‘Counter-infections’: Biopolitics and Performance in Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek and Christoph Schlingensief

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(German)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

2014

Date of final oral examination: 08/01/2014

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisor Sabine Gross for more than a decade of mentoring, encouragement and careful reading. Next, I would like to thank Marc Silberman and Hans Adler for their support and critical insight throughout my graduate career and especially during my dissertation defense. I would also like to thank Sonja Klocke, who provided important new perspectives on my work in its final stages (and was incredibly helpful during my job search), and Jill Casid, for her close reading and insightful comments at my defense. I am grateful to Nancy Kaiser for her suggestions and support early in the dissertation process, and for her encouragement going as far back as my days as an undergraduate. Venkat Mani, James Steakley and Klaus Berghahn have my gratitude for being important intellectual influences during my time in graduate school. I would also like to thank Mark Mears and Joan Leffler for their help with countless administrative tasks. Finally, I would like to thank Randall Halle of the University of Pittsburgh for suggesting that I work on Schlingensief in the first place.

My "Kommilitonen," both in the German Department and beyond it, helped make my graduate experience great on an interpersonal and intellectual level. At UW-Madison, I would like to thank Rose Rittenhouse, the only other remaining member of my cohort, as well as Gideon Stanton, Charlie Webster, Ben Parrot, Katie Chapman, Frieda Fichtner, Ragnar Svare, Justin Court and anyone else who I may have forgotten. I am especially grateful to Paul Buchholz of Scripps College for providing the soundtrack to this dissertation. I would also like to thank, in no particular order, the numerous other

scholars I met during my time as a Fulbrighter in Berlin, especially Paul Flaig, Matt Cornish, Shane Boyle, Abby Anderton and Simon Walsh.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Tom and Marianne Davis, my siblings, Melissa and Sam Davis, and my in-laws, Hugh and Holly Quinn, for their emotional support and encouragement during my graduate studies. My deepest gratitude goes to Claire Davis, my wife, the love of my life and my favorite fellow student, for supporting and helping me in innumerable ways, not the least of which included viewing several of the unwatchable films of Christoph Schlingensief at my side. Finally, I cannot help but mention Henry Berwyn Fowler “Harry Bear” Davis, who has made my life a joy during the past 19 months.

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Abstract

Through a study of literature, performance and film by three of the most notorious postwar German-language cultural provocateurs – Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989), Christoph Schlingensief (1960-2010) and Elfriede Jelinek (1946-) – this dissertation demonstrates an intersection between psychoanalytic accounts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and theories of biopolitical power. It argues that the fascist past, characterized by the radicalized implementation of a biopolitical "paradigm of immunization" (Esposito), has itself become a legacy which must be "immunized" against in postwar German-language performance.

The first chapter focuses on the works *Frost* (1963) and *Heldenplatz* (1988) by the Austrian writer and dramatist Thomas Bernhard, tracing the way that the speech of monomaniacal male characters is constructed in biopolitical terms not only in these works, but in their reception and the reception of Bernhard's persona.

The second chapter argues that Christoph Schlingensief's films *100 Years of Adolf Hitler* (1989) and *Terror 2000* (1992) employ the New German Cinema's aesthetic strategy of parapraxis (Elsaesser) against the New German Cinema itself, showing that for Schlingensief, the "homeopathy" of the New German Cinema has become "autoimmune."

The final chapter investigates Elfriede Jelinek's appropriation and repurposing of the anti-Semitic biopolitical trope of the "parasite" in her 2011 essay "Das Parasitärdrama." In reading this work against the backdrop of the origin of the "parasite" in classical theater, the writings of philosopher Michel Serres on the systemic and

theatrical role of the parasite, and Jelinek's other theater manifestos and dramatic works, it becomes clear that "Das Parasitärdrama" is key to understanding the author's overall political project, but that the essay ultimately performs the helplessness of its own aesthetic.

The conclusion of the dissertation draws a connection between the "paradigm of immunization," which Bernhard, Schlingensief and Jelinek critically challenge, and Adorno's ideas about poetry after the Holocaust. Bernhard, Jelinek and Schlingensief's strategies of aesthetic negation – considered alongside Esposito's concept of immunity - are caught up in the very biopolitical processes they attempt to fight: their works reproduce the immunological imagination of National Socialism even as they attack, expose and re-purpose it.

Introduction

Erreger and *Erregungen*: Provocative Performance and Figurations of the National Body

I. Schlingensief's container

During the Wiener Festwochen in 2000, the German *Aktionskünstler* Christoph Schlingensief staged a performance piece in which he housed several asylum seekers in a shipping container on Herbert-von-Karajan-Platz in front of the Viennese Staatsoper. The asylum seekers were to have cameras trained on them 24 hours a day for the next week. In a parody of the popular television show "Big Brother," Schlingensief invited the Austrian public to log on to a specially created website where they could watch live streaming video of the inside of the container, and vote on their least favorite asylum seeker for the nightly "deportation." At the end of the week, the last remaining asylum seeker-cum-contestant was to be awarded citizenship through marriage to a willing Austrian. Set against the backdrop of recent elections that saw Wolfgang Schüssel's center right Österreichische Volkspartei (ÖVP) enter into a coalition government with the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) headed by Jörg Haider (a man considered by many on the European left to be a dangerous demagogue), Schlingensief's action was perfectly timed to provoke a robust public reaction, both in Austria and throughout Europe (see also Langston 234-235).[1]

[1] This *Aktion*, which cemented Schlingensief's reputation as a performance artist, has also become the touchstone for scholarly debates on Schlingensief. See, for example Schmidt 2008 (29). Two artists in the "BAVO" collective (see Chapter 2) use the container action as the basis for their reading of Schlingensief's strategy of "over-identification," which they associate (via the writings of Slavoj Žižek) with the Neue

The Viennese filmmaker Paul Poet documented the event in his 2003 film *Ausländer Raus: Schlingensiefs Container*. In Poet's film, Schlingensief is seen during the first few days of the theatrical action, brandishing a megaphone through which he shouts phrases like "Das ist Österreich — wir sind Nazis!" at passersby on the Opernplatz. Above the shipping container, his team has placed a sign with the slogan "Ausländer Raus." Schlingensief exhorts tourists to photograph the sign and tell the world what is happening in Austria. At the same time, he challenges Austrians themselves to oppose the ÖVP/FPÖ government, because it has allowed him to display such a hostile slogan in a prominent public place. The documentary shows how, after four days of provocations, a group of Viennese leftists mount a protest and storm Schlingensief's container, thus "liberating" the asylum seekers and effectively ending Schlingensief's action.

In Poet's film, we see Schlingensief on the morning after the "liberation" filled with new resolve. After deciding that the leftist protesters who freed the "captive" asylum seekers had intentions that were not entirely different from the FPÖ's (that is, to keep Austria's international image pure at all costs), he decides that, instead of heading home to Germany, he will continue the action. He begins day five by hanging a banner on the container reading "Unsere Treue heißt Ehre," a saying with a remarkable similarity to the SS motto "Meine Ehre heißt Treue." Schlingensief tells the crowd through his megaphone that he is merely quoting an FPÖ politician who repeated the modified SS slogan during a recent campaign speech. This new provocation produces its intended effect: Viennese citizens are understandably offended that the slogan be displayed so

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Slowenische Kunst movement (BAVO). The second chapter of this dissertation goes into more detail on this subject.

prominently in the city center. The rest of Poet's film documents the lively public reaction to Schlingensief's re-contextualization of the Nazi slogan.

During a roundtable discussion after the event, the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk was asked about the art action's relationship to the historical avant-garde:

> [Moderator Sven Gächter:] Und woher Herr Sl[oterdijk] glauben Sie, rührt denn die Schockwirkung eines solchen Projekts?
> [Sloterdijk:] Ich bin nicht sicher, ob das eine richtige Beschreibung ist, dass hier eine Schockwirkung stattgefunden hat.
> [Gächter:] die Erregungswirkung?
> [Sloterdijk:] Ja ich glaube, man muss eher von Erregungen sprechen, denn das Zeitalter des Schocks ist vorüber. Die Epoche, in der eine Avantgarde mit Überraschungen hat arbeiten können, oder mit Direktangriffen auf ein unvorbereitetes Nervensystem, ist vorbei. Das hat einfach damit zu tun, dass unsere Gesellschaft - immunologisch gesehen - auf einem Zustand ist, den es so noch nicht gegeben hat. Die Gesellschaft ist im großen und ganzen eigentlich durchgeimpft. Wir sind politisch durchgeimpft. Ich glaube, dass wir heute versuchen, das finde ich auch die wichtige Seite, und auch die theoretisch interessante Seite an Schlingensiefs Arbeit, dass er versucht, die Realität zu benutzen als etwas, wogegen es letzten Endes doch keine Impfung gibt. Wo eine letzte Immunitätsbarriere aufgehoben wird. Und das macht ja den Unterschied zwischen Big Brother und so einer Aktion aus" (From .pdf transcript of the conversation, www.schlingensief.com. S. a. Poet, ~36:08; Langston 236).

While the remainder of Sloterdijk's comments during the discussion circle around immunological metaphors, in the quote above he collapses two physiological systems, the nervous system and the immune system. Whether this is an oversight or intentional, it encapsulates perfectly the convergence of two discrete yet often intertwined and sometimes complementary metaphoric regimes used to describe social response to external irritation: society as a nervous system and society as an immune system. The first, the metaphor of the "nervous system," has roots in the physical nervous system, but has been abstracted by thinkers at least since Freud to explain psychic and emotional processes involved in individual and collective reactions to trauma. In later works specifically about German society by other social theorists whose thought has

psychoanalytic underpinnings, such as Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich or Aleida Assmann, the metaphor of the collective nervous system is invoked less directly but remains in force. The second, related metaphor in Sloterdijk's comments, the immune system, has been used by numerous other theorists to describe society's reaction to "undesirable" elements, systemic contradictions and irritations. It has seen a recent resurgence in the study of biopolitics, that is, state power over human life, especially in works that analyze how the biopolitical *dispositifs* of Nazism may be said to continue into the present.[2]

Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that Sloterdijk's conflation of these two metaphoric regimes is not unique: theoretical approaches based on the nervous system metaphor are not entirely free from the discourse of immunology, and approaches that explain social reactions in immunological terms also frequently invoke concepts from neurology. This metaphorical imbrication is also visible in the shared etymology of the German words *erregen* (to excite, agitate or arrouse), *Erregung* (excitement, irritation, arousal), and *Erreger* (germ or pathogen). The examination of these two intertwined metaphors becomes especially useful when considered in relation to the aesthetic irritations by the postwar avantgarde in Germany and Austria which concern the memory of National Socialism. Schlingensief's *Container-Aktion* is exemplary in this respect because of the way it united the collective memory of the Nazi past (both through its evocation of concentration camps and its use of the SS slogan) and

[2] As Thomas Lemke demonstrates, the concept of "biopolitics" has a long, complex and contentious history, which has been influenced by thinkers at all points on the political spectrum (1-5). In this context, I mean the strain of analysis inaugurated by Michel Foucault which informs the writings of Agamben and Esposito (Foucault 2003 244-45; s.a. Lemke 4-5).

the Austrian present.[3] Indeed, the artistic "Erregungen" that I investigate in this dissertation are all either conceived of or understood as "Erreger," i.e. attacks on, or vaccinations of a social immune system. Both the work of Bernhard, Jelinek and Schlingensief and the artists themselves have been described in positive, negative and ambivalent terms taken from medical science: as national "illnesses" or "cures," as "parasites," "viruses," "foreign bodies," "doctors," "oncologists" or "vaccines."[4] While other postwar authors and filmmakers pursue a more or less explicit program of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in works that dig through the German past to confront questions of guilt and remembrance, Bernhard, Jelinek and Schlingensief parody, recontextualize and play with either imagery or language from the Nazi past and attempts to come to terms with this past. In doing so, they eschew the public positions of moral authority taken by other artists, opting instead for ludic and sometimes downright clownish critique of contemporary politics.

These three artists, though they come from different backgrounds, (more or less) three different political generations, and do not always work in the same media, share a sense for theatricality and performance that blurs the lines between their public and private personae. This conflation of artist and work is central to my analysis in this dissertation. Because of the way in which all three of the artists position themselves in the public sphere, I believe that it is unproductive to read their works in isolation from the public reception of the authors or the works themselves, i.e., to separate the "Werk" from

[3] s. a. Langston 241.
[4] For example, in the same roundtable discussion with Sloterdijk that I quoted above, he later refers to Schlingensief (positively) as a "Theatervirus" (6). These appellations are documented at length in each chapter.

the "Wirkung" as Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler puts it in the case of Thomas Bernhard (see Chapter 1).

While Jelinek's incisive deconstructions of patriarchal language, Bernhard's carefully constructed rhythmic rants, and Schlingensief's manic restagings of the Nazi past are ostensibly motivated by similar political goals as other left-wing artists, their works take an affect-laden, performative and frankly provocative approach to political art, which blurs the lines between irony and candor in ways that are often unsettling. While irony and Brechtian *Verfremdung* have been mainstays of cinematic, literary and theatrical discourses of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in both Germany and Austria since the fall of the wall, Schlingensief, Jelinek and Bernhard do not seek to arrive at historical insight or social consensus through rational or dialectical methods. Instead, they seek to disrupt consensus and to provoke or unsettle their audiences in ways that cannot be easily assimilated rationally or coopted for party politics.

II. The generational construction of memory after the Third Reich

In seeking to place these artists in historical context, it is useful to understand what separates each of them from or unites them with their respective political generations. Whereas Bernhard (born in 1931) belongs – roughly speaking – to the same generation as Günter Grass and Christa Wolf (1927 and 1929, respectively), Schlingensief and Jelinek were born much later (1960 and 1946), and so their personal connections to the collective memory associated with fascism are different.

In their 1998 study of German collective memory *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945*, Ute

Frevert and Aleida Assmann delineate three stages of cultural memory. The first, the *kommunikatives Gedächtnis*, is the memory preserved by eyewitnesses or others who lived through the events. It is a memory that is constructed through social interaction among eyewitnesses and between eyewitnesses and members of other generations: "Das kommunikative Gedächtnis entsteht in einem Milieu räumlicher Nähe, regelmäßiger Interaktion, gemeinsamer Lebensformen und geteilter Erfahrungen" (36).

The communicative memory is inexorably tied to and co-constituted by the memories of a single generation: "Die expliziten subjektiven Erinnerungen sind eingebunden in ein implizites Generationsgedächtnis" (38). That is to say, the communicative memory is constructed through the reciprocal action between an individual's memory and his/her position in the collective.

Thomas Bernhard, like Christa Wolf and Günter Grass, was a child or early adolescent during much of the Third Reich, and therefore belongs to the *Erlebnisgeneration* of the Third Reich. However, as Assmann makes clear in this section, the Third Reich represents an extreme case of communicative memory construction because there were no fewer than three discrete political generations formed during the 12 years of the Third Reich (40). She quotes Heinz Bude's book *Bilanz der Nachfolge. Die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus* to illustrate this point:

> Es war die Zufälligkeit des Jahrgangs, die den einzelnen so oder so in das historische Geschehen verwickelte und ihn so oder so schuldig werden ließ. Für die 1924 Geborenen gelten andere Maßstäbe als für die 1927 Geborenen, und noch andere für die 1930 Geborenen. Es ist ein Altersunterschied von drei Jahren, der die ersten zur schuldigen Generation der jungen Soldaten, die zweiten zur 'skeptischen Generation' der Flakhelfer und die dritten zur 'unbefangenen Generation' der 'weißen Jahrgänge' schlägt" (Bude 91, qtd. in Assmann 40).

Even if Bude's generational sketch is less than completely reliable (most notably in the case of Günter Grass, who in 2006 revealed himself to have been a member of the SS at the end of the war – thus more than a mere *Flakhelfer*), it illustrates how political events and ruptures, rather than spans of time, construct generations. It seems at least plausible that Bernhard's more frankly confrontational approach to the Nazi past can partially be attributed to his generational position: unlike Grass, he was not old enough to have been a *Flakhelfer* (having only reached the age of 14 by the end of the war), and thus did not have to grapple with the questions of guilt and complicity in quite the same way as Grass. Of course, Bernhard's trademark obstinacy when it comes to exposing the remnants of the Austrian Nazi past took a while to manifest itself. While Bernhard's earlier work such as the novel *Frost* (1963) approaches the war only obliquely (references are made to "der Krieg", but not to National Socialism), his later, mature work is progressively bolder and more confrontational, culminating in the play *Heldenplatz*, which is the subject of the first chapter of this dissertation.[5]

If Bernhard's birth placed him on the threshold of the *Erlebnisgeneration*, and therefore made him part of the collective that constructs the *kommunikatives Gedächtnis*, Elfriede Jelinek's birth, in 1946, places her squarely in the second generation and in the midst of the second phase of cultural memory, which Assmann refers to as the *kollektives Gedächtnis* or collective memory. While all memory is collective on a certain level, Assmann has a particular kind of collectivity in mind with this term:

> Das kollektive Gedächtnis ist […] eine Steigerungsform des Generationsgedächtnisses, das sich ohne entsprechende Maßnahmen mit dem

[5] Although *Frost* does not approach the subject of the war directly, it does hint at the trauma left behind by the war. The most memorable image, practically borrowed explicitly from one of Freud's descriptions of trauma, is that of a Pfarrhaus in the village whose foundation has been torn asunder in an earthquake, yet shows no visible damage to the outside (146).

> Ableben seiner Träger immer wieder von selbst auflöst. Wie wird das kollektive Gedächtnis zu einem sozialen Langzeitgedächtnis? Die Antwort lautet: in Verbindung mit der Entstehung eines politischen Kollektivs, einer Solidargemeinschaft. Gedächtnis und Kollektiv unterstützen sich gegenseitig: das Kollektiv ist der Träger des Gedächtnisses, das Gedächtnis stabilisiert das Kollektiv. […] Das kollektive Gedächtnis ist ein politisches Gedächtnis. Im Gegensatz zum diffusen kommunikativen Gedächtnis, das sich von selbst herstellt und wieder auflöst, ist es außengesteuert und zeichnet sich durch eine starke Vereinheitlichung aus (42).

The collective memory, in other words, is a phase during which memory is employed for narrow ideological purposes: there are clear winners and losers, victims and perpetrators, good and evil parties. This phase in the memory of the Third Reich in Germany corresponds roughly to the Cold War, when the East and West German governments each tried to paint themselves as the heirs to liberal German traditions like the 1848 revolutions and various other resistance movements, while casting the other nation as a de facto continuation of the Third Reich.[6]

Jelinek, an avowed leftist whose political views were shaped by the protest movements of the late 60s and early 70s, is not free of this type of polarized thinking, though it is by no means characteristic of all of her works.[7] It is especially visible, for example, in her 1980 novel *Die Ausgesperrten*, which tells the story of a gang of Austrian teenagers who run amok in 1950s Vienna, beating and robbing pedestrians for sport. Their youthful ennui and aggression are explicitly linked to the silence surrounding the violence in Austria's recent past.[8] The disabled father of the two middle-class children

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[6] Much of the second part of *Geschichtsvergessenheit -- Geschichtsversessenheit*, authored by Frevert, is concerned with this dynamic of reciprocal blame that arose between the two German states.

[7] Although Jelinek spent 1968 isolated in her Vienna apartment due to agoraphobia, her first novel, *bukolit* dates from this time, and is intimately connected to the protests launched by the Wiener Schule in the form of linguistic critique (Mayer 42).

[8] See, for example, the first page of the work, after the teens have attacked a man in the park: "Anna ist eine Täterin. Das Opfer ist immer besser, weil es unschuldig ist. Zu dieser Zeit gibt es allerdings immer noch zahlreiche unschuldige Täter. Sie blicken voller Kriegsandenken von blumengeschmückten Fensterbänken

Anna and Rainer passes the time forcing himself on their mother and reliving his days as an officer in the SS. All of the characters in the story are manifestly negative to the point of caricature, with the notable exception of the mother of the working-class teenager Hans, who wishes that her son would spend more time learning about his father, who died in the concentration camps as part of the socialist resistance to the Nazis. The political polarization within the novel between left and right extends even to the choice of character names: Hans and Sophie, two of the anti-social teenagers, are clearly named after the siblings Hans and Sophie Scholl, paragons of bourgeois Christian (that is, non-socialist) resistance to the Third Reich.

For his part, Bernhard made polarization into a structural formal principle throughout his later work. The examples are too numerous to mention, but an illustration of this typical Bernhardian tendency is encapsulated perfectly by the title of Reinhild Steingröver's monograph on Bernhard: *Einerseits, Andererseits* (2000). What separates Bernhard's polarized narratives from Jelinek's early polemics is his refusal to take sides in party politics. In Bernhard's texts, polar opposites co-exist in irresolvable tension. While Jelinek's membership in the KPÖ is well documented – even if she remained ambivalent about many aspects of the party (Mayer 105) – Bernhard's political views never centered on a single party.

Christoph Schlingensief, born in 1960, was less than 15 years younger than Elfriede Jelinek. Nevertheless, he belongs to yet another generation. In this case, the watershed year separating Jelinek and Schlingensief is 1968. While Jelinek's first prose pieces are connected to this era (Mayer 42), Schlingensief was still a child. Yet he is

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aus freundlich ins Publikum, winken oder bekleiden hohe Ämter. Dazwischen Geranien. Alles sollte endlich vergeben und vergessen sein, damit man ganz neu anfangen kann" (7).

close enough in birth to Jelinek's generation to feel the need to distance himself from it, which becomes clear in works like the *Hörspiel* and theater piece *Rocky Dutschke '68* (1996) which mocks icons of the left such as Rudy Dutschke, Wolf Biermann and Heiner Müller, among others. However, Schlingensief's role models include several artists either closely associated with the "68ers" (Joseph Beuys) or who could be considered "68ers" themselves (Rainer Werner Fassbinder), meaning that his relationship to the protest movement as a whole is ambivalent. Schlingensief's irreverent treatment of iconic moments in the German memory of the Third Reich (which include, for example, an action in which he parodied Willy Brandts Warsaw *Kniefall* in front of the Statue of Liberty in New York while dressed as an orthodox Jew [Häntzschel 1999]) place his actions, whatever their ostensible political aims, squarely within the third phase of memory as outlined by Assmann: *das kulturelle Gedächtnis*. Much of his work, I will argue, is in fact a reflection on the cultural memory of the Third Reich and its development within German culture.

Cultural memory is memory that is created primarily through media and educational institutions, that is, it is memory that survives after the *Erlebnisgeneration* has passed on. Assmann describes cultural memory as follows:

> Während das kollektive Gedächtnis eine gemeinsame Erfahrung und einen gemeinsamen Willen auf Dauer stellt, dient das kulturelle Gedächtnis den Bürgern einer Gesellschaft dazu, in langfristiger historischer Perspektive überlebenszeitlich zu kommunizieren und sich damit einer Identität zu vergewissern, die durch Zugehörigkeit zu einer generationsübergreifenden Überlieferung und weitgespannten historischen Erfahrungen entsteht. Aufgrund seiner medialen und materialen Beschaffenheit widersetzt sich das kulturelle Gedächtnis den Engführungen, wie sie für das kollektive Gedächtnis typisch sind. Seine Bestände lassen sich niemals rigoros vereinheitlichen und politisch instrumentalisieren, denn diese stehen grundsätzlich einer Vielzahl von Deutungen offen (50).

Schlingensief's Third Reich is formed less through encounters with eyewitnesses and more through images and tropes originating in the media. These images are combined freely with styles, techniques and images borrowed from other sources: talk shows, American horror or exploitation films, melodramas by Fassbinder, Sirk or Harlan, happenings, and so on. Schlingensief's use of many of the actors who appeared in Fassbinder films suggests, in fact, that his cinematic encounters with the Nazi past take previous such attempts in the New German Cinema as their referent, not the German past itself. I will discuss this phenomenon at greater length in Chapter 2.

The boundaries between the three stages of memory are anything but clear-cut. All three types of memory – communicative, collective and cultural – exist simultaneously for a period of years, until the *Erlebnisgeneration* has passed on. As Aledia Assmann puts it, "[d]ie Anordnung dieser drei Begriffe führt zu Stufen immer höherer Integration und größerer Reichweite in Raum und Zeit" (49). Even if the *Erlebnisgeneration* is gone, however, Assmann's examples, which include the memory of Serbian defeat at the hands of the Osman Turks in 1389, and the Jewish memory of the destruction of the second temple in 73 BC, suggest that there is no guarantee that the collective memory will ever entirely give way to a cultural memory; rather, the two may co-exist (43).

We can surmise, however, that the cultural memory will always eventually become increasingly dominant. There is evidence that this has been happening in Germany over the past few years in the context of the Third Reich. To illustrate this, I need only point to two particularly notable examples: Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) and Dani Levy's *Mein Führer* (2007). *Mein Führer* features a farcical

Adolf Hitler played by Helge Schneider, and *Inglorious Basterds* includes a character known as the "Jew Hunter" who is charged with hunting down Jews in France.

Although they are certainly not the first films to take a playfully revisionist approach to the National Socialist past (Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* [1940] comes to mind, although it was filmed before the crimes of Nazi Germany were well-known), these films were nevertheless remarkable for the relative lack of controversy that they inspired.[9] Tarantino's film, which was co-produced by Babelsberg Studios, shot in German, English and French and starred the Austrian actor Christoph Waltz, was arguably just as much of a German film as it was an American one. In the film, a group of Jewish-American soldiers infiltrate Nazi-occupied France and take bloody revenge on high-ranking Nazi officials (including Hitler, Goebbels and Goering) and common German soldiers alike. This example alone illustrates the difficulties in seeing memory (at least cultural memory as defined by Assmann) in purely national terms. In the mediated cultural memory, memory of the Third Reich and the Holocaust is no longer the domain of survivors and eyewitnesses, but has rather become part of the cultural heritage of the Western world.

While broad generational characteristics may be recognizable in their works, what makes Bernhard, Jelinek and Schlingensief's provocations interesting to consider together is the extent to which they fall outside of Assmann's generational model. If their work were merely reducible to their respective generations' memory of the Third Reich, it would make for an uncompelling comparison. I do not wish to overstate similarities among the three artists, but their use of provocation is a heuristic that illuminates a

[9] Rolf Hochhuth's play *Heil Hitler!* which premiered around the same time as the Levy film, caused even less of a scandal than the minor one provoked by *Mein Führer*, despite its provocative name and the use of the Swastika in its promotional materials (Wahl 2007).

certain type of trans-generational treatment of the traumatic memory of the Third Reich, the nature of which I will examine in more detail later.

Despite (or perhaps precisely *because of*) their provocative stances, all three artists have become fixtures in cultural institutions in Germany and Austria. Thomas Bernhard's plays are widely considered classics in and outside of Austria, especially after Claus Peymann took a former cadre of Bernhard actors from the Vienna Burgtheater to the Berliner Ensemble in 1999. In 2004, Elfriede Jelinek won the Nobel Prize for literature, and her plays are performed all over Germany. Finally, Christoph Schlingensief's recent fame in Germany is perhaps almost as surprising as Jelinek's Nobel Prize win. Once known only to a small audience for his over-the-top Volksbühne productions and his *Wende*-parody film *Das Deutsche Kettensägemassaker* (1990), he became a mainstream figure of some prominence after publishing a memoir about his struggle with lung cancer in 2009 (*So schön wir hier kann es im Himmel nicht sein*). His attempts to raise funds for an "Operndorf" in Africa during the last two years of his life received quite a bit of attention in the mainstream German media.[10] In 2011, he was posthumously awarded a Golden Lion for the German national pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

There are personal connections between the three artists as well: Elfriede Jelinek participated in Schlingensief's *Container-Aktion*, and later requested that he direct her theater piece *Bambiland*, a critique of the US-led war against Iraq, which premiered late in 2003. She went on to write several texts for Schlingensief which were used in his later

[10] He appeared, for example, on the German television show "Beckmann," and was lauded in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* after receiving the 2010 Helmut-Käutner-Preis (Seßlen, Georg 04.03.2010).

theater performances. I provide a brief reading of two of these texts in the concluding section of the chapter on Schlingensief in this dissertation.

III. Psychoanalysis, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and biological collectivity

In what follows, I will argue that the most important overlap in the two discourses on nervous systems and immunology comes from their claim that individual or group identity is constructed through the introduction of attenuated doses of negative elements, whether these are "pathogenic" elements or traumatic ones. While my initial focus on accounts of the German past driven by psychoanalytic theory may seem narrow at first, it should become clear that these accounts shape the later historical scholarship as well as public discussions about the effect of art that recalls the Nazi past (as seen for example in the quote above from Peter Sloterdijk).

Since I am concerned in this introduction with the interplay between metaphors of the nervous and immune systems in discourses surrounding identity formation, specifically as it applies to the German situation, I direct most of the following discussion to postwar theorists and approaches. However, I will first provide a brief discussion of Sigmund Freud's essays *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* and "Trauer und Melancholie," both because they form the basis for central arguments made by later writers, and because they themselves use metaphors based on the physical nervous system, which are simultaneously cast in immunological terms.

Freud's text *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* is one of the foundational texts dealing with traumatic memory's effect on the constitution of identity. During his work with patients exhibiting symptoms of "Kriegsneurose," Freud noticed that the patients returned to their

traumatic experiences in dreams, instead of having wish-fulfillment fantasies as Freud's studies in *Die Traumdeutung* would have anticipated. This led Freud to the following conjecture, which is the point of departure for his essay:

> Es kann also nur so sein, daß eine starke Tendenz zum Lustprinzip in der Seele besteht, der sich aber gewisse andere Kräfte oder Verhältnisse widersetzen, so daß der Endausgang nicht immer der Lusttendenz entsprechen kann (5).

One important component of Freud's findings on the psyche's confrontation with trauma in this essay is trauma's connection to the *Wiederholungszwang*, or repetition compulsion, that is, the traumatized patient's repeated and involuntary return to the scene of trauma in thoughts and dreams. On the trail of the *Wiederholungszwang*, Freud turns to children's games (11).

This point in the essay has become the main focus for several contemporary revisions of Freud. In what follows, Freud introduces a now-famous anecdote about watching his grandson play with a wooden toy. The child throws a wooden spool over the side of his crib, then pulls it back up on a string. In doing so, he makes two separate noises. Freud soon learns that his grandson is saying "fort" when he throws the wooden spool out of sight and "da" when the spool returns. At first, he interprets the child's game as follows:

> Die Deutung des Spieles lag nahe. Es war im Zusammenhang mit der großen kulturellen Leistung des Kindes, mit dem von ihm zustande gebrachten Triebverzicht (Verzicht auf Triebbefriedigung), das Fortgehen der Mutter ohne Sträuben zu gestatten (13).

That is, the child is seen mastering the absence of the mother through play – specifically, through symbolic play. This is one aspect of the fort-da game, the one that is brought out by later writers like Eric Santner who seek to link the act of signification with the process

of mourning. But Freud's conclusions about the game are actually quite a bit more ambivalent. He offers another possible interpretation of the game:

> Das Wegwerfen des Gegenstandes, so daß er fort ist, könnte die Befriedigung eines im Leben unterdrückten Racheimpulses gegen die Mutter sein, weil sie vom Kinde fortgegangen ist, und dann die trotzige Bedeutung haben: Ja, geh' nur fort, ich brauch' dich nicht, ich schick' dich selber weg (14).

And finally, Freud is unable to decide if the game is totally at odds with the pleasure principle:

> Man gerät so in Zweifel, ob der Drang, etwas Eindrucksvolles psychisch zu verarbeiten, sich seiner voll zu bemächtigen, sich primär und unabhängig vom Lustprinzip äußern kann (14).

Later theorists focus on the similarities between the child's game and the work of mourning or inoculation (see my discussion of Johannes Türk and Eric Santner below) due to the resonances between the construction of identity in childhood (through the traumatic loss of the mother) and Freud's description of successful mourning in the essay "Trauer und Melancholie." In both cases, the reality principle wins out over infantile narcissism, and the libidinous drives focused on a beloved object must be slowly decathected. From "Trauer und Melancholie":

> Worin besteht nun die Arbeit, welche die Trauer leistet? Ich glaube, daß es nichts Gezwungenes enthalten wird, sie in folgender Art darzustellen: Die Realitätsprüfung hat gezeigt, daß das geliebte Objekt nicht mehr besteht, und erläßt nun die Aufforderung, alle Libido aus ihren Verknüpfungen mit diesem Objekt abzuziehen (430).

This description is not at odds with the fort-da game, although it is at odds with Freud's second conjecture about the infants "Racheimpulse" against the mother – for if the mother is really equivalent to a mourned object, revenge against her would be futile and thus a symptom not of the acceptance of reality and thus "the primal work of mourning" (Santner 21), but rather of mourning's negative counterpart, melancholia, because of the

infant's desire for power over the absent mother, that is, a narcissistic tendency that precisely does not acknowledge the limitations of the self.

Freud, however, does not make this connection in either of the two essays. In "Trauer und Melancholie," even though the result of *Trauerarbeit* may be clear ("das Ich [ist] nach Vollendung der Trauerarbeit wieder frei und ungehemmt" [430]), the actual process is not: "[...] wir [können] nicht einmal sagen, durch welche ökonomische Mittel die Trauer ihre Aufgabe löst" (442).[11]

It is Freud's departure in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* from his discussion of traumatic neurosis and his detour into infant psychology, combined with "Trauer und Melancholie," that lay the groundwork for later theorists like Lacan (and Kristeva, in her reading of Lacan) to claim that the entry into language and the process of signification itself is traumatic, analogous to the work of mourning.[12] As I will later demonstrate in my discussion of Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects*, the analogy between childhood language learning and mourning provides an essential theoretical insight on the way individuals and societies deal with trauma, and is simultaneously beset with unexamined assumptions that ultimately reveal essential weaknesses in the Lacanian psychoanalytic approach. For is it not more traumatic for a child (and for a child's relationship to its mother) to *not* learn to speak? And can the putative mourning of a lost bond with the mother really be likened to mourning, either the loss of a loved one or the loss of collective national identity? In the following sections I want to examine the implications of these questions.

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[11] See also: 439 "das ökonomische Verständnis des Herganges bleibt hier [bei der Melancholie] wie dort [bei der Trauer] aus."

[12] See, for example, Kristeva's discussion of the "thetic" nature of signification: "Language learning can therefore be thought of as an acute and dramatic confrontation between positing-separating-identifying and the motility of the semiotic *chora*. Separation from the mother's body, the *fort-da* game, anality and orality […] all act as a permanent negativity that destroys the image and the isolated object even as it facilitates the articulation of the semiotic network, which will afterwards be necessary in the system of language where it will be more or less integrated as a *signifier*" (47).

There is another dimension to "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" that will become important later in my discussion of systems theory and identity formation, namely Freud's attempt to schematize the psychic response to trauma. In his description of a system that functions as a mediator between the inside and the outside, that is, a system that internally processes external stimuli, he is not so far away from Luhmann's system-theoretical account of emotions and (in a more abstract sense) Esposito's description of the reciprocal effect between immunity and community in *Immunitas*:

> Da das Bewußtsein im wesentlichen Wahrnehmungen von Erregungen liefert, die aus der Außenwelt kommen, und Empfindungen von Lust und Unlust, die nur aus dem Innern des seelischen Apparates stammen können, kann dem System *W-Bw* [Wahrnehmung-Bewußtsein] eine räumliche Stellung zugewiesen werden. Es muß an der Grenze von außen und innen liegen, der Außenwelt zugekehrt sein und die anderen psychichen Systeme umhüllen (Freud Ibid. 23).

While Freud's conception of the mediation between inside and outside, self and other involves a passive rather than active barrier (as in immunology), his metaphors in the essay nevertheless borrow from the immunological tropes of attack and defense. Early in "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" he states his goal as "die Untersuchung der seelischen Reaktion auf die äußerliche Gefahr [...]" (8). Trauma, as defined by Freud in this speculative part of his essay, is "[s]olche Erregungen von außen, die stark genug sind, den Reizschutz zu durchbrechen, […]" (29).

These "Erregungen" need not be only traumatic experiences but are described as sensations with an astonishing physicality, able, for example, to leave impressions on the cerebral cortex (23). Additional terms employed in this essay include the familiar "defense mechanism" and the discussion of psychic "Abwehr" of other kinds. In other words, while Freud's speculations are based on the empirical, physical nervous system,

his language describing the function of this system conjures up the immune system. The most salient difference is that for Freud, *Abwehr* occurs not at the outer limit of the system, but is part of an internal dynamic that rids the psyche of excess stimulation. I will explore the implications of these metaphors in Freud's thought when I trace their appearance in the work of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich and Niklas Luhmann below.

Perhaps the seminal work on West German collective memory of the Third Reich, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlichs' *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1967) diagnosed a widespread refusal to acknowledge the crimes of the National Socialist past and to mourn both for the victims of Nazi crimes and the loss of the collective identity provided in the person of Hitler. In their study, the Mitscherlichs apply insights from speculative and clinical psychology to West German society as a whole, with a clearly democratic political bent. Throughout the book, their central concern is for the health of West German democracy, which they see as threatened by conformity and lack of affect, what they term "politischgesellschaftliche Sterilität" resulting from "Verleugnung der Vergangenheit" (24). A brief discussion of this canonical work's relationship to Freudian theory will illuminate further connections between memory studies, psychoanalysis and the metaphors of the immune system.

At the beginning of the study, the Mitscherlichs derive a novel explanation for the *Wirtschaftswunder* from the impeded confrontation with the Nazi past:

> Statt einer politischen Durcharbeitung der Vergangenheit aus dem geringsten Versuch der Wiedergutmachung vollzog sich die explosive Entwicklung der deutschen Industrie. Werktätigkeit und ihr Erfolg verdeckten bald die offenen Wunden, die aus der Vergangenheit geblieben waren (23).

The success of the Wirtschaftswunder is described as "manische Abwehr," recalling the narcissism of the melancholic subject in Freud's "Trauer und Melancholie" (25). In this case, however, the Mitscherlichs claim that instead of a "Melancholie der Massen" there has been a successful psychic defense against the traumas of losing the war (37). The rest of the book is devoted to teasing out the consequences of the use of these defense mechanisms.

The Mitscherlichs' theoretical arsenal is stocked with concepts taken from several seminal essays by Freud but most notably "Trauer und Melancholie," "Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten," and "Jenseits des Lustprinzips." The Freudian provenance of their analytic apparatus has an unavoidable effect on their findings. The focus on the individual and the extrapolation of individual experience to explain group dynamics, is present from the beginning of their study, for example when they define politics (*Politik*) as "menschliches Verhalten in großer Zahl" (7). For the Mitscherlichs, collective behavior is no different from the way the individuals in the collective would behave in isolation. There is no accounting for mob mentality besides Hitler as an "Ego-Ersatz" for the masses.

If group behavior is analogous to individual behavior for the Mitscherlichs, then the nation also has a collective body with corresponding physical systems, which is clear on the metaphorical level throughout the text: "[die Therapie] kann nicht ohne Berührung neuralgischer Punkte abgehen" (8) – here, the metaphor of the collective nervous system is suggested by the "neuralgische Punkte." It resurfaces repeatedly throughout the text, for example, in the discussion of West German political apathy, which is explained as "*Reaktionsträgheit* im politischen und sozialen Organismus" (emphasis mine) (17).

The homology between the clinical patient and the nation is especially apparent in invocation of Freud's therapeutic model from the text "Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten":

> Der Inhalt ehemaligen Erinnerns, auch wenn es von heftigen Gefühlen begleitet ist, verblaßt rasch wieder. Deshalb sind Wiederholung innerer Auseinandersetzungen und kritisches Durchdenken notwendig, um die instinktiv und unbewußt arbeitenden Kräfte des Selbstschutzes im Vergessen, Verleugnen, Projezieren und ähnlichen Abwehrmechanismen zu überwinden. Die heilsame Wirkung solchen Erinnerns und Durcharbeitens ist uns aus der klinischen Praxis wohlbekannt (24).

The nation, like a patient under clinical treatment, can benefit from therapeutic psychoanalytic practices. This extension of individual behavior and biology to group dynamics allows the Mitscherlichs to transfer Freud's explanatory model for human behavior – the dynamics of the nuclear family – to the nation as a whole. This means that the development of the nation is inevitably cast as a process of maturation:

> Die große Majorität der Deutschen erlebt heute die Periode der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft retrospektiv wie die Dazwischenkunft einer Infektionskrankheit in Kinderjahren […] (25).

Here, the memory of National Socialism is cast explicitly in immunological terms. Moving past the childhood illness of National Socialism, the Germans are now in a kind of stunted puberty. The Mitscherlichs reflect this contention both in the introductory sections of the book and especially in the fourth chapter "Identifikationsschicksale in der Pubertät."

In analyzing the stunted adolescence of the German people, the Mitscherlichs posit Hitler as a Vaterersatz, an ego-ideal who is simultaneously revered for his ability to transgress previous cultural norms, and unconsciously hated for his control over his

"children." This leads to masochism *en masse* halting the ego development of an entire generation.

As I demonstrated in the previous section on Freud, the Mitscherlichs' psychoanalytic discourse, though reliant on an abstracted model of the physical nervous system (id, ego, etc.), is still not entirely free from the discourse of the immune system and tropes of attack and defense. These metaphors recur in the Mitscherlichs' study as well in their explanation of the defense mechanisms used to avoid confrontation with the past:

> Die Mechanismen, um die es hier geht, sind Notfallreaktionen, Vorgänge, die dem biologischen Schutz des Überlebens sehr nahe, wenn nicht dessen psychische Korrelate sind (35).

This evocation of both the immune and nervous systems is what binds the Mitscherlichs' work to other seemingly unrelated discourses like Luhmann's systems theory and Esposito's political immunology (discussed below).

At a distance of more than 60 years, there are many other objections that one can raise against the Mitscherlichs' thesis and working methods. The Mitscherlichs find historical precedence for the *Untertanmentalität* among the German people as a whole, thus painting them with a rather broad brush. By revisiting the German *Sonderweg* thesis they actually end up recapitulating the idea of the Germans as a chosen people who are predestined, not to be the master race, but rather the greatest perpetrators of all time:

> Diese deutsche Art, das schier Unerreichbare kompromißlos so zu lieben, daß das Erreichbare darüber verloren geht, wiederholt sich in der deutschen Geschichte seit dem Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation (16).[13]

This reflects a tendency towards "negative aggrandizement" that Aleida Assmann points out several decades later (51).

[13] S.a. Santner 31.

Furthermore, leaving aside for a moment the question of whether the normative progression from adolescence to adulthood behind the Mitscherlichs' speculations is defensible, it is interesting to notice how casting postwar Germans as perpetual adolescents has the (clearly unintended) effect of mitigating their guilt. For there are many precedents for treating adolescents differently from adults within criminal justice systems, and a nation of adolescents, or adults stuck in adolescence, need not meet the same standards for culpability as other nations.

While there are shortcomings to the Mitscherlichs' theoretical approach, their work is nevertheless essential for explanations of the German confrontation with the past that work in affective, instead of purely rational terms, and is a key text for many other works.

If the Mitscherlichs metaphorically position postwar Germans as perpetual adolescents, Eric Santner's "postmodern revision" of their theories that he offers in his book *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* pushes Germans' development (and, by extension, the development of the second and third generations) back even further: to the state of infancy.[14] Nevertheless, Santner's study of postwar West German film is an essential contribution to my argument, both because of his focus on the uniquely aesthetic dimensions of memory and his recognition of the homeopathic aspects of identity formation.

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[14] The most succinct illustration of this infantilizing tendency (via Lacan) can be found on page 5 of *Stranded Objects*: "In Lacanian terms, the Jews were assigned to the role of the ones who intrude into and disrupt the Imaginary, akin to evil fathers who brutally uproot the children from their native matrix and maroon them in the cold and abstract space of the Symbolic. To eliminate Jews would allow for a fantasy of return to the purity of a self-identity unmediated by any passage through alterity. The destruction of the Jews becomes, according to this logic, part of a broad group psychological strategy designed to 'undo' or reverse the passage through the more primitive labor of mourning by which the boundaries between self and other are consolidated on the ruins of primary, that is, infantile, narcissism."

Santner's book was written just before the fall of the Berlin wall, and published shortly afterwards (1990). In it, he examines the films *Heimat* and *Hitler: ein Film aus Deutschland*, reading them as part of a "national Trauer-Spiel," a concept he arrives at through an innovative theoretical complex consisting of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Freudian theories of mourning, Benjamin's reflections on allegory, and Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida's ideas about language.

Stranded Objects, like *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, is a product of its times: near the beginning of the book, Santner devotes several pages to discussing the legacy of Paul de Man, whose reputation had been posthumously damaged by recently discovered wartime writings for a collaborationist newspaper in Belgium (13-19). Although the sections on de Man seem like a digression at first, they are actually essential to Santner's argument about film, because they reveal his conflation of visual and textual signs, which in turn allows him to argue that film is uniquely suited to the work of mourning.

Santner arrives at this elegiac dimension of film by way of the putatively elegiac nature of signification in general. Here, he finds a precedent in Walter Benjamin's writings on the baroque *Trauerspiel*:

> In language anticipating Derrida's critique of Western phonocentrism, Benjamin suggests that the greatness of the baroque lay precisely in its insight into the irreducible elegiac dimension of signification, which for Benjamin is to be seen in the allegorical mode of representation of baroque Trauerspiel (11).

Through a language game of his own, he then translates "Trauerspiel" into English in order to further appropriate Benjamin for poststructuralism:

> The fragmentation of all images of organic totality, which Benjamin sees as the mournful point of departure for the baroque, opens up extravagant and excessive possibilities of recollection, recombination, and interpretation. It is in this sense that the baroque allegorist has been regarded as the forbear of the postmodern *bricoleur*. Both engage in signifying practices that depend on a previous

> dispersion, on a certain state of diaspora. The difference is that the postmodernist, while insisting on this condition of loss and dispersion, tries to move beyond mourning and invest his or her libidinal energies in the process of improving new associations and correspondences in this open field of semiotic excess. The postmodernist appropriates the Benjaminian analysis of *mourning* play as one of mourning *play* (12).

From Benjamin's analysis of the *Trauerspiel*, it is only a small step to the conflation of the child's game from Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* and with Freudian mourning process from "Trauer und Melancholie," which I have already discussed at length above:

> Bereft by the mother's absence, and more generally by the dawning awareness that the interval between himself and the mother opens up a whole range of unpredictable and potentially treacherous possibilities, he reenacts the opening of that abyssmal [sic] interval within the controlled space of a primitive ritual. The child is translating, as it were, his fragmented narcissism into the formalized rhythms of symbolic behavior […] (20).

The connection between play and mourning allows Santner to show the connection between homeopathy and aesthetic creation, but at the same time suffers from several unexamined assumptions. First, there is the (nearly) uncritical acceptance of the oedipal triangle formed by the male child, the mother and the father. By making the oedipal triangle paradigmatic for his conception of mourning, not only does he place the mourning subject (by analogy) in an infantile state, he also carries over Freud's prejudices towards the heterosexual male child. Santner acknowledges some of these problems in a brief parenthetical statement, but does not confront the implications that oedipal thinking has for his project as a whole. He writes:

> (To speak of oedipal scenarios is, of course, to remain within the terms of a patriarchal symbolic order and, perhaps, to address primarily, though I hope not exclusively, the experience of the male child) (21).

This objection to Santner's book is not as trivial as it may seem at first glance,

for the "homeopathic cure" that Santner is suggesting for German society is based exactly on the oedipal construction of identity. While the "patriarchal symbolic order" is an integral part of Lacanian psychoanalysis,[15] to assume a male subject position is a curious blind spot in such an avowedly postmodern book, which espouses the need to challenge all master narratives based on "Western narcissism." Psychoanalysis, a Western master narrative par excellence, remains basically unquestioned throughout, even when it is applied in unorthodox ways. A second, related objection is that Santner constitutes the object of his study (i.e. the German people) in clearly homogenous (and hence explicitly *not* postmodern, fragmented, etc.) terms: although the Germans have not learned to say "we," while incorporating alterity into their identity, for his study, Santner must construct who "they" are, thus disallowing the very alterity he is seeking for Germans to acknowledge. This performative contradiction is especially evident in the second chapter, "Germany and the Tasks of Mourning in the Second and Third Generations" (31-56).

Nevertheless, Santner's account of the postwar German film is innovative in the way it employs psychoanalysis to understand the way aesthetic experience forms identity. In doing so, it often repeats the Mitscherlichs' tendency to extrapolate individual behavior to group dynamics:

> Numerous examples of the homeopathic pattern of mourning exist in the texts of ancient mythology. One thinks, for example, of the story of Apollo and Daphne in which the object of desire is transformed into a laurel tree from which the god then cuts and fashions a wreath. This construction of a figure or trope bearing the traces of the lost object displaces the desire for possession into a realm of material and formal laws, a realm of play or art. […] The self constitutes itself by homeopathically integrating the loss of its narcissistic fantasies of centrality and omnipotence. By learning to engage in symbolic behavior at a distance from the self through play and through identification with figures of power – totems – the child is able to survive loss and to discover new possibilities and satisfactions of a life in the symbolic order (22-24).

[15] See also Santner 101.

Another major weakness in Santner's approach, the conflation of the symbolic order (language) and loss, is evident in the above quote. The child loses a beloved object (the mother) through identification with the father (the symbolic). Thus, the entry into language is perceived as a traumatic event. This is not per se problematic, it is, indeed the pre-condition for signification in Lacanian psychoanalysis (see the quote from Kristeva in the footnote above). However, when the entry into language and the loss of infantile narcissism (which is as near to a universal human experience as there can possibly be) is equated with German trauma at the end of the war, whether this loss is the loss of the "specular" identity provided by Hitler gazing back at the *Volk*, or the loss of the war itself, the book takes on an ahistorical nature, with curiously overblown claims about the nature of language:

> To be a speaking subject is to have already assumed one's fundamental vocation as survivor of the painful losses – the structural catastrophes – that accompany one's entrance into the symbolic order (9).

If signification and mourning are really equivalent (as this passage and many others in the book seem to argue) and not merely analogous in some way, this is either a gross overstatement of the nature of learning language or a gross understatement of the trauma of losing a collective group identity. Ultimately, it is symptomatic of the post-structural tendency to treat everything as a problem of language.

Laden with the incredible burden of salvaging a new postmodern national identity from the ruins of history, it is no wonder that neither of the films that Santner discusses proves up to the task. *Heimat*, in Santner's analysis, places the nostalgic memory of pre-modern, idyllic Germany in competition with the memory of the Holocaust (100-102),

while *Hitler: Ein Film aus Deutschland* instantiates an "elegiac loop" that has no hopes of completing the work of mourning and forging a new identity (149).

Johannes Türk is another scholar who has developed similar ideas about the homeopathic dimension of literature through readings of texts by Freud and Benjamin. Türk's conception of literary immunization is not far from Santner's discussion of the elegiac nature of the cinema, but there are several important differences. Although Türk has made the concept of immunology central to his criticism in several essays, I will focus only on his 2007 essay "Rituals of Dying, Burrows of Anxiety in Freud, Proust and Kafka: Prolegomena to a Critical Immunology," in order to isolate the key components of his thinking about literary immunology.[16]

Türk begins with a discussion of Benjamin's "Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert." In a foreword to the piece, Benjamin describes his literary process as an "Impfung" against the nostalgic memory he fears he will experience in exile (142). This, according to Türk, is the beginning of a larger turn in modernist literature:

> Benjamin's text, therefore, marks nothing less than the ushering in of an age of immunology, in which writing the *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert* becomes an exemplary literary praxis. The critic turns into an immunologist, and his task is to exploit and mobilize the resources of immunization against the impact of traumatic events (142-143).

Türk jumps then from Benjamin's critical immunology to a text by Freud, "Die endliche und die unendliche Analyse," which grapples with the question of how analysis functions. Specifically, Freud is interested in whether psychoanalysis can be finished, or whether it must be a continuous process. Türk tells us that Freud "compares the

[16] Türk has published a book-length examination of "literary immunity," *Die Immunität der Literatur* (Türk 2011) which I will not address at length here, because it includes the article under discussion in a modified form. Türk's overall conception of immunity is not significantly different in the book form from what I deal with here.

achievements of psychoanalysis […] with the inoculation against scarlet fever […]" (144). Then he reads two other texts by Freud – the famous "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" and "Hemmung, Symptom, Angst" – along the same lines before concluding:

> What Freud defines here is an immunologic memory that can counteract the powers of trauma. By projecting past experiences into the future, this memory provides antigens against specific threats (145).

However, Türk notes that the immunology pinpointed by both Benjamin and Freud is more than a mere memory, it is an active inoculation, it is a set of practices giving rise to "a new concept of education" which has nevertheless "always been at work" in the domain of literature (145).[17] This is the closest that Türk gets in this essay to outlining a *social* theory of literary immunology. It remains instead a way for the *individual* to assimilate and anticipate trauma.

Literature, Türk claims, insofar as it allows us to experience things and prepare ourselves for events beyond the scope of our limited experience, is analogous to an immune system. The seemingly oxymoronic term he uses to describe this prophylactic function of literature, "analeptic prolepsis," is derived from Gérard Genette, who in turn takes it from the Greek "to take something in advance" and "to take something after the event" (146).

To illustrate "analeptic prolepsis," Türk returns to the Fort-Da-Spiel from Freud's "Jenseits des Lustprinzips," calling it "an archetypal scene of immunization" (146). Here it is instructive to note both the similarities and differences between Santner and Türk's respective readings of the Fort-Da-Spiel. For Santner, the Fort-Da-Spiel is a scene of

[17] The term Türk uses for this kind of education, "anthropogenesis," is reminiscent of Sloterdijk's discussion of *Anthropotechnik*, which he also derives from immunological thinking in his book-length essay *Du Mußt dein Leben Ändern. Über Anthropotechnik*. The analysis of this similarly will be part of the future expansion of this dissertation project.

mourning, a "presentation of elegiac procedures beyond the pleasure principle" (20). The difference between these two accounts is in which temporal direction the efforts are focused. In Santner's account, the child's game looks backwards, mourning the loss of the mother; it is "elegiac." For Türk, the child's game is focused on the future: it is designed to anticipate the coming trauma of the mother's absence.

These two views of the Fort-Da-Spiel are equally tenable, but they place emphasis on two diametrically opposed aspects of the game: either on the anticipation of future traumas or on the mastering of traumas in the past. The immunological memory that I propose to read in works by Bernhard, Schlingensief and Jelinek looks forward by looking backwards, it is concerned with the past as well as the future, and has elements of the processes described by both Santner and Türk.

While Türk's use of immunological or homeopathic metaphors to explain the function of literature are innovative, it, like Santner's study, has the drawback of being focused on the individual, and thus difficult to combine with memory studies of the kind pursued by Assmann and Frevert, which always focus on the social construction of memory. Türk reads writing as a fundamentally immunological procedure that an individual writer (e.g. Proust or Kafka) uses to "inoculate" him/herself against death.[18] This means that his reading is ultimately about the function of the process of writing for the author as a human being, and less about the social function of the text.

Santner, while recognizing the collective aspects of memory and mourning, nevertheless also relies too heavily on theories derived from individual behavior, such as

[18] See for example Türk 2007: "What becomes clear is that Proust's last writings on anxiety and suffering are means to cope with his illness by directing the affective immune mechanisms his writing has created against his own physical ailments. Emotion functions as a form that is directed against a traumatic scene of dying in which the author mobilizes all analogous experience for something that forbids analogies" (150).

Freud's description of the mourning process, the child's ego-differentiation, or the Mitscherlitschs' extrapolation of individual clinical cases to large-scale social processes.

The other fundamental limitation to both Türk and Santner's texts is their preoccupation with the negative or elegiac aspects of literary immunology. When Santner invokes an idea of the "Trauer-Spiel," that is, the playfulness of mourning, he imagines aesthetic play which is focused almost entirely on the past. And even though Türk's "analeptic prolepsis" is concerned with uniting the past and future, his future is ultimately bleak, in that it is characterized by the aporia represented by the individual writer's death. He concludes his essay by writing: "it is this impossible future for which immunology tries to prepare" (155).

IV. Systems theory and immunity: Luhmann, Esposito, Serres

At this point, I would like to return to the metaphors of the immune and nervous systems. It is my contention that examining the significance of biologically derived metaphors such as the collective "immune system" alongside memory studies approaches like Assmann and Frevert's provides fruitful ways of thinking beyond previous attempts to conceive of the artistic treatment of the Third Reich in terms of mourning or melancholy. While the discursive metaphors of the immune and nervous systems are often impossible to disentangle, the points at which they intersect reveal useful ways of thinking about how these authors make use of the Nazi past to "shock" audiences. The process of introducing negative elements in a weakened form is analogous to the medical practice of vaccination or homeopathy, and has consequences for the metaphorical body that it protects. The Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito summarizes this neatly in his

monograph on the concept of immunity translated into German as *Immunitas. Schutz und Negation des Lebens*:

> Natürlich, diese homöopathische Praktik des Schutzes – die durch Einschluß ausschließt und durch Negation affirmiert – vollzieht sich nicht, ohne Spuren auf der Verfaßtheit des eigenen Gegenstandes zu hinterlassen […]" (Esposito 2004: 15-16).

Esposito's study is especially insightful in the way that it makes the critical rubric of immunology become productive when viewed against its etymological foil: community. Through recourse to the Latin terms *immunitas* and *communitas*, Esposito demonstrates that while the two terms seem to be defined purely in opposition (both have the Latin word for gift, *munus*, as a root), in reality *immunitas* and *communitas*, and, by extension, immunity and community, are unthinkable unless considered together (Esposito 2004: 11-12, 14):

> Kurz, die Immunität ist die innere Grenze, welche die Gemeinschaft durchschneidet, indem sie sie auf sich selbst zurückfaltet, in einer Form, die sich zugleich als konstitutiv und destitutiv auswirkt: sie konstituiert – oder rekonstituiert – eben indem sie destituiert (17).

With the co-constitutive relationship between immunity and community in mind, the central concerns of my dissertation come into focus: what is the negative trace that remains from the use of fascism as provocation? In other words, what comes of fending off the resurgence of fascist discourse through imitating, parodying or recontextualizing exactly this discourse? What aspects of the reaction are revealed or obscured through the use of the metaphoric rubric of immunology? After all, as Ed Cohen reminds us in the introduction to his 2009 book *A Body Worth Defending*, the concept of immunity started in the legal realm and has only drifted into the natural sciences in the past few hundred years or so (3-4). Cohen's careful historical analysis of the drift of the notion of

"immunity" in the modern period, from the realm of "Polizey" (roughly speaking, state management of populations) into the conceptual framework of medical immunology, complements Esposito's philosophical reading of immunity in *Immunitas*.

In *Bios* (2008), Esposito keeps this philosophical focus on the concept of "immunity" while turning to the historical locus of the works under investigation in this dissertation, National Socialism. In *Bios*, Esposito argues that National Socialism was characterized by a radicalization of the "paradigm of immunization," which in the Third Reich ultimately turned the biopolitical task of "preserving life" into its opposite: producing death. In his analysis, biopolitics becomes "thanatopolitics." I will elucidate Esposito's analysis of biopolitics and the implications it has for my research in the conclusion of this dissertation.

It becomes clear that Esposito, Cohen, Türk and Santner are all concerned with the implications of the metaphor of a social "immune system." But they are not the only theorists to implicitly or explicitly analyze the "immune system" of society. Sloterdijk's comments concerning the avantgarde during the roundtable discussion quoted above were most likely influenced in no small part by Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. Not only is Sloterdijk almost certain to have read Luhmann's *Soziale Systeme* (1984) sometime before his conversation with Schlingensief in 2000, he also cites immunology as the single key component of his own anthropological thinking in his 2009 book *Du mußt dein Leben ändern. Über Anthropotechnik*.[19]

[19] See, for example: "Alle Geschichte ist die Geschichte von Immunsystemkämpfen. Sie ist mit der Geschichte des Protektionismus und der Externalisierung identisch. Die Protektion bezieht sich auf ein lokales Selbst, die Externalisierung auf eine anonyme Umwelt, für die niemand Verantwortung übernimmt" (712). This passage, with its description of a system primarily concerned with the distinction between itself and the environment, is clearly influenced by Luhmann's systems theory – and indeed, Sloterdijk makes this connection explicitly much earlier in the book. In his earlier *Sphären-Trilogie*, Sloterdijk also discusses human culture in terms of immunity.

Luhmann's systems theory, and especially the position of the immune system within it, parallels Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* and Santner's aesthetic homeopathy in that it is concerned with the way that identity is created through the differentiation of self from other. I will suggest in this section that there are theoretical insights to be won from Luhmann's system's theory when combined with the social dynamics of *Erregung* or "eruptive" memory as described by Assmann and Frevert. It will become clear from my discussion that the study of the immune system and the study of memory are not as distant from each other as it might appear at first glance, because the physical immune system itself (and hence its metaphorical extension) represents a very specific type of embodied memory.

Luhmann's *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeiner Theorie.* represents the beginning of a large-scale attempt to rethink sociology from the perspective of systems theory. At the heart of Luhmann's systems theory is the idea of the "autopoietic" or self-producing system. In my partial appropriation of Luhmann's thought for the use of thinking about political art, I want to keep in mind what Luhmann himself says about the usefulness of comparative systems theory at the beginning of the volume, namely, that systems exhibit functional similarities only at a certain level of abstraction:

> Die Unterscheidung von Ebenen soll fruchtbare Vergleichsansichten festlegen. Aussagen über Gleichheiten können dann auf die nächst höhere Ebene überführt werden. Zum Beispiel sind soziale Systeme und psychische Systeme gleich insofern, als sie Systeme sind (17-18).

In other words, to make comparisons between immune systems theory and the memory of the Third Reich as expressed in works of art is to operate at a level of abstraction that may in fact obscure the specific details of the material under discussion, even as it illuminates functional similarities. Nevertheless, I believe that Luhmann's thought

provides useful connections to the thought of the theorists I discussed above. For the time being, I will disregard Luhmann's writings on the differentiation of the art system, *Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, in order to focus on the immune system metaphor, which is not mentioned there.

Interestingly enough for my reading of Luhmann alongside psychoanalytic theory, the first mention of immune systems in *Soziale Systeme* comes from a discussion of the role of emotions (*Gefühle*) in the constitution of consciousness:

> Auf ihre Funktion hin gesehen, lassen sich Gefühle mit Immunsystemen vergleichen; sie scheinen geradezu die Immunfunktion des psychischen Systemes zu übernehmen. Sie sichern angesichts von auftretenden Problemen den Weitervollzug der Autopoiesis – hier nicht des Lebens, sondern des Bewußtseins – mit ungewöhnlichen Mitteln, und sie verwenden dazu vereinfachte Diskriminierverfahren, die Entscheidungen ohne Rücksicht auf Konsequenzen erlauben. Sie lassen sich, ohne direkten Bezug dieses Geschehens zur Umwelt, steigern oder abschwächen je nach der Erfahrung des Bewusstseins mit sich selbst. (371).

Emotions are part of consciousness's drive for self-preservation. This is clearly reminiscent of Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* as well as the Mitscherlichs' analysis of defense mechanisms as the "Korrelat" to the biological drive for survival, as quoted above.

Luhmann claims here that emotions are analogous to an immune system in that they use simplified mechanisms of discrimination to identify threats to the autopoiesis of consciousness. This in itself is a type of memory, one that Luhmann returns to later and discusses at length, explaining the role of contradictions (*Widersprüche*) within a system. Since a system must reproduce itself within a dynamic environment, it must be able to learn about and handle contradictions:

> Mit Hilfe eines Gedächtnisses können Erstvorfälle das System binden. Das führt zu einer gerichteten Sensibilisierung des Systems. Im Falle einer Wiederholung

> des Vorfalls kann das System dann verstärkt spezifiziert und beschleunigt reagieren. Auf diese Weise werden die wahrscheinlichen (und wahrscheinlich sich wiederholenden) Störungen ausgefiltert und, dadurch bedingt, unwahrscheinlichere Störungen als 'Zufälle' für lernende Anpassung abgesondert. Das Erkennungsverfahren wird raffiniert, ohne dass eine 'Analyse' der Störungen und ihrer Ursachen erforderlich wäre (504).

In other words, immune systems are based on memory without cognition (see also 505). Threats to the autopoiesis of the system are confronted without analysis, and rather than being destroyed, the trace of the threat is incorporated into the system itself. Here, the affinities between Luhmann, Freud, Santner and Espositio become clear:

> Das System immunisiert sich *nicht gegen das Nein*, sondern *mit Hilfe des Nein*; es schützt sich *nicht gegen Änderungen*, sondern *mit Hilfe von Änderungen* gegen Erstarrungen in eingefahrenen, aber nicht mehr umweltadäquaten Verhaltensmustern. Das Immunsystem schützt nicht die Struktur, es schützt die Autopoiesis, die geschlossene Selbstreproduktion des Systems. Oder um es mit einer alten Unterscheidung zu sagen: es schützt durch Negation vor Annihilation (507).

This view of the introduction of negativity into a system is analogous to the homeopathy of mourning (which incorporates a loss into the new identity), and formulates even more clearly the postmodern, decentered subject position that Santner wishes for the Germans: just as a system reproduces itself dynamically, incorporating negativity or contradictions found in the environment, the Germans must find a way to incorporate loss into their new identity. Santner, however, views this identity (or at least the realization of the always-already fragmented nature of identity in general) as a goal to be striven for, whereas Luhmann assumes that the process of incorporation of the negative to preserve autopoiesis is a functional *reality* (and therefore precisely *not* in conflict with the Freudian "Realitätsprinzip" as narcissism would be), neither desirable or undesirable.

Michel Serres is the second systems theorist whose work will be important for my study, especially in my reading in Chapter 3 of Elfriede Jelinek's appropriation of the

theatrical and biopolitical trope of the parasite. In this study *Le parasite* (translated into English as *The Parasite* [1982]), Michel Serres mines the etymology and history of the term "parasite" to theorize the parasite as a literary and dramatic figure as well as a player in a system.[20] He links the figure of the parasite in ancient Greek drama and mythology to questions of epistemology and intersubjectivity.

Serres' book starts with an investigation of parasitic constellations in classic fables, mapping these relations onto a cybernetic schema, an economy or ecology of relations. According to Serres, the parasite is that which is on the receiving end of a vector of transfer. It is a "[r]elation without a reversal of direction" (5). Serres' study is characterized by both fancy and cybernetic rigor.[21] The fanciful aspect comes from his use of the character constellations in animal fables by La Fontaine and Aesop to establish the position and functional role of the parasite. This metaphoric description is necessary to his project ("I speak in figures to those who speak in figures," he writes [7]) because he is attempting to develop a "fuzzy" logic that is not reducible to mere symbols.

For Serres, the "primal scene" of the parasitic relationship is an interrupted meal. He uses the fable "City Mouse and Country Mouse" by La Fontaine to illustrate this system of relationships. The city mouse and country mouse are feasting on the scraps from a meal, when they are interrupted by a noise at the door. Here, the two mice are parasites in the original etymological sense of the term: they are "eating next to" the host's table (7).

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[20] S.a. Gehring, Petra "Figurenfülle und strenge Permutation" (Eßlinger 2010 180-192). S.a. Damon for a brief discussion of Serres book's relationship to classical theater (3-4).

[21] See Rasch who finds Serres' use of the parasite maddeningly mercurial. After pointing out that Niklas Luhmann returned over and over again to Serres' image of the parasite, he asks: "Was an diesem Festmahl für Ratten stillte Luhmanns intellektuellen Hunger? Über diese Frage zu sinnieren verlangt von einem so schwerfälligen Narren, wie ich es bin, mehr als einen entzückenden Bildertanz. Sogar Serres gab zu, dass für Erdenbewohner manchmal Details gefragt sind" (287).

But the noise at the door, perhaps caused by the one who has played "host" to the two parasitic animals up to this point, now becomes a parasite as well, in another sense of the French term, which refers not only to an "abusive guest, unavoidable animal" but also to a "break in the message" in the sense of static in a radio or television signal (8). In systems theory, it is "noise," i.e., the opposite of a "signal" which carries meaningful information (6). By virtue of interrupting the original two parasites, the uninvited guest at the door illustrates the "cascade" of parasitic relationships: he parasites the parasites (5). But if the uninvited guest, the noise at the door, is the farmer himself (i.e. the one who is parasited), he makes the initial "signal chain" more complex, in that he occupies two positions within the parasitic framework (14). He is both the "host" and a parasite himself. For Serres, the parasitical relationship is the most basic kind of relationship; indeed it is the origin of intersubjectivity (8).

As Serres' study progresses, his reflections on the parasite as "noise" in a cybernetic sense lead to a compelling intertwining of biological, social and medial systems theory. The aural parasite, as the opposite of the information "signal," is the fundamental difference through which communication is made possible in the first place: "[t]here is no system without parasites," writes Serres (12). Like Niklas Luhmann, whose analysis of immune systems in *Soziale Systeme* I glossed briefly above, Serres recognizes the potential of systems to use disturbances to their benefit. He illustrates this with examples from politics, religion and biology:

> The couple noise-message is a part of the system, and its relation is a good index of the operation and the age of the system. This couple and their relation are set apart by an observer seated within the system. In a way he overvalues the message and undervalues the noise if he belongs to the functioning of the system. He represses the parasites in order to send or receive communications better and to make them circulate in a distinct and workable fashion. This repression is also

> religious excommunication, political imprisonment, the isolation of the sick, garbage collection, public health, the pasteurization of milk and so forth as much as it is repression in the psychoanalytical sense (68).

It seems that dogmatic observers within the system will "[perceive] noise less and [repress] [parasites] more," thus rendering the noise all but inaudible (ibid.). But because systems are pluricentric and complex, without a single univocal norm, this model is too simple. Noise is not merely repressed, but integrated at another systemic level. "In other words, the game of exclusion can be played without ever leaving the system, and, on the contrary, getting more and more into the system" (ibid.). It is notable that Serres returns to the language of immunology suggested by the above example of pasteurization when he explains the way that systems incorporate their own opposition:

> Since Bergson, who invented this whole business about open and closed, interior and exterior, systems have been immunized by becoming more complex. They become stronger by becoming more tolerant. They were acclimated to the revolutionary, the madman, the deviant, the dissident: an organism lives very well with its microbes; it lives better and is hardened by them. The implacable power of systems with several norms and several variables grouping each time a norm and a counternorm and the function of inclusion of these systems have to be added to the cruelty of systems with one norm and a gesture of exclusion (ibid.).

This account of the "immunizing" power of negativity is in keeping with the broad historical dialectic that Roberto Esposito describes in *Immunitas*, i.e. the increasingly stronger power that expands not through expulsion of its negation but rather through incorporating negativity into the autopoesis of the system. Like Esposito, Serres describes the immunized property of complex systems in terms of inhibitive (as opposed to destructive) power: "[o]n the one side, you kill. On the other side, you castrate. On the one side you put away; on the other you festoon. Tolerance is part of the panoply of intolerance" (ibid.). Serres study, in other words, suggests that the parasite as a figure and

as a position within the system participates in a "paradigm of immunization" like the one with Esposito argues characterizes modernity (Esposito 2008 51).

In a simple, ideal system, the repression of parasites (i.e. "noise" as opposed to "signal") leads to a smoother functioning of communication. Indeed, as Serres' previous example indicated, it is like the measure of psychological repression which a healthy individual requires to function normally. But a system as such, that is, a set of relations, cannot exist without a parasite, a third element or medium. Otherwise its nodes would be self-identical. The entire idea of a system is predicated on the existence of parasites; communication requires a distance or obstacle to be overcome.[22] This is true even (and especially) when the system tries to establish a space completely free of parasites. According to Serres, this was Descartes' goal. Serres account of Descartes' project connects Jelinek's self-styling as "parasite" to scholarly claims about her work's potential to unsettle the position of the Cartesian subject:

> The Cartesian meditation eliminates, expels, banishes everything, hyperbolically. Once again, a clean slate and a clear spot in the religious major mode, and this slate and this spot are the extent of which I am the master and possessor of my thought. The thinking ego chases the parasites out, chases out in prosopopoeia the most cunning of all who return, who might return at any moment and anywhere, thus chases everything out, speaking absolutely [...] (180).

Serres, like some other scholarly readings of Jelinek which I will discuss later (see Chapter 3), uses prosopopoeia to describe the way that language rhetorically invokes a human "face" behind its utterances. Descartes, who intends to "purify" his discourse of any external assumptions, thus attaining a clean slate for the beginning of his meditations, declares "cogito ergo sum." This attempt is nevertheless thwarted by the fact that the "ego" of the statement is already predicated on a "face" which persists despite the

[22] S.a. Serres 12.

attempts of the philosopher to expel it and replace it with his own. This is a version of the now-widespread critique of the transcendental (male) Cartesian subject that masks its dependence and contingency through declarations of autonomy and mastery. Jelinek's writing has often been described as unsettling this male master discourse.[23] But what is striking in Serres' account of Descartes' project is the key connection it offers between the anti-Cartesian thrust of Jelinek's writing and her embrace of the function of the "parasite" in "Das Parasitärdrama" which I will discuss in more detail later.

Serres' model is more complicated than the simple "cascade" of relations he outlines in the early chapter, which implies that each position must be occupied by either a parasite or host, and that disruptions such as the knock on the door merely reverse this chain of relations. Instead, each person in the parasitic chain, including the initial "host," is in fact both parasite and host. This means that instead of being a linear cascade which could be represented by the slope of a line, parasitic relations are "fractal" in nature, that is, they occur in a recursive pattern. This means that who or what is considered to be a parasite or host (and by extension, what is considered to be "signal" and what is "noise") is relative to the position of the observer. To illustrate this point, Serres asks us to pretend we are at a banquet and receive a telephone call. The initial ringing of the telephone is noise – a parasite. However, once we begin to talk on the phone, the conversation of the guests – formerly "signal" in the cybernetic sense of carrying information – now becomes "noise." The telephone conversation is the new signal. It would be possible, however, Serres argues, for an outside observer to stand in the border zone between the two

[23] See discussions of *Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen* (in which Descartes is clearly alluded to), for example Erdle 333-334 and Rosellini 49.

conversations, the pivot point as it were connecting the two systems, where "repressed noise becomes message and repressed message becomes noise."

To return to the main argument, Serres' theoretical, at times schematic (see for example, the diagrams on 4, 20, 247) sketches of the parasitical relation in all its iterations are never far from the figure of illness, that is, the biological (and, once the notion of "the collective" is introduced, implicitly biopolitical) sense of the term "parasite." The explicitly immunological register of the passages I quoted above recurs during Serres' discussion of Tartuffe:

> The parasite is a thermal exciter. [...]
>
> Without him, the feast is only a cold meal. His role is to animate the event. His social role and thus, theatrical. Sometimes professorial, sometimes pastoral. A clerk at the table, a good raconteur, made the others guess where Tartuffe had come from and why he was named Tartuffe (190).

From this initial discussion of the Moliere play (and hence the theatrical, social and communicative notion of the parasite), Serres veers towards the biological correlate of the term:

> [The parasite] enters the body and infests it. Its infectious power is measured by its capability to adapt itself to one or several hosts. This capability fluctuates, and its virulence varies along with its production of toxic substances. [...] The parasite brings us into the vicinity of the simplest and most general operator on the variability of systems. It makes them fluctuate by their differential distances. It immunizes or blocks them, makes them adapt or kills them, selects them and destroys them. It is necessary to say of the parasite, generalizing Claude Bernard's expression from his first lesson on toxic agents: the variable reagents of life? (190-191).

As the "reagent" of life, which through its toxic properties revivifies the host, the "parasite" performs the immunitary function of vaccination. Indeed, this is what Serres suggests later, once again in the context of Tartuffe:

> [Parasites'] small effects are usually well-tolerated by the organisms, which quickly rediscover their health, that is to say, their silence (at least relatively). This equilibrium that is well taken care of, thanks to the defense systems, is more solid than the preceding one. With the expulsion of Tartuffe, Orgon's family is vaccinated against the next devout man. In vaccination, poison can be a cure, and this logic with two entry points becomes a strategy, a care, a cure. The parasite gives the host the means to be safe from the parasite. The organism reinforces its resistance and increases its adaptability. It is moved a bit away from equilibrium and it is then even more strongly at equilibrium. The generous hosts are therefore stronger than the bodies without visits; generation increases resistance right in the middle of endemic diseases (193).

In Serres' account, the theater of the bourgeois dinner table in Tartuffe's play becomes a method of "immunizing" the family unit against interlopers. In this reading however, it is the "thermal excitement" caused by the parasite which makes theater and narrative possible in the first place. Without the irritation which causes a change in equilibrium, no story is possible. This would indicate that all narrative is in a sense "parasitic" in that it is initiated by an upset in equilibrium.[24] I will return to Serres' study in the third chapter of this dissertation.

V. Conclusion

The notion uniting all of the overlapping theoretical frameworks I have discussed in this introduction, most generally speaking, that collective identity is constructed by means of a passage through negativity, forms the basis for my readings of works by Thomas Bernhard, Christoph Schlingensief and Elfriede Jelinek in the remainder of this dissertation. My analysis will show that this construction of identity in the works and

[24] Bianca Theisen also discusses this property of literature in terms of systems theory, and specifically in reference to literary encounters with the National Socialist past in Austria in the context of Peter Handke's book *Der Hausierer*: "In this utmost reduction of plot to a transformational syntax, detective fiction appears to be modeled on what could be called a cybernetic dynamic of perturbation and reestablished equilibrium at the heart of narrative structures in general" (119).

reception of Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek and Christoph Schlingensief always takes place within frameworks of biological collectivity, which include a normative (that is, biopolitical) metaphorical substrate articulated in immunological terms.

In Chapter 1, I discuss how Thomas Bernhard's work (and his public persona) has been received, both in scholarship and in the popular press, in medical terms. This reception, I argue, is an uncanny echo of National Socialism's concern with the "national body," a metaphor that remains in force not only in the reception of Bernhard's texts, but in the texts themselves and the way in which these texts circulate in the public sphere. I demonstrate this first through a reading of Bernhard's debut novel *Frost* (1963), and then in a reading of the text and scandal surrounding Bernhard's final public intervention, the play *Heldenplatz* (1988). In doing so, I trace the trajectory of an image running throughout Bernhard's work, from his first published novel to his final drama: that of the staged rant as a poison and cure, a virus and vaccine.

The second chapter of this dissertation examines the usefulness of the metaphor of artistic homeopathy (as advanced by Santner and others) in understanding the political intervention made by the cinematic and dramatic work of Christoph Schlingensief. Schlingensief, the son of a pharmacist, believes that he has translated his father's practice of medical therapy into the realm of aesthetics. Schlingensief explicitly advocates for a "homeopathic" reading of his work, purporting to use the "poison" of the Nazi past in much the same way that Santner suggests in his reading of films by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg and Edgar Reitz. My reading of two of Schlingensief's films, *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* and *Terror 2000*, throw this contention into question, however. I argue instead that Schlingensief's art is a kind of "second order" homeopathy, in that it is not so much

directed at constructing a new German identity through the incorporation of negative elements, but rather directed at this very "homeopathic" process itself. The film *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* targets the New German Cinema, while *Terror 2000* sets its sights on the depiction of history in the Hollywood film *Mississippi Burning*. In both cases, the efficacy of "homeopathy" is implicitly called into question. Schlingensief's final performance pieces, which deal with cancer, take this claim out of the purely aesthetic realm and apply it to his own illness as well.

The final chapter of this dissertation deals with Elfriede Jelinek's appropriation of the figure of the parasite in her recent theater poetics, "Das Parasitärdrama" (2011). Jelinek's essay is both a response to critics who view her texts as overly dependent (that is, in a sense "parasitic") on current events and a playfully sardonic reflection on her own creative process. I offer a close reading of Jelinek's essay, contextualizing it with respect to Jelinek scholarship, her previous works for the theater and theater manifestos, the cybernetic and theatrical theory of the parasite as advanced by Serres, and, finally, the anti-Semitic trope of the "Jewish parasite," which Jelinek seems to consciously and deliberately appropriate. In employing the image of the parasite, Jelinek has seized upon a rich (and in some ways disturbing) set of cultural, historical and theatrical associations that offer a compelling account of how her appropriative aesthetics function. At the same time, by reading Jelinek's text in juxtaposition to Serres' study of the parasite, I argue that Jelinek's manifesto performs the kind of writing it describes. It is, in other words, a work-immanent poetics. In my reading, however, this self-reflexivity ultimately becomes a gesture of helplessness or frustration.

In the conclusion of the dissertation, I draw together my readings of all of the works in the dissertation. My readings suggest that the biological imagery in force both in the reception of Bernhard, Schlingensief and Jelinek's public personae and in their works can be read as demonstrating a productive tension between Adorno's famous dictum on poetry after Auschwitz and the notion of the "paradigm of immunization" that Roberto Esposito develops in *Bios*. This tension is at once logical and uncanny, in the sense that the biologically inflected negative dialectics of these works become a sublation or rearticulation of Nazi biopolitics on an aesthetic level. This is not to say, of course, that Jelinek, Schlingensief or Bernhard are in any sense aligned with the political goals of fascism, but is rather meant to highlight the way in which attempts to counter fascism "immunologically" often overlap with the imagination of the national body which informed fascism's historical biopolitical *dispositif*.

Chapter 1. Pathogenic polemics: Thomas Bernhard's Textual "Counter-infections"

I. Introduction

During his lifetime, Thomas Bernhard (1931-1989) was one of the most prolific, provocative and polarizing authors of the postwar era in Austria. In the years since his death, he has also become one of the most beloved German-language writers world-wide. In honor of what would have been his eightieth birthday in 2011, there were conferences, ceremonies, television programs and exhibitions all over Austria and Germany celebrating his body of work.[25]

Bernhard's collected literary works, put out by the prestigious German publisher Suhrkamp Verlag, comprise over a dozen volumes. In recent years, his estate has authorized numerous posthumous literary publications including *Meine Preise* (2009), *Goethe Schtirbt* (2010), and *Der Wahrheit auf der Spur* (2010). Preceding the release of these (mostly) previously unpublished literary works were several small-format volumes featuring thematic groupings of quotations by Bernhard himself or from his fiction. These volumes include *Die Ursache bin ich. Eine Autobiographie in Fragmenten* (2008 "zusammengestellt" by Raimund Fellinger from interviews, letters and the novel *Wittgensteins Neffe*), *"Ich bin ein Geschichtenzerstörer"* (2008, a collection of "unerhörte Begebenheiten" excerpted from several novels), *Die Ehehölle* (2008, a collection of scenes concerning marriage from various novels and plays), *Naturgemäß. Über die Menschen und die Natur* (2008), and *Meine Übertreibungskunst* (2008, a

[25] Major academic conferences were held in Vienna, Salzburg and Ljubljana. Exhibitions were held in Vienna (on the theater works) and in Berlin (at the Berliner Ensemble). Several television documentaries were re-aired, and at least one new documentary, *Thomas Bernhard. Die Kunst-Naturkatastrophe* was premiered (dir. Norbert Beilharz).

collection of literary rants excerpted from plays and prose and organized alphabetically by target from A for "Ärzte" to Z for "Zeugnisse und Titel").

On the one hand, this new marketing of Bernhard has purely commercial motivations: Suhrkamp Verlag has found a new iteration in which to sell the work of one of its most prominent authors. Furthermore, this (re-)commodification of Bernhard's writing was only the logical extension of the campaign of *Selbstinszenierung* blending the literary Bernhard with the "real" Bernhard which had both accompanied and enabled the author's rise to literary stardom (Billenkamp 388-389).

On the other hand, however, the fact that Bernhard's prose and public statements lend themselves so well to this kind of decontextualization and repackaging provide a sort of indirect proof for my assertion in this chapter, namely, that the power of Bernhard's writing is tied to the ability of his language to become separate from its original context and circulate freely. As Bernhard's posthumous commercialization also illustrates, his provocations were eventually rendered innocuous through incorporation into larger narratives of national identity and literary history.

However, while Bernhard's transition from *enfant terrible* to canonized author is nothing out of the ordinary (we might even say that it is almost paradigmatic for controversial artists), the dynamics of provocation and response by which this transition took place is, I will argue, accompanied by an uncanny recapitulation of the fear of infection which informed Nazi biopolitics. The following sections will make this connection clear.

I take my impetus for the organization of this chapter from the first of Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's eleven theses on the work of Thomas Bernhard (from his collection

Der Übertreibungskünstler). Titled "Die Wirkung als Qualität des Werkes," this thesis posits a connection between the form of Bernhard's texts themselves and their reception:

> Seit dem Erscheinen des Romans ‚Frost' (1963) ist dem Werk Thomas Bernhards dessen Wirkung als eigene Qualität zugewachsen und von diesem nicht mehr zu trennen. Die Ursache für diese Wirkung ist nicht das Ergebnis einer mehr oder weniger willkürlichen Steuerung durch Verlage und Literaturkritik, sondern ist vor allem im Werk selbst angelegt (Schmidt-Dengler 1989, 107).[26]

In taking this claim seriously, I propose a new way of reading the entanglement of history, memory and performance which was inaugurated with Bernhard's first published literary work *Frost* and culminated in his last public scandal which concerned *Heldenplatz*. If Bernhard's early prose both thematized and staged the disturbing, infectious potential of language, *Heldenplatz*, his final theater work, launched a mediatized "counter-infection" that led to a defensive response in the media which, in condemning Bernhard's work or the author himself as sick, recapitulated the Nazi obsession with the health of the "Volkskörper."[27]

The following analysis throws into relief the performative power of the textual processes in play within Bernhard's larger artistic project, arguing that throughout his work, Bernhard constantly explores and employs language that has the power to disturb so fully that it seems to infect. The *Heldenplatz* scandal offers the most salient and explicit example of the performative effect of Bernhard's language, which was able to interpolate intertextual processes in the media itself, rendering the cliché of "Austria as stage" an uncanny reality. This interface between literary language and political language, between art, media, and political reality connects Bernhard to the other artists

[26] See also Oliver Bentz who (mis)quotes this line as the epigraph to his study of *Heldenplatz* (1).
[27] I take the term "counter-infection" from Erika Fischer-Lichte's article "Zuschauen als Ansteckung" in connection with her discussion of Artaud (35).

under discussion in this dissertation. What begins in *Frost* as an intertextual process staged as intergenerational pedagogy, culminates, in my reading, with the release of this poetic language into the public sphere during the *Heldenplatz* scandal. In what follows, I will trace this textual process across the secondary literature as well, where the author figure Bernhard stands in for the nihilistic pedant Strauch.

II. Bernhard's Infectious Prose

Thomas Bernhard's writing has been "contagious" for a long time, inspiring imitators and parodists from almost the very beginning of his artistic career. Even before he had perfected his signature style of repetitive, lyrical invective, and long before his literary breakthrough with the novel *Frost* in 1963, the first critic wrote a review in the Bernhardian style (Dittmar 10-11). Numerous parodies and imitations followed as Bernhard's fame grew. This in itself is not remarkable – any accomplished author with a distinctive style is bound to attract imitators and satirists. Yet in Bernhard's case the tendency to induce imitation was tied to his ability to provoke scandal.

The infectious nature of Bernhard's language was at least partially due to the sheer hyperbole of his polemics, which seemed to determine the ways in which it was possible for their targets to respond.[28] This performative effect (whether its actor was Bernhard the writer, playwright, or the character "Bernhard" that he played in public and in the media) was never more evident or successful than during the scandal surrounding

[28] Gitta Honegger notes this in connection with Bernhard's misogynistic diatribes during the interview "Monolog auf Mallorca." Because of the sheer outrageousness of his comments, any kind of answer plays into Bernhard's hands (199).

Heldenplatz. The *Neue Kronen Zeitung* and *Wochenpresse's* publication of excerpts of the stolen text of the play shortly before its premiere famously provoked a response as extreme as Bernhard's invective itself: not only did protestors deposit a pile of manure in front of the Burgtheater in echo of the play's incendiary line "Dieser kleine Staat ist ein großer Misthaufen!", but the curses hurled at Bernhard seemed to be prefigured in the leaked text (Bentz 29).

But this dynamic of reception, conditioned by the same logic of the outré exaggeration in Bernhard's texts, was not restricted to the *Heldenplatz* scandal. In the scholarly and literary reception of Bernhard, his texts also seem to govern the terms of their own reception. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler speaks in several essays of the ability of Bernhard's œuvre to fend off attempts to understand it[29], and, at the same time, to determine scholarly approaches to it: "Bernhard scheint die Kategorien, unter denen sein Werk betrachtet wird, so unerbittlich vorzugeben, daß die Untersuchungen geradezu gebannt auf eben diese Begriffe blicken, die sich bei Bernhard finden" (2002, 11).[30] In a similar vein, Klaus Zeyringer notes that Bernhard's signature titles ("*Holzfällen. Eine Erregung*," "*Verstörung*," etc.) often encapsulate the expected effect of the text – sometimes, of course, with great predictive accuracy, as in *Holzfällen*, which caused a literary scandal after one of Bernhard's old mentors filed a libel suit against him (133).

But beyond steering its reception, Bernhard's texts have also inspired untold numbers of imitators and parodists – further evidence of his language's virulence. Jens Dittmar provides a long list of reviews of Bernhard's work that are written in his style, a

[29] Schmidt-Dengler 1995, 178.
[30] See also Huntemann 156 for a similar observation.

practice that began as early as 1957.[31] Manfred Mittermayer also notes that journalists covering Bernhard began to appropriate the style of his titles (Mittermayer 2006, 133). Literary studies of his work in German also frequently use Bernhardesque subtitles, albeit without the same forceful valence as the originals.[32]

Uwe Betz uses the character constellation of *Frost* to illustrate the worst possible scenario for writers (and by extension, readers and spectators) after Bernhard: to be placed in the position of the Famulant, the nameless medical student who slowly internalizes the speech and pessimistic outlook of the painter Strauch (72). Though it is not a strictly literary text, Peter Handke's short essay "Als ich 'Verstörung' von Thomas Bernhard las," (published in the first volume devoted to Bernhard's work) is paradigmatic for this type of response. Instead of offering a commentary or critical perspective on Bernhard's prose, Handke spends the vast majority of the essay summarizing and quoting from Fürst Saurau's monologue in *Verstörung*. The final sentence of the essay, "Ich las und las und las . . . ," appropriates the ellipsis at the end of the Fürst's monologue, effectively positioning Handke in the place of the narrator of *Verstörung* — and Bernhard's text in place of the Fürst, whose mesmerizing speech fills most of the novel (Handke 100-106). In another early work of criticism, Hans Höller also seems to place the reader in the role of the mesmerized listener in Bernhard's texts and the text itself in the role of the speaker:

> [D]ie sprachliche Form [Bernhards] gibt ja zugleich Denkform, Wahrnehmungs- und Erfahrungsform der Wirklichkeit vor, sie läßt die Haltung des Lesers nicht unangegriffen, zwängt sich in seine Sehweise der Dinge und Menschen und will ihn an ihre beherrschenden Vorstellungs- und Gedankenbilder ausliefern" (1).

[31] Dittmar 10-11.
[32] For example: Krista Fleischmann. *Thomas Bernhard. Eine Begegnung*. and *Thomas Bernhard. Eine Erinnerung*., also: Hoell, Joachim, et al (eds.) *Thomas Bernhard. Eine Einschärfung*.

In this section, Höller seems to inscribe the dynamics of the critical reception of Bernhard's texts within the dynamics of the texts themselves. He continues:

> Der Leser kommt sich mit dem Erzähler und seinen konkreten Schwierigkeiten und Erfahrungen, mit seiner eigenen Welt, wie gefangen vor in den Mauern der Welt des Fürsten, in den Mauern einer Burg, von der der Fürst sagt, daß sie die Welt ist (2).

However, Höller also understands the problem of taking on Handke's perspective and becoming mesmerized by the Fürst (indeed, he explicitly discusses Handke's review). Nevertheless, Höller takes the attractive pull of Bernhard's prose for granted, using metaphors of attack, defense and capture to describe the experience of reading Bernhard, even if he seeks to intellectually understand the mechanism of this attraction.

The numerous parodies that Bernhard inspired (documented at length by Jens Dittmar), are equally susceptible to his attractive force. Because parodistic responses to Bernhard's texts must rely on qualities inherent to those texts, which include the tools of parody itself (exaggeration, for example), they cannot escape the logic of the texts they parody. This is Heide Helwig's argument:

> Damit verweigern sich Bernhards Texte einer allzu planen parodistischen Ausbeutung, das in ihnen angelegte Potential an Komik fungiert als *Abwehrmechanismus* [italics mine], und der Lacheffekt, den die Adaption erzielt, bleibt an die Spielregeln des Primärtextes gebunden (122).[33]

This defense mechanism of Bernhard's language is closely connected with its infectious quality: while remaining impenetrable itself, Bernhard's language proves irresistible to other authors. As I will demonstrate, this effect goes beyond an "anxiety of influence" – it is a quality modeled in Bernhard's texts themselves, a quality which often takes on more-or-less explicitly biological overtones.

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[33] See also Zeyringer 135 and 147: "[Die Parodisten] wollen Bernhard schlagen, indem sie seine eigenen Mittel gegen ihn (um)kehren – werden sie aber nicht letztlich von ihm eingesetzt und geschlagen? (147)"

For Gitta Honegger, translator and author of biographies of Bernhard in English and German, the attractive quality of Bernhard's language is so important that she ends her study by describing it:

> Bernhard's speech acts modified the German language. It is hard to resist the infectious rhythm of his phrasing. In Austria, the performative force of his speech continues to impact the country's collective psyche. His language, its use and misuse after his death, has become an active part, for better or worse, in the production of his native culture, which in turn keeps producing him (308).

Honegger's portrayal of Bernhard's infectious language inhabiting, producing and being reproduced by his native culture employs the imagery of the virus.[34] It captures a performative effect that could be called contagious, not unlike the reaction to *Heldenplatz* that I briefly described above. But Honegger's quote also exposes an ambivalence in the reception of Bernhard's attractive language, hinting at the negative correlate to its magnetic quality: Bernhard not merely as a writer of illness, but as an illness himself.

Writing a few years after Honegger and many years after Höller, Andreas Maier employs similar imagery to both of them in his reckoning with Bernhard in *Die Verführung. Thomas Bernhards Prosa* (2004):

> Bernhards Prosa will, daß ich ihre rhetorischen Strukturen übernehme, daß ich die Welt auf ihre Weise sehe, kurz, daß ich diese Struktur reproduziere. Aber sie liefert mir in Wahrheit gar keine mögliche Sichtweise der Welt, sie liefert mir immer nur ein rhetorisches Konstrukt, dessen Lebensdauer allein davon abhängt, ob es von mir (und anderen) benutzt wird oder nicht (269).

Despite the anthropomorphizing gesture of the first clause ("Bernhards Prosa will") Maier casts Bernhard's language as pure structure – a genetic code of sorts –

[34] See also Schmidt-Dengler 1995, who describes the unsuccessful attempts of literary scholars from every perspective to appropriate Bernhard's work. He also mentions Bernhard fans, who are "infected with his seriousness, but not his humor" (304).

dependent on others to reproduce. The viral imagery could hardly be stronger.[35] Maier, a German novelist whose first book bore a heavy stamp of Bernhard's influence, seems particularly determined to move beyond his literary predecessor through an exhaustive account of Bernhard's style and its effects.[36] His study relies on the construct of a naïve, more or less helpless reader who is forced by identificatory mechanisms in the text to accept the truthfulness and profundity of Bernhard's characters' monologues.[37] As my discussion above of Hans Höller's work demonstrates, this conceit is not unique to Maier's book, though it seldom appears in such negative terms.

At variance with Maier's opinion of Bernhard but in accordance with the imagery he employs, Erich Wolfgang Skwara uses the figure of disease to describe the veridical (and overpowering) quality of Bernhard's writing. In a 1988 piece about his youthful admiration for Bernhard, Skwara writes that for him, Thomas Bernhard is

> der Mensch, dem ich unentwegt beistimmen muß. Ich lauere, bisher vergebens, auf eine Gelegenheit zum Widerspruch. Ich möchte ja Nein rufen, aber es gelingt nicht. Eigentlich bedeutet diese Verwandtschaft der Gedanken eine Gefahr. Wenn wir nämlich merken, daß ein Mitmensch unaufhörlich genau das fühlt und sagt und tut, was wir selber fühlen, wenn auch nicht sagen oder tun, dann werfen wir ihn früher oder später auf den Scheiterhaufen (277).

This is the familiar trope of Bernhard's irresistibility, also recapitulating the reading dynamic which Höller outlines in the introduction to his study (see above). Skwara, however, realizes the potential of unqualified admiration to invert itself at any moment, for admiration to turn into revulsion. He further describes the double-edged nature of this magnetic writing in the following passage, in which he compares

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[35] Maier does, in fact, make explicit use of biological imagery when he refers to *Der Untergeher* as a "parasitic" text that fed on Glenn Gould's success (237).
[36] For more on this influence, see Betz 89.
[37] "Wir sollen angeleitet werden, den Texten zu *glauben* und bei bestimmten Punkten nicht nachfragen. Dadurch wird Kritik dem Text ferngehalten. Es gilt, diese in Bernhards Werk immer wieder reproduzierte Kommunikationsstruktur herauszuarbeiten und zu zeigen, was sie beim Leser bewirkt" (Maier 7).

Bernhard's prolific production to the growth of cancer:

> Dieses krebsartige wuchernde Werk: das ist keine Belletristik, es hat nichts Dokumentarisches, das benennt und läßt doch offen, das will nichts erreichen und erreicht doch alles. Das ist wortgewordene Wahrheit, und die hat weder Anfang noch Ende (278).[38]

Skwara's Bernhard is a cancerous overgrowth, an explosion of disease that has no goal but is nevertheless a lethal avatar of truth. His Bernhard writes neither literature ("Belletristik") nor history ("Dokumentarisches") – a negative definition that resonates with Maier's notion of Bernhard's prose as empty structure. Skwara's attraction to Bernhard's work led him, as a young man, to follow the writer after readings, leave notes on his car, and ultimately to seek him out at his home in upper Austria – all without the desired encounter ever coming to pass (279).[39] What Skwara's account brings to my study is the entrance of the biopolitically-tinged metaphor of cancer into the catalogue of figures used to describe Bernhard's infectious language.

Hervé Guibert, the French novelist and video artist, employs the trope of Bernhard as disease most explicitly and directly, sharing the ambivalence of the authors mentioned above. In his autobiographical *roman á clef* detailing his struggle with AIDS, translated into German as *Dem Freund, der mir das Leben nicht gerettet hat* (1990), Guibert's authorial encounter with Thomas Bernhard's writing parallels the progress of HIV in his body. Early in the novel, Bernhard appears only as a pair of initials – a cryptic reference that suggests something sinister:

> Mein Buch, mein Gefährte, das ursprünglich, vom Vorsatz her, so streng sein sollte, hat schon begonnen, mich nach seiner Pfeife tanzen zu lassen, obgleich

[38] In his study of Bernhard's novels, Thomas Cousineau uses the biological metaphor of "genetic mutations" (which he takes from the novel itself) to illuminate the way that "corrections" function within the text (72).

[39] Manfred Mittermayer also describes the phenomenon of other young writers identifying with Bernhard to the point of fearing the loss of their artistic personalities (2006, 135).

> doch dem Anschein nach ich der unumschränkte Kapitän auf dieser Sichtfahrt bin. Ein Teufel hat sich in meinen Schiffsbauch eingeschlichen: T.B. (10).[40]

Only in the next sentence is it clear that "T.B." refers to a writer, but the metaphorical conflation of body and text remains in force:

> Ich habe aufgehört, ihn zu lesen. Es heißt, jede erneute Einspritzung des Virus durch Flüssigkeiten, Blut oder Sperma, greife den schon infizierten Kranken erneut an […] (ibid.).

Guibert's novel, narrated by a writer who shares his name, tells the story of his relationship with Bill, the eponymous friend, who works for an American pharmaceutical company that is testing a vaccine against AIDS. Early in the narrative, Bill offers Guibert hope by assuring him of the efficacy of his vaccine, and guarantees that Guibert and his circle of infected friends will be included in the pilot study. Moreover, he promises to rig the double-blind test so that Guibert, his partner Jules, and Jules' wife and children get the real vaccine and not the placebo. In the course of the novel, however, it becomes clear that Bill does not intend to keep his promise, and that he enjoys holding power over his HIV-positive friends. Ultimately, the two have a falling-out, and the novel ends.

In keeping with the nature of the double-blind experiment, the book is structured by pairs. Guibert's text doubles his body, and Thomas Bernhard doubles the virus attacking his immune system. After the initial appearance of the cipher "T.B.," Bernhard is mentioned again, for the first time by his full name, more than a hundred pages later, shortly after the protagonist has received the final assurance that he is HIV-positive. In a long paratactic Bernhard-like passage he writes of Thomas Bernhard's "Fortschreiten" through his text, "das doch genauso unausweichlich ist wie das zerstörerische Fortschreiten von HIV im Blut und in den Zellen […]" (156).

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[40] See also Wagner 129.

This "progression" through the text culminates in a decisive final encounter with Bernhard's writing. The narrator heaps a series of creatively insulting epithets on Bernhard, including among others (in German translation): "zeilenschindender Nörgler," and "Verzapfer syllogistischen Platitüdensalates" (205). Bernhard's books are "nichts weiter […] als winzig kleine Nichtigkeiten" (206). Guibert's narrator suffers a similar anxiety of influence as Skwara and Maier. In Bernhard, he is faced with a seemingly empty structure, a code which, though incomprehensible, nevertheless reproduces itself within his own creation, menacing it from within.

This threat becomes explicit when, after more than a page of ranting against Bernhard in the style of Bernhard, the narrator admits:

> Ich hatte die Unvorsichtigkeit besessen, für meinen Teil, mich in eine quälende Schachpartie mit Thomas Bernhard einzulassen. Die Bernhardsche Metastase hat sich gleich der Ausbreitung von HIV, das in meinem Blut die Lymphozyten verwüstet, indem es meine Immunkräfte zusammenbrechen läßt; […] parallel zu HIV hat sich also die Bernhardsche Metastase mit Höchstgeschwindkeit in meinem Gewebe und meinen vitalen Schreibreflexen ausgebreitet, sie phagozytiert mein Schreiben, absorbiert es, nimmt es gefangen, zerstört all seine Natürlichkeit und eigene Prägung, um ihre verwüstende Herrschaft darauf auszudehnen (206-207).[41]

Here, Skwara's ambiguously inflected imagery of cancer ("Metastase") meets the viral idiom of the other writers above. Just as Guibert is awaiting the vaccination that his friend Bill can provide against HIV, he is also awaiting a "literarischen Impfstoff" to cure him of the influence of Bernhard's writing (208). Bernhard's writing, however, has not had a merely detrimental effect on Guibert: "ich habe mich im Gegenteil gegen Thomas Bernhard empört," he continues:

> und ich, der arme Guibert, spielte nur noch schöner, putzte meine Waffen, um genauso gut zu werden wie der zeitgenössische Meister, ich, der arme kleine Guibert, Ex-Weltmeister, der ich meinen Meister gefunden habe sowohl in Aids

[41] See also Mittermayer 2006 who quotes the same passage (137).

wie in Thomas Bernhard (208).[42]

Through incorporating Bernhard's influence, Hervé Guibert has strengthened his will to write against exactly this influence. This procedure is not paradoxical; rather it is the very mechanism of vaccination. By consciously and openly confronting Bernhard's influence on his text, he is able to restrict the scope of this very influence. Bernhard is a poison, but a cure as well. He is grafted into Guibert's text as an inoculation – albeit an inoculation who, like his friend Bill, will not save his life.[43]

III. Bernhard's poetics of infection: previous scholarly readings

What is most remarkable about literary and scholarly encounters with Bernhard that cast his writing in terms either connoting or denoting biological illness (like those I have enumerated above) is that they all in some sense replicate the narrative dynamics of Bernhard's texts themselves, which posit the infectious, dangerous power of language.

The prototypical Bernhard character is a man who is terminally or chronically ill and fixated on his illness. Consequently, scholarly writing on Bernhard has often focused on the various valences of illness as a philosophical or existential category. Bernhard's prose has been read as an expression of the author's own struggle with terminal illness, his personal pathologies or traumas so many times that Alfred Pfabigan, in his study *Thomas Bernhard. Ein österreichisches Weltexperiment*, has dubbed this the "pathographisch" approach, a conspicuous manifestation of the conformity that he

[42] See also Wagner 130.
[43] cf. Wagner 131-133 for a discussion of the "Wahlverwandtschaft" between Guibert and Bernhard. See also Mittermayer 2006, 136.

diagnoses in the secondary literature on Bernhard (26). Indeed, metaphors of illness are so omnipresent and diffuse in Bernhard's writing that they become almost meaningless. Monika Kohlhage describes this problem as follows:

> Kaum meint man, durch die dargestellte ubiquitäre Morbidität das leidende Subjekt gefunden zu haben, taucht das eben noch betroffen machende Krankheitsmotiv neuerlich, aber vollkommen lächerlich auf: neben einer organischen Todeskrankheit erschient plötzlich auch das Zeitunglesen als Krankheit und die Leidenschaft, ins Kaffeehaus zu gehen, wird ebenfalls als Krankheit tituliert (122).

However, instead of pursuing a hermeneutics of illness, at least two scholars have used the metaphor of infection to conceptualize the narrative or psychoanalytic processes at work in Bernhard's prose. Though their work focuses on Bernhard's autobiographical writing about his time as a lung patient, their insights are crucial to my reading of the dynamics underlying Bernhard's textual confrontation with National Socialism in *Frost* and *Heldenplatz*.

The first, Elisabeth Strowick, devotes a large chapter in her study *Sprechende Körper. Poetik der Ansteckung* to the narrative means by which Bernhard causes the sick body to manifest itself in his autobiographical writings (291). She explicates several polyvalent processes of "infection" in *Wittgensteins Neffe* and in the fourth volume of Bernhard's autobiography *Die Kälte. Eine Isolation*. According to Strowick, when the narrator of *Wittgensteins Neffe* "goes too far" on his walk between one pavilion and another at the Steinhof sanatorium, he not only exceeds his physical strength as a lung patient, he also intrudes upon the discursively hermetic space belonging to the mental patients whose pavilion he has invaded (293). In doing so, he becomes a taboo breaker, marking himself as an infectious agent (294). Next, in her discussion of *Die Kälte. Eine*

Isolation, Strowick suggests that Bernhard's autobiographical protagonist stages his loss of individuality within in the lung sanatorium Grafenhof as an infection:

> Eine Ansteckung – so lässt sich zwar nicht im medizinischen, wohl aber im dramaturgischen Sinne sagen – hat stattgefunden, wobei die Lungenheilanstalt als Ort von Ansteckung fungiert. Ansteckung markiert den Prozess der Normalisierung, der Auslöschung jeglicher Individualität und Alterität […] (296).

This "infection," according to Strowick, is the result of modern processes of institutional subjectification as analyzed by Michel Foucault (ibid.). Bernhard's means of resistance to this dehumanizing discourse is to resist it by turning it against itself:

> Von einem Gegensatzverhältnis des Erzählers zur Institution kann nicht die Rede sein. Qua Nicht-Ansteckung aus der Gemeinschaft ausgeschlossen, verworfen, trägt der Erzähler zugleich die Züge der Institution: In seinem permanenten Beobachten, Misstrauen und der erworbenen Immunität unterscheidet er sich in nichts von den Mitpatienten und Ärzten, gegen die er opponiert. Anders gesagt: Bernhard inszeniert autobiographisches Erzählen als unreines Performativ, als einen Sprechakt, in dem sich die Ausnahme die Mittel der Institution aneignet, um sie gegen die Institution zu wenden (300).

By "infecting" itself with the language of the sanatorium, Bernhard's language becomes immune to the very "immunity" that constitutes the institution's discursive hegemony (304). According to Strowick, in Bernhard's autobiography, as in Esposito's explication of the dialectic of modern immunity (which she quotes), immunity is generated via the process of infection: it is not the elimination, rather the containment and integration of a threat (305). Here, the metaphor of immunized narration resonates with Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's notion of Bernhard's prose "closing itself" against attempts to appropriate it (Schmidt-Dengler 1995, 304). It also recalls the problems with Bernhard parodies that Heide Helwig explores – the prose itself appears to be "immune" from parody by encapsulating its own "defense mechanism" (See above: Helwig 122). At the

same time, however, while the "immunized" result may be the same in the texts that Strowick, Schmidt-Dengler and Helwig examine, the "threat" that Bernhard's text subsumes into itself in an immunizing gesture is not. For Strowick, this language is the hermetic discourse of the modern clinic as described by Foucault, for Helwig it is the discourse of parodistic appropriation, for Schmidt-Dengler it is the discourses of philosophy or literary theory.[44]

I believe that Strowick's insight into the textual dynamics of immunization in Bernhard's autobiography makes explicit a strategy that is present in a general way throughout Bernhard's texts, even those that do not thematize illness: that of the text incorporating aspects of an oppositional discourse in order to oppose that discourse. Moreover, this process becomes all the more apparent and important when the oppositional discourse Bernhard appropriates is the rhetoric of fascism. This is neglected in Strowick's account of infection in Bernhard, and it is the point of departure for my reading of *Frost* and *Heldenplatz*.

The second scholar to treat the notion of Bernhard's prose as infectious is Hélène Francoual. In her article "Das Imaginäre des Übels oder die Bernhardsche 'Anthropologie' der Krankheit," she draws together Bernhard's autobiographical encounter with disease and his insistent accusations about Austria's complicity with fascism. Here, the anxiety of Bernhard's influence as felt by other German-language writers intersects with the performative function of his viral polemics in the Austrian public sphere. Francoual's analysis puts (specifically National Socialist) biopolitics at the heart of Bernhard's poetics, even if this connection remains undertheorized in her short

[44] In my reading of the *Heldenplatz* scandal below, I will show how the Austrian press also accused Bernhard of "immunizing" himself through his language in several different contexts.

article.

Francoual starts her analysis by examining the imagined etiology of Bernhard's lung illness within his autobiography and in his real life, combining a reading of the texts *Der Atem. Eine Entscheidung* and *Die Kälte. Eine Isolation* with accounts of Bernhard's actual lung illness. She claims that Bernhard's autobiographical protagonist (whom she does not always cleanly separate from the real man)[45] sways between endogenic and exogenic explanations for the cause of his ailment, ultimately settling on the exogenic explanation because the endogenic cause – that he himself is somehow responsible for his lung disease – is intolerable to the ego (239-241).

The repressed endogenic explanation resurfaces, however, as a projection of contagion onto the outside world (243). This is how Austria, Francoual argues, becomes the ultimate source of evil in Bernhard's texts. Looking for a cause of this pestilence which he himself has shifted onto the environment, Bernhard's protagonist finds it in the unconfronted Nazi past in Salzburg (244): "Hier sieht er die Ursache für diese gefährliche Ausdünstungen, den Giftgestank aus der nationalsozialistischen Ära" (245).

In a final transposition, Bernhard, who sees illness in the air around him, is himself confronted as a "Störfaktor" or "Krankheitserreger," when he reminds Austria of its complicity with fascism through his incendiary literary and public performances (247). According to Francoual, Bernhard aims to strengthen Austria's resistance to a resurgence of the Nazi past through this program of insistent irritation. He offers his work as a "Heilmittel,"

> insofern als er — wie ein Impfstoff, der durch das Einbringen einer Mikrobe in den Körper eines Menschen Immunität gegen die Krankheit erzielt — die alten

[45] For example, see 238, where Francoual discusses the evidence that Bernhard did not actually contract tuberculosis in Großgmain, as he claims in his autobiography.

> Dämonen der österreichischen Gesellschaft aufweckt und somit hofft, ihre Immunabwehr so zu fördern, daß sie selbst ihre eigenen Antikörper erzeugt, um sich gegen eine Reinfektion des Virus zu schützen. Bernhard glaubt an die reinigende Heilkraft einer Selbstbesinnung des österreichischen Volkes, die es ermöglichen würde, das Übel endgültig zu überwinden, auf die Gefahr hin, der österreichischen Gesellschaft einen Schock zu versetzen (249).

Francoual's account of Austrian society immunizing itself through Bernhard is a compelling way to understand Bernhard's irritations. It provides a therapeutic complement to my readings above of biologically inflected receptions of Bernhard's work that view his language as at once irresistible and dangerous, as poisonous and salutary. It also approaches from a different direction Elisabeth Strowick's notion of narration that is both immunized and contagious.

Francoual's imagery, however, seems to have more in common with catharsis than vaccination or immunization. "Reinigende Heilkraft," implies the purification or cleansing of the emotions that Aristotelian catharsis promises. The hope of "overcoming the evil permanently" ("das Übel endgültig zu überwinden") further betrays the fact that Francoual has neglected to carry the logic of immunity to its conclusion. In doing so, she has short-circuited the connection between the personal imaginary of Bernhard's autobiographical narrator and the Austrian public sphere. For a system (here the Austrian state) to protect itself against an external threat through the practice of inoculation, the system must assimilate exactly this threat in an attenuated form. The threat is not cleansed from the system, rather it becomes a type of embodied memory that it is integrated into the autopoiesis (i.e. self-fashioning) of the system itself.[46] Roberto Esposito describes the procedure of inoculation as follows:

[46] See Luhmann 1984: „Das Immunsystem schützt nicht die Struktur, es schützt die Autopoiesis, die geschlossene Selbstreproduktion des Systems. Oder um es mit einer alten Unterscheidung zu sagen: es schützt durch Negation vor Annihilation" (507).

> Dem Übel muß entgegengetreten werden – doch nicht, indem man es von den eigenen Grenzen fernhält. [...] Sondern im Gegenteil durch Einschluß innerhalb dieser Grenzen. Das Gift ist vom Organismus nicht dann besiegt, wenn es aus ihm heraus gestoßen wird, sondern wenn es in gewisser Weise zu einem Teil von ihm wird (15).[47]

In other words, in the practice of inoculation, the "Übel" is never defeated head-on, or purged, as Francoual's evocation of catharsis implies, it is integrated, becoming a permanent part of the system, organism, society etc. Therefore, if Francoual is correct that Bernhard is a "vaccination" against the recrudescence of fascism, the logic of immunity would require that Bernhard's irritations represent a *return* of the fascist past – albeit in an attenuated, though morphologically similar, form. Put another way: if Bernhard's irritations merely involve challenging Austria's status as a victim, their inoculatory function would work against exactly this memory – an effect that hardly seems desirable. And would the "purification" of emotions related to fascism, the final "healing" of the Austrian state really be possible or desirable?

In what follows, I will give a brief reading of Bernhard's first novel against the backdrop of the poetics of infection, showing how the immunized narrative that Strowick situates in the institutional contexts of the autobiography also takes place in the novels, sometimes within an institutional – but always also a *historical* – framing. In the fictional prose, and, as I will argue, in *Heldenplatz*, Bernhard's performance of infection has ambivalent connections to the fascist past, which means that his "immunological" function in Austrian society must be understood in these terms, not merely as a discourse of an abstract "modernity."

Insofar as Bernhard's work continuously links the dispersal of language to infectious disease, it both resists the biological determinism of Nazism and repeats the

[47] See my discussion of Strowick above, who also quotes from this same passage by Esposito.

immunitary dynamics of Nazism on a symbolic, narrative level. While Bernhard's novels offer the most trenchant examples of this type of dispersal, his scandalous plays – especially *Heldenplatz* – transport this dynamic into the public sphere. My discussion below will trace this process in Bernhard's first published novel and his final play.

IV. "Erbfolgekrankheit": Infectious Speech and the Fascist Past in *Frost*

In Bernhard's debut novel *Frost*, what Andreas Maier has called the "Zuhörerfigur" (Maier 7) is a young man, the unnamed Famulant, whose medical supervisor gives him the assignment to follow and report on the doctor's brother Strauch, a failed painter who has withdrawn into seclusion. Strauch, residing in an alpine inn in the village of Weng, suffers from a mysterious ailment with seemingly no physical cause. Instead of the narrator reporting on the painter to his brother with a cold clinician's eye, he is slowly drawn into the worldview and language of the painter. By the end of the novel, he is shaken in his scientific view of the world but nevertheless finishes his internship and continues his medical studies. The painter goes out into the snow to die – whether in a suicide or accident is unclear – but his language lives on in the protocols, letters, diary entries and other writings of the Famulant. These written records make up the story itself, a combination of pithy (though oftentimes absurd or ridiculous) sayings, narrations of isolated events, and stories about the characters in the town and inn. These stories take the form of anecdotes that are not integral to the larger plot of the novel. The only narrative motion in the story, the true plot of the novel, is the Famulant's gradual identification with the painter Strauch, which reaches a climax in his inability to

distinguish his own thought from that of Strauch's.[48]

Already in *Frost*, we see Bernhard's characteristic narrative strategy, which thematizes and performs the passing on of language from one person to another as a legacy, or *Erbe*. In *Frost*, this legacy is not yet explicitly a testament or part of an inheritance, but in its intradiegetic structure it is clearly related to the other novels and *Heldenplatz*. This process of discursive transference and incorporation can be read alongside Strowick's concept of "immunized narration" in Bernhard's autobiography, insofar as both Strauch and his language are described variously throughout the narration as poison, disease, irritation, medication, transfusion or foreign body. However, in contradistinction to the type of "immunized narration" described by Strowick, which appropriates the discourse of the institution in order to work against it, Strauch's discourse is already shot through with institutional tropes and is transferred to the narrator, who in his capacity as a medical student is already a representative of the "Foucauldian" modern institution (cf. Strowick 296).

My reading argues, therefore, that the institutional framework here is of less importance than the way that biological and medical imagery is deployed in the intergenerational encounter between the painter and the narrator, for it is here that the provenance of the infectious threat that Strauch poses becomes clearer: the legacy of fascism in Austria. This threat is articulated within the narration through metaphorical language that transposes, inverts and shifts the discourse of Nazi biopolitics, positioning Strauch (himself vaguely associated with the fascist past) in the position of an infectious

[48] s.a. Judex: "Allmählich vollzieht sich die ‚Krankheit der Auflösung', unter der der gescheiterte Maler als Objekt der Beobachtung und geheimer Protagonist leidet und die auch den sogenannten Famulanten als beobachtendes bzw. erzählendes Subjekt erfasst" (54).

agent, and the Austrian "Volkskörper" as irrevocably moribund.[49]

The staging of the very first meeting between Strauch and the narrator suggests the connection between Strauch and the legacy of fascism. The Famulant wanders out into the woods near the inn, only to find himself in a field of tree stumps recalling a battlefield: "Vor dem Baumstumpf blieb ich stehen. Jetzt sah ich lauter solche Baumstümpfe aus dem Schnee herausragen, wie von Geschossen zerfetzt, Dutzende und aber Dutzende" (13). The painter Strauch emerges out of this landscape, and the Famulant is able to strike up a conversation with him easily. The field of mangled tree stumps serves as an uncanny recollection of the war, which is omnipresent in the novel's imagery but only occasionally mentioned explicitly. On the third day, the painter's declaration to the Famulant offers a further uncanny association with the war, on the level of the signifier:„„Ich bin kein Maler,' hat er heute gesagt, ‚Ich bin höchstens ein Anstreicher gewesen'" (16).[50]

Here, the epithet "Anstreicher," used by Brecht to mock Hitler ("Das Lied vom Anstreicher Hitler"), whether or not intentional on Bernhard's part, serves to connect Strauch, himself a failed painter, to the Nazi dictator.[51] This implicit connection at once reinforces his ties to the war and the (mis-)use of speech to control or influence others. This misuse of speech, staged as an "infection" throughout the novel, does not necessarily have to do with fascist thought or even a coherent worldview, but rather with the gradual occlusion of the difference between the two main characters.

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[49] For more on the way that Bernhard inverts Nazi propaganda, see Cousineau's reading of *Der Untergeher* and *Mein Kampf* (33).

[50] For more on how *Frost* employs generic markers of "Anti-Heimatliteratur" and the "Anti-Idylle," in order to gesture towards the repression of the National Socialist past in Austria see Judex 59.

[51] The fact that he once claimed to have written a thesis on Brecht and Artaud (later proven to be false) proves that Bernhard must have had at least a passing knowledge of Brecht's work (Fialik 9).

This "infection" is related to Strauch's almost comically overinflated discourse of disease. Strauch sees illness everywhere, for example, in the congenital defects of the townspeople:

> „Das ist kein guter Menschenschlag hier," sagte er. „Die Leute sind verhältnismäßig klein. […] Der Anenkephalos ist hier zu Hause. […] Den meisten ist eine Verkrüppelung angeboren. […] Die Tuberkulose versetzt sie [die Lehrer] in eine milchige Melancholie, aus der sie nicht mehr herauskommen […]" (31-32).
>
> Läuse hätten die Kinder, die Erwachsenen den Tripper, die das Nervensystem zeitweise ganz ausschaltende Syphilis (71).
>
> Die ganze Gegend sei „aufgeweicht von ihren Krankheiten." „[…] die Leute haben ihre Tuberkulose auf ihrer Stirn. Außen tragen sie sie, schamlos, so daß sie der Gletscherwind aufwühlen kann wie einen Haufen Laub" (73).

Here, as in other passages in the novel where Strauch comments on the townspeople, the echoes of Nazi propaganda about racial hygiene are clearly apparent – for example, in using the term "Menschenschlag," the painter makes sickness into an ontological (if not exactly racial) category. But Strauch doesn't merely pathologize the residents of the town, he uses the figure of illness to describe a whole series of other things:

> „[…]Ich bin mir sicher, dass Phantasie eine Krankheit ist. Eine Krankheit, die man nicht bekommt, weil man sie immer gehabt hat. Eine Krankheit, die alles, vor allem das Lächerliche und das Bösartige, auf dem Gewissen hat […]" (38).
>
> „Die Erinnerung macht krank […]" (45).

The Famulant slowly but surely internalizes this discourse of all-pervasive illness. The first hint we have that the narrator is being shaken in his worldview comes right after one of Strauch's lengthy descriptions of his own illness:

> Er hat Fußschmerzen. Diese Fußschmerzen würden ihn hindern, so zu gehen, wie er es gewohnt sei, wie er gewillt sei zu gehen. "Es besteht wahrscheinlich ein geheimer Zusammenhang zwischen meinem Kopfschmerz und diesen Fußschmerzen" (51).

In this passage and the description that follows, the painter portrays his illness as an expression of a more serious, hidden mental problem, in terms taken almost straight from Freud's concept of the symptom: „Über Nacht drückt meine Kopfkrankheit auf meinen Fuß aus. Unheimlich. [...] Es hat mit dem Fuß gar nichts zu tun." (51-52).

Although the Famulant, himself a medical student, knows that Strauch's cyst is completely harmless, Strauch does not believe him: "Sie lügen wie mein Bruder, der Arzt," he says (52). In the next moment, the Famulant's vision of Strauch is important in two aspects: "Er musterte mich, er kam mir vor wie ein ehemaliger, nach langer Zeit plötzlich wieder zum Leben erweckter gefürchteter Lehrer" (Ibid).

The imagery of the teacher evokes here not only Strauch's brother, the Assistent, who is arguably his rational doppelganger, it also is a further connection to an older, male authority figure. Furthermore, the fact that this authority figure has returned from the dead resonates with the evocation of Hitler in the Maler's self-description as an "Anstreicher."

Shortly after this oedipal vision, the Famulant begins to show the first signs of the creeping ennui which his acquaintance with Strauch has initiated. This is expressed in an autobiographical passage that throws the status of the text as a protocol into question. For whom is this passage, if not for the Famulant himself? His musing does not seem to be intended for Doctor Strauch:

> Ich kann auch heute noch nicht sagen, vielleicht nie sagen, daß mir Medizinstudieren Freude macht, daß mir die Medizin Freude macht. Aber ich bin nicht mehr umgekehrt – und in welche Richtung wäre ich denn gegangen? – [...] (53).

Out of these reflections on his life choices emerges a therapeutic metaphor describing his

assignment to observe Strauch:

> So eine Sache wie die, den Maler Strauch zu beobachten, *auf mich wirken zu lassen* [italics mine], wie verhält sich die zu mir? Und ich mich zu ihr? Und ist es nicht mehr als merkwürdig, zu einem Mann zu fahren, den man nicht kennt und dem man sich vorstellt und mit dem man dann herumgeht, um zu hören, was er sagt, nachzuschauen, was er tut, herauszubringen, was er denkt und vorhat? (54).

The phrase "auf mich wirken zu lassen" evokes medication, implying that observing Strauch is a kind of therapy for the Famulant. This formulation also reverses the normal hierarchy of clinical practice: the patient (Strauch) exerts influence on the observing doctor (the Famulant). This influence takes the form of language. The trope of Strauch's language as a potent substance is recast throughout the narrative in several different forms: as a poison, as an irritation, and as a threat.

The Famulant's narrative performs "infection" as it slowly allows Strauch's consciousness to overtake the narrator's. This happens both within the diegesis, as well as formally and grammatically. First, the narrator begins to concur with some of Strauch's more eccentric pronouncements, seeing a reflection of his own feelings in Strauch's outlandish imagery: "Wie ihn, so zogen mich Brennesseln für Augenblicke in eine teuflische Unzucht. Angst war, wie von ihm, von mir gebrockt mit Himbeeren, Brombeeren" (76).[52] This affinity between the narrator and Strauch's almost synaesthetic experience of fear strains the credulity of the reader.

This convergence in worldview is reflected in the grammar of the narrative as well. The Famulant uses the subjunctive voice almost consistently when relaying the painter's thoughts, but repeatedly lapses into the indicative, effacing the grammatical

[52] See also *Frost* 76: "Die Kindheit läuft immer noch mit wie ein kleiner Hund, der einmal ein froher Gefährte gewesen ist und den man jetzt pflegen und schienen muß, ihm tausenderlei Medikamente eingeben, damit er einem nicht unter der Hand stirbt."

barrier between himself and the painter. This is repeated multiple times throughout the narrative. Although there is not a consistent unidirectional motion from indirect to direct speech, the slippage between journalistic objectivity and identification is an indicator of the effect of Strauch's language on the narrator. The following passage is an isolated example of this phenomenon, with the indicative forms in my italics:

> Überhaupt reize ihn von jeher alles Abwesende, ziehe ihn mit einer kindischen, verderbten Leidenschaft an. Er sei aber nie und in nichts klar gewesen. "Klarheit ist etwas Übermenschliches." Er *sucht* und *propagiert* die Einfachheit und *verabscheut* sie: wollte immer schon aus ihr ausbrechen. […] (85).

Strauch presents himself throughout the text as dangerous. In this passage, the Famulant once again relays Strauch's speech in the subjunctive: „in seinem Blut seien so viele Giftstoffe, daß man ‚ganze Stadtbezirke damit ausrotten könnte'" (90).[53]
At the same time that Strauch styles himself as poison or an irritation, the Famulant also begins to describe his influence in explicit terms as threatening:

> Er, der Assistent, hält mich offenbar für durchaus geeignet, einen solchen Auftrag, wie den Maler Strauch zu beobachten, ohne *Schaden* durchzustehen. [...] Der Assistent schickte mich in dem Glauben her, ich sei fähig, Einflüsse, die mich *angreifen*, *abzuwehren* [italics mine] (144).

The Famulant frames his relationship to the "influences" exerted on him by Strauch in terms reminiscent of the self/other distinction that defines immunological thought. He continues with this line of thought, employing imagery that lends Strauch's influence an almost physical quality:

> Ja, das muß man natürlich, sogenannte schlechte Einflüsse von Menschen, mit denen man umgeht, umzugehen gezwungen ist, *abwehren*, *nicht in sich eindringen lassen*. Mit ihnen fertig werden, so schwierig es oft sein kann. Wenn man die Augen offen hat, übersieht man es auch nicht, nämlich man übersieht die Gefahr nicht und begegnet ihr mit der nötigen Ausrüstung. Ich bin natürlich in

[53] See also 123: "'Wenn es Ihnen nichts ausmacht, daß ein alter Mann Ihr Zimmer *vergiftet*'"; 303 (Strauch's description of his dream) "[…] als ob mein Kopf mit *giftigen* Gasen gefüllt wäre [italics mine]."

> Gesellschaft des Malers ständig schlechten Einflüsse ausgesetzt (ibid.).

There is, however, as the passage continues, a hint of the type of immunological thinking that Esposito writes about, which uses the negative to immunize itself:

> Aber ich sehe sie, und ich kann genau unterscheiden, wo die schlechten Einflüsse anfangen, wo die schlechten Einflüsse nicht gut sind, denn schlechte Einflüsse können gut sein (ibid.).

The ultimate integration of Strauch's language into the Famulant's narrative, while keeping the narrative intact, describes the move that will take place in the narrative as a whole, one that uses the "bad influence" of the painter to good effect. This is not the relationship of a mentor to a student, but a pedagogical relationship representing a threat to the student. Not coincidentally, the painter worked as a substitute teacher, and spends at least as much time if not more time talking about his time as a pedagogue as he does discussing his time as an artist. He casts his influence on his students in explicitly medical terms:

> Die Elternbeschwerden, die seinetwegen in den diversen Direktionen immer wieder eintrafen, bezogen sich meistens auf "anstößige Ansichten," die er "wie ein Medikament seinen Schülern einzugeben" beschuldigt wurde (185).

Here, even if it is unclear whether the imagery of "medication" originates from the parents' complaints or from Strauch himself, its similarity to the Famulant's descriptions of Strauch's language (and its effects on his own text) is nonetheless striking.

As the narrative progresses, the Famulant begins to cast Strauch's influence in ever more negative terms. The painter speaks to him "in scharfem Befehlston," and when he gets a moment alone, the Famulant feels "[w]ie ein Hund von der Leine losgelassen" (149). Later, the imagery of the dog leash is intensified to that of a noose:

> Er zog mich dann in immer mehr finstere Gedanken hinein, die mich schließlich,

> so verrückt es mir schien, mit dem Engerwerden der Schlinge, in der ich meinen Kopf stecken hatte, von ihm losreißen ließen (155).

As negative and damaging as Strauch's influence is, we find the Famulant ever more accepting of Strauch's ideas. His doubts about the veracity of Strauch's terminal illness disappear. When reflecting on the probability of Strauch committing suicide, the Famulant decides that he will most likely not do it immediately, but qualifies this assumption: "Aber das kann nicht Jahrzehnte dauern. Bei ihm nicht. Auch nicht Jahre, denn *er ist todkrank* [italics mine] und wird bald von selbst sterben" (157). Despite ample evidence against Strauch's claims of being physically ill (see, for example, the scene mentioned above in which the Famulant assures Strauch that his cysts are completely harmless) the Famulant has aligned his opinions with those of Strauch. Instead of reporting the painter's illness in the distancing subjunctive, the Famulant employs the indicative mood.

This gradual alignment accompanies an escalation in the threat that the Maler represents for the Famulant. After listening to one of the painter's characteristic pessimistic and disjointed monologues about death, the Famulant experiences physical exhaustion: "Ich selbst war erschöpft. Mich hatte der Ausbruch des Malers niedergeschlagen, wie von einem Steinbruch niedergeschlagen war mein Körper" (161).

As great as this exhaustion is, Strauch still exudes an irresistible pull for the young medical student:

> Denn ich stehe ganz unter dem Einfluß des Malers, ich muß mit ihm gehen, und ich muß gar nicht, ich kann nicht anders, als mit ihm gehen: selbst wenn er mich nicht immer dazu auffordern würde, ginge ich mit (169).

Soon Strauch himself acknowledges that there is a strange congruence between himself

and the narrator forming: “Was ist der Unterschied zwischen mir und Ihnen? […] Besteht zwischen mir und Ihnen ein Unterschied?“ (239). The point at which the difference between the two main characters, Strauch and the Famulant, is called into question is (perhaps not coincidentally) the point at which the formal structure of the novel begins to visibly break down. Now, instead of a sequence of diary entries, the Famulant intersperses his narrative with short episodes related to him by the painter. The first of these “Die Geschichte mit dem toten Holzzieher,” is interpolated into the narrative of the 20th day (240). The painter Strauch, taking a rare walk without the narrator, meets a young timber-hauler from the other side of the valley. After exchanging a few words of small talk with the man, the painter continues on, only to hear a horrific noise. Upon doubling back, he finds the timber-hauler pinned beneath his sled, dead. The Famulant, who has deemed this anecdote worthy of a title that suggests literature and not a clinical protocol, discovers the difficulties of writing even as he discovers the literary form. Instead of the self-sufficient and transparent language of the clinical protocol, he experiences the self-alienation inherent in symbolic representation: “[…] ich habe alles anders im Kopf, als es dann auf dem Papier ist. Auf dem Papier ist alles wie tot. Ich stürze hinauf ins Zimmer und schreibe das und das, aber es ist, als ob ich es durch das Aufschreiben umbrächte” (243).

As the Famulant falls increasingly under the influence of the Maler, he nevertheless is able to use the Maler’s influence to find a literary voice. This will be a key part of the painter’s ultimate effect on him, which will not be deleterious, or not merely deleterious. The narration of the next story, “Die Geschichte mit dem Landstreicher,” encapsulates this process by which the Famulant remains in thrall to the Maler while

simultaneously repurposing the Maler's stories for his own literary use. The *Landstreicher* story concerns another walk that Strauch has taken on his own, without the narrator. This time, instead of a man who is at first alive and later dead, he meets a man who at first appears to be dead but later proves to be alive.

During his walk through the *Lärchenwald*, the painter almost stumbles across what appears to be a dead body in his path. The man is wearing clothes that mark him as an outsider, perhaps even a member of the circus. At first the painter mistakes him for a *Schausteller*, i.e., a member of the travelling freak-show that puts disfigured women and animals on display, and whose members were recently involved in a fight at a local tavern after refusing to pay their bill. Immediately after leaping to his feet and showing himself to be very much alive, he assures the painter that he is not the fugitive *Schausteller*:

> „Oh," soll der Landstreicher gesagt haben, „ich habe mich nur totgestellt, ich habe nur ausprobieren wollen, wie ein Mensch reagiert, der einen anderen findet, der mitten im Wald und mitten im Winter auf der Straße liegt, ausgestreckt, und zwar auf dem Bauch, wie ein Toter." Mit diesen Worten sei der Landstreicher aufgestanden und habe seine Hose glattgestreift. „Wenn Sie glauben, ich sei der entkommene Schausteller, so irren Sie sich, ich habe nichts mit diesen Schaustellern zu tun […]" (249-250).

While the fact that the tramp immediately anticipates and answers the painter's unasked question seems improbable, what follows is an even more unbelievable story. The tramp, the director of a "sogenannte[s] beweglich[es] Theater" demonstrates two physically impossible tricks: first, he makes his head disappear, next (with his head back in place) he detaches his legs and plays ball with them. In this anecdote the ridiculous eclipses the uncanny.[54] The Famulant, however, despite having written the narrative in an especially

[54] Thanks to Paul Buchholz (private correspondence) for this observation.

distanced tone (the formula "[…] soll er gesagt haben" is repeated several times), seems to accept the painter's tall tale credulously. „‚Ein Mensch wie dieser, der vorgibt, der Besitzer eines ‚beweglichen Theaters' zu sein, ist mir noch nie untergekommen. Oder glauben Sie gar, ich habe diese Geschichte erfunden?'" the painter asks. „Ich glaube schon, daß sie wahr ist," the Famulant writes, without further commentary (255).

The next anecdote, this time framed as an experience that the narrator himself has had, is nevertheless the confirmation of another of the Maler's improbable stories and thus demonstrates how even the painter's most inane and unsubstantiated tales have insinuated themselves into the Famulant's consciousness. Early in the novel, Strauch casually mentions that the Wirtin cooks with dog meat. On the 22nd day of his observations, however, the Famulant is able to confirm this story: "In der Nacht machte ich eine grausige Entdeckung, die die Bestätigung für etwas war, das der Maler nur angenommen hatte" (ibid.).

The Famulant wakes in the middle of the night to see the Wasenmeister climbing through the Wirtin's window with a large rucksack. This is actually unsuspicious because the Wirtin and the Wasenmeister are known to be lovers. Nevertheless, the Famulant puts on his clothes and goes downstairs to skulk outside the Wirtin's door. He overhears the Wasenmeister present the Wirtin with a dog carcass. "So ein schöner Hund," she says. „Jetzt weiß ich, daß sie mit Hundefleisch kocht, dachte ich. Der Maler hat es ja gesagt. Es ist wahr," writes the Famulant. The next morning, however, he is unsure of what he has seen:

> In der Frühe wußte ich nicht, ob ich der Sache mit dem Hundekadaver nicht doch geträumt habe. Aber nein, ich habe diese Wahrnehmungen wirklich gemacht. Mich ekelte, wenn ich daran denken mußte, aber ich beschloß gleichzeitig, niemandem etwas von der Geschichte, die mir doch immer wieder wie ein Traum

> vorkam, zu erzählen. Es wäre für den Maler Wasser auf die Mühle, wenn ich ihm davon Mitteilung machen würde (257).

The narrator appears unable to distinguish between dream and reality, even if he later decides, in echo of the narrator of Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* "es war kein Traum" (ibid.). Nevertheless, perhaps also in allusion to Kafka, the Famulant writes: "Ich selbst kam mir, rückblickend, in dieser Nacht ganz verwandelt vor" (258).[55] His "transformation" however, is due less to the "harmless" sounds that originally woke him, and more to the seed of suspicion concerning the Wirtin that the painter sowed early in their acquaintance. Once again, the painter's words have agitated the Famulant, whether his experience of seeing the dog carcass was "real" or not.

Later, on the twenty-third day of the narrator's observations, the Maler explicitly employs the trope of discursive infection. Speaking to the Famulant, he says: "Es ist mir entsetzlich, zu wissen, daß ich Sie vielleicht anstecke, wissen Sie, mit meiner Krankheit […] ich möchte nicht Besitz ergreifen von Ