reader. While the reader might wonder about the actor potentially suffering from the economic crisis, this possibility never occurs to Pinneberg. He regards facts presented by the fictional movie, which he saw and heard, as true (343).

Despite Pinneberg's inability to separate fact and fiction, he (mostly in vain) employs techniques to appear different to others than he actually is but people see right through his facade. This can be seen at the beginning of the novel, when he meets his future mother-in-law. She is immediately connected to a lower socio-economic class, or a "lower developmental stage" through the presence of "lower" sensory perceptions such as taste or smell, e.g. the smell of cabbage in the apartment. In spite of this, Pinneberg tries to impress her and to set himself apart from this class through visual cues such as his fine clothes (21). Yet, the future mother-in-law does not buy into Pinneberg's appearance and instead suspects him to be poor and unable to sustain his new family (21).

Clothing is an important visual element in the novel, through which Pinneberg continuously tries to manipulate others' perception of him. There are numerous scenes in which either Pinneberg himself or the narrator refers to his clothing to set him apart from other characters: "judging by his appearance, he does not belong to the unemployed, he looks handsome in his fine clothes. He is wearing his red-brown winter coat [...] and the black homburg hat" (157).¹⁵ At the same time, while his appearance is intended to set him apart from the unemployed masses, it is noted that his beautiful black hat is "no longer quite fashionable, the brim too wide" (157), and despite his efforts it is made clear that Pinneberg might not be part of the unemployed "on the outside, but on the inside" (157) he is.¹⁶

Along with his appearance and the visual illusions Pinneberg attempts to convey (he continues wearing his collar, neck tie and suit until the end of the book), he also defines himself through possessions. An example of this is the dressing table he bought (a useless, blocky, overly expensive status symbol of people better off than Pinneberg) that follows him through all the stages of life. In addition, he tries to manipulate himself and his wife through sensory perceptions into believing they are better off by buying and consuming expensive groceries such as salmon or bananas (122, 410). Wittenbrink-Nordenhem states the same holds true for family Pinneberg's search for a bright, light and sunny apartment (which they cannot afford) and Lämmchen's strict rejection of living in the tenant barracks (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 24)¹⁷ that are connected to "lower" sensory perceptions: "overcrowded, smelly, bellowing" (212).¹⁸ Moreover, he suggests Lämmchen's reaction to be in line with Pinneberg's inability to accept such

housing as status-appropriate for his family, and illustrative of various other attempts at reflecting a desired status through material possessions which Pinneberg's family cannot afford (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 24).¹⁹ Likewise, this consumerism exemplifies people's mindset during a time of social and economic turmoil. Nonetheless, the connection of Pinneberg to the "lower senses" of taste, touch and smell, and his desire to dissociate himself from them, show how despite his efforts he stays connected to them and consequently to a lower status.

There are various scenes in which Pinneberg suspects that the illusion he wants others to believe might not be convincing, but for the most part others do not actually confirm Pinneberg's assumed self-image. When seeing his reflection in a mirror while walking to meet his former colleague Heilbutt, Pinneberg takes off his collar, as he realizes it is simply a vain attempt to appear better than others: "[H]e does not look much different now, there is not much left to spoil about him, Heilbutt will not say anything, but Heilbutt will look surprised" (Fallada 402).²⁰ However, Heilbutt neither says anything nor does he seem to notice the change. It takes Pinneberg much time and reflection to physically remove his white collar and status symbol. In his mind, the removal of the collar degrades him. His friend's actions, however, do not affirm this fear, as Heilbutt does not treat him differently. Even the prostitutes he passes a short while later do nothing to actively confirm his belief. It is only in Pinneberg's perception and interpretation of reality that they do so: "[T]he girls don't look at him, for them he is out of the question, with his worn coat, dirty pants and without a collar" (410).²¹ Pinneberg interprets their lack of advances as a sign of his low status, even though the prostitutes themselves do not treat him in an uncivil manner. It is thought-provoking that Pinneberg nearly regretfully notes the prostitutes' lack of advances, given his opposition towards his mother's job. The idea of satisfying his primitive, sexual, and lower desires is dropped when he reminds himself of his pure, moral and loving wife who keeps telling him that they are not that bad off after all (409).²²

It is only when Pinneberg sees his fears confirmed during an encounter with a police officer that he loses hope and falls back on primitive, lower senses. Significantly, he is standing in front of a closed delicacy store, trying to buy butter (at that time an expensive consumer good), when the police officer tells him to move along. While previously only the lower senses of taste and smell connected Pinneberg to a lower socio-economic class in this scene, it is the acoustic signal of the police officer's voice that triggers him to self-consciously realize the visual impression he makes, acknowledging his poor status. Pinneberg recognizes his own reflection in the window: "There are other people standing at the shop-window, [...] well-dressed people, decent people, earning people. But in the reflecting glass of the window there is another one, a faint specter without a collar with run-down Ulster, with tar-smearred pants" (411f.).²³ When Pinneberg sees himself as a reflection among others, he realizes what has become of him and what he looks like compared to the people surrounding him. He connects his now perceived appearance with key social problems of the time: "And all of a sudden Pinneberg grasps everything [...], that he is outside, that he does not belong here anymore, that they are right to chase him away: slipped, drowned, done" (412).²⁴

The fact that the police officer does not only try to chase him away from the shop window, but pushes him off the sidewalk with his baton, furthers his feeling of hopelessness. This push represents more than a reminder of the sense of touch or a simple shoving off the sidewalk. The

German term “Bürgersteig” literally translates to “citizen’s walkway”. Since Pinneberg is pushed off of it by a representative of the law, he feels that he is not even worthy of being considered a citizen anymore, thus returning to his lower, animalistic senses in the subsequent illustration of the narration. It is only when Pinneberg sees his assumed perception actively confirmed by the officer that he believes the world sees him as an outsider not worthy of the term “citizen”. When he first realizes the reflection in the window and becomes aware of how poor and dilapidated he looks now, he could live with this fact: “[He] immediately gives in” (412).²⁵ He acquiesces and wants to take the sidewalk to the train station and return home to his wife, who through her love for and perception of him, would allow him to remain a citizen. Instead he suddenly finds himself no longer part of those allowed to walk on the sidewalk, excluded and relegated to a second-class human being. His sensory perceptions and the way he suspects others to perceive him are strongly connected to his own identity and identity formation processes. His response to this situation is to flee. The description of this scene strongly resembles the flight of a hunted animal driven through the streets: “he is walking very fast, he notices they are no longer behind him, but he does not dare to turn around. He continues [...] hurrying, always straight ahead, into the darkness, into the night which is nowhere truly dark night” (413).²⁶ An important aspect to notice here is how Pinneberg (re)turns to a presumably “lower” self at this time of extreme strain, as a result the heightening of his sensory perceptions is reiterated. In the light of this, it is because he is no longer considered, or no longer considers himself, civilized that he is able to “sense” that he is no longer being followed. The cacophony of the busy streets of Berlin is suppressed and Pinneberg is able to utilize his senses, to hear and see like an animal in the darkness of the night. The image he perceives of himself in this scene is so repulsive and hopeless that he no longer feels like a citizen, or human being. Only in the dark, when he is alone, does he dare to cautiously attempt to raise himself to the status of a citizen again: “he looks around. Empty. Nothing. No police. Carefully he lifts his foot and puts it onto the sidewalk. Then the other one” (413). While he tries to recreate an image of his Self that at least has human dignity, he needs the affirmation and love of his wife Lämmchen to do so. Until receiving this love he is unable to enter their home.

Lämmchen is connected to the positive events in the narration and to wind metaphoric, which usually indicates a change for the better. The most compelling evidence for this can be found in four key scenes. First, at the beginning of the novel right before Pinneberg meets Lämmchen to see the doctor and find out about her pregnancy: “A fresh wind is blowing toward him, the bushes are nodding with their branches, the trees are whispering a little” (7).²⁷ Subsequently, at the chronologically first meeting when Pinneberg and Lämmchen fell in love with each other: “They trudged into the dunes, they sat in a recess like in a big, friendly hand, the wind stroke across the dune crests over their heads” (255).²⁸ Thirdly, the wind is also noted when they move in together: “The wind moves the white curtains at the windows. A gentle light irradiates the room. Arm in arm they both are magically drawn to the open window, where they lean outside” (57).²⁹ However, the wind metaphoric is nowhere as prominent as at the moment when Lämmchen informs Pinneberg of her employment. This offers Pinneberg hope, as it will help their family not only make a living after Pinneberg was fired, but also provide them with food, which Lämmchen is given in addition to her salary: “The room appears to get brighter while she is speaking like this, it is as if there is fresh air blowing from her. [...] Now it is getting completely bright, the sun has risen” (384).³⁰ Keeping this in mind, it is striking that in the final scene of the narration, before Lämmchen discovers her devastated husband, she notices the

absence of wind: “something is in this silent night that makes her heart restless. There are the stars, they are twinkling in the cold air [...]. No wind, no sound, nothing [...]” (422).³¹

Only through his wife’s confirmation and support is it possible for Pinneberg to feel human again, which is once more expressed through positive light and wind imagery: “And suddenly the cold is gone, an infinitely soft green wave picks her up and him with her. They are gliding upwards, the stars are twinkling very close; she is whispering, ‘But you can always look at me! Again and again! You are with me, we are together indeed’” (425).³² Through this discourse, and because his wife sees him as who he is and who he has always been, Pinneberg develops courage and hope and is able to see himself as a human being again. As a result, he perceives himself and his situation positively, “It is the old happiness, it is the old love. Higher and higher, from the stained earth to the stars. And then they both go into the house in which Murkel is sleeping” (425).³³ These last lines link sensory perception and identity to moments of happiness in the private sphere and manifest them through light imagery (seeing), and positive associations of wind imagery (feeling, hearing, smelling), which are usually associated with Lämmchen through the course of the novel: a small “happily ever after” in the private sphere, after all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the ending of Hans Fallada’s *Kleiner Mann – was nun?* stresses the integration and primacy of sensory perception in the novel. I showed how sensory perceptions are vital for the identity-formation processes of the protagonist Pinneberg within this text. It is only due to the affirmation of and relation to the “Other” that Pinneberg is able to create a coherent image of the “Self”. My analysis of key scenes and characters did not only demonstrate various instances in which sensory perceptions were manipulated and purposefully distorted, but also showed how Pinneberg suffered from the inability to distinguish between appearance and reality. This struggle is central and appears throughout the narrative. It is this, which most of all illustrates the Zeitgeist of the late Weimar Republic, as it exemplifies the disorientation of the individual at that time. Through my unique approach to identity formation at the time of the Weimar Republic and my investigation of sensory perception connected to identity-formation processes, this essay contributes to the core of interdisciplinary literary research focused on sensory perception in general and sensory perception in modern literature, and the literature of the Weimar Republic, in particular. Lastly, it is to note that despite the initial absence of wind, the final scene suspends the perception of time and space by the main characters, further illustrating the Zeitgeist of the time. It thus allows the readers to enter into an idealistic fairytale-like state of mind, and enables them to positively reevaluate their own situation, offering hope notwithstanding the impending upheaval of the Weimar Republic.

¹ All the translations are my own unless noted otherwise. Original wording of Fallada’s novel and German sources will be provided in German in footnotes.

² The original reads: “Das Wort wird also gleichzeitig auf die Raumdimension, auf die Zeitdimension und auf die

Sozialdimension bezogen, was signalisiert, daß der Begriff auf einer relativ abstrakten Ebene operiert und zugleich auch für individuelle Prozesse in Anspruch genommen werden kann" (Fontius, in Barck 436f.).

- ³ The original reads: "Das Gehirn kann natürlich nur die Signale aus der Umwelt aufnehmen, für die es Sinnessysteme hat. Seit wir in der Lage sind, Teleskope und Mikroskope zu bauen, können wir deswegen sehr viel mehr Phänomene beobachten [...]. Aber selbst bei Zuhilfenahme solcher Instrumente nehmen wir die Welt nur durch die Filter von Sinnessystemen wahr, und das Sosein dieser Systeme ist durch die phylogenetische Entwicklung determiniert" (Singer 71f).
- ⁴ The original reads: "während Denken sich in hohem Maße auf intersubjektive Übereinstimmung verpflichtet weiß und Abweichungen als Fehler zugerechnet bekommt, sind Wahrnehmungen nur 'schwach äquivalent'. Aber das heißt eben auch: intersubjektiv verschieden und immer wieder neu" (Luhmann 69).
- ⁵ The original reads: "der eigene Körper muß mitwahrgenommen werden, wenn das Bewußtsein in der Lage sein soll, Selbstreferenz und Fremdreferenz zu unterscheiden" (Luhmann 28).
- ⁶ The original reads: "In der westlichen Denktradition wurden diese fünf Sinne vor allem nach ihrem Abstand zum Wahrgenommenen in Nah- und Fernsinne eingeteilt [...] Diese Einteilung korrespondiert weitestgehend mit einer Hierarchisierung der Sinne ihrer Entwicklungsstufe zufolge in sogenannte höhere und niedrigere Sinne [...]. Georg Simmel und Sigmund Freud zufolge steht die Distanzierung von den Nahsinnen bzw. Die besondere Bedeutung der Fernsinne im Zusammenhang mit dem Entwicklungsgrad einer Kultur" (Arantes 24).
- ⁷ The original reads: "'Hoch' und 'niedrig', 'nah' und 'fern' stehen dem Soziologen Georg Simmel zufolge miteinander in Beziehung: je weiter sich eine Kultur entwickelt, desto wichtiger würden die Fernsinne und desto unbedeutender die Nahsinne" (Beer 7).
- ⁸ The original reads: "Wie Kant hervorhebt, war es Seneca, der bedeutendste Stoiker der römischen Kaiserzeit, von dem die Idee klassisch formuliert wurde, 'daß ohne den Menschen die ganze Schöpfung eine bloße Wüste, umsonst und ohne Endzweck sein würde'. Die zentrale kosmische Stellung des Menschen, argumentiert Seneca, enthülle die Position, an welche die Natur, die 'betrachtet und nicht nur mit einem flüchtigen Blick bedacht [...] werden' wolle [...] uns gestellt habe. [...] Bei dieser Liaison zwischen menschlichem Selbstbewusstsein und Kosmos ist die Unmittelbarkeit des Augenscheins die selbstverständliche Grundlage" (Fontius, in Barck 442).
- ⁹ The original reads: "der von Kant beobachtete 'Übergang vom Sinnenreiz zum habituellen moralischen Interesse'" (Fontius, in Barck 439).
- ¹⁰ See e.g.: Freud, Sigmund. *Abriss Der Psychoanalyse: Das Unbehagen in Der Natur*.
- ¹¹ The original reads: "Das Fehlen von eigenen ideologischen Fixpunkten, die ihm im Strudel der Zeit und in seinem täglichen Kampf ums wirtschaftliche Überleben zur Seite stehen könnten, zeigt die geistige Leere Pinnebergs" (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 26)
- ¹² The original reads: "In keinem anderen Roman Falladas aber finden wir Parteinahme für die sozial Schwachen und Gesellschaftskritik so stark ausgerichtet" (Manthey 88)
- ¹³ The original reads: "Plötzlich in nächster Nähe – beide fahren zusammen-, ein brausendes Gelächter, gefolgt von Ausrufen, Johlen, Gekicher" (Fallada 190).
- ¹⁴ The original reads: "'Richtige Kinohelden', erklärt Jachmann, 'dürfen überhaupt keine Haare an den Beinen haben. Dieser Film ist todsicher eine Pleite'" (Fallada 336).

- ¹⁵ The original reads: "Äußerlich gehört Pinneberg nicht zu ihnen [den Arbeitslosen], ist fein in Schale. Er hat den rotbraunen Winterulster an, den hat ihm Bergmann noch für achtunddreißig Mark gelassen, und den steifen schwarzen Hut, auch von Bergmann" (Fallada 157).
- ¹⁶ The original reads: "nicht mehr ganz modern, die Krempe zu breit, [...] äußerlich gehört Pinneberg nicht zu den Arbeitslosen, aber innerlich" (Fallada 157).
- ¹⁷ The original reads: "Die andere und für die Pinnebergs erschwingliche Alternative wäre eine Wohnung in einem Arbeiterviertel, doch Lämmchen tut diese 'schrecklichen Mietskasernen, überfüllt, riechend, grölend' mit einem entschiedenen 'Nie!' ab" (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 24)
- ¹⁸ The original reads: "Nun ist sie immer weiter nach dem Osten und Norden hinaufgelaufen, endlose, schreckliche Mietskasernen, überfüllt, riechend, grölend. Und Arbeiterfrauen haben ihr die Türen aufgemacht und haben ihr gesagt: 'Ansehen können Sie's ja. Aber Sie nehmen's doch nicht. Nicht fein genug für Sie.'" (Fallada 212)
- ¹⁹ The original reads: "Lämmchen tut diese [...] ab und liegt damit wohl auf einer Linie mit ihrem Ehemann, der eine solche Wohnung ebenso wenig akzeptieren könnte. [...] Pinneberg zeigt eine durch bestimmte Statusindikatoren demonstrierte und deutlich von bürgerlichem Denken geprägte Vorstellung seiner Wohnsituation. Die Wohnung soll möglichst den von ihm gewünschten, beziehungsweise herbeigesehnten Status widerspiegeln." (Wittenbrink-Nordenhem 24)
- ²⁰ The original reads: "Viel anders sieht er nun auch nicht aus, es ist nicht mehr viel zu verderben an ihm, Heilbutt wird nichts sagen, aber Heilbutt wird doch Augen machen." (Fallada 402)
- ²¹ The original reads: "die Mädchen sehen ihn nicht an, für die hier kommt er keinesfalls in Frage, mit dem verschossenen Mantel, den schmutzigen Hosen und ohne Kragen" (Fallada 410).
- ²² The original reads: "'Wir haben es doch noch nicht schlecht', sagte Lämmchen immer" (Fallada 409).
- ²³ The original reads: "Es stehen noch mehr Leute am Schaufenster, [...] gutgekleidete Leute, ordentliche Leute, verdienende Leute. Aber in der spiegelnden Scheibe des Fensters steht noch einer, ein blasser Schemen, ohne Kragen, mit schäbigem Ulster, mit teerbeschmierten Hosen" (Fallada 411f.).
- ²⁴ The original reads: "Und plötzlich begreift Pinneberg alles [...], daß er draußen ist, daß er hier nicht mehr hergehört, daß man ihn zu Recht weggagt: ausgerutscht, versunken, erledigt" (Fallada 412).
- ²⁵ The original reads: "gibt sofort klein bei" (Fallada 412).
- ²⁶ The original reads: "er läuft sehr rasch, er merkt, sie sind nicht mehr hinter ihm, aber er wagt es nicht, sich umzusehen. Er läuft [...] weiter, immer geradeaus, in das Dunkel, in die Nacht hinein, die nirgendwo wirklich tiefschwarze Nacht ist" (Fallada 413).
- ²⁷ The original reads: "Ein frischer Wind weht herüber, die Büsche nicken mit ihren Zweigen, die Bäume rauschen ein wenig" (Fallada 7).
- ²⁸ The original reads: "Sie stapften in die Dünen, sie saßen in einer Mulde wie in einer großen freundlichen Hand, der Wind strich über die Dünenkuppen über ihre Köpfe fort" (Fallada 255).
- ²⁹ The original reads: "Der Wind bewegt die weißen Vorhänge an den Fenstern. Das Zimmer ist von einem sanften Licht durchstrahlt. Magisch angezogen gehen die beiden Arm in Arm gegen das offene Fenster und lehnen sich

hinaus" (Fallada 57).

- ³⁰ The original reads: "Das Zimmer scheint heller zu werden, während sie so spricht, es ist frische Luft, die von ihr weht [...] Nun wird es ganz hell, die Sonne ist aufgegangen" (Fallada 384).
- ³¹ The original reads: "irgend etwas ist in dieser schweigenden Nacht, was ihr Herz unruhig macht. Da sind die Sterne, sie funkeln in der kalten Luft [...]. Kein Wind, kein Geräusch, nichts [...]" (Fallada 422).
- ³² The original reads: "Und plötzlich ist die Kälte weg, eine unendlich sanfte grüne Woge hebt sie auf und ihn mit ihr. Sie gleiten empor, die Sterne funkeln ganz nahe; sie flüstert: "Aber du kannst mich doch ansehen! Immer und immer! Du bist doch bei mir, wir sind doch beisammen [...]" (Fallada 425).
- ³³ The original reads: "Es ist das alte Glück, es ist die alte Liebe. Höher und höher, von der befleckten Erde zu den Sternen. Und dann gehen sie beide ins Haus, in dem der Murkel schläft" (Fallada 425).

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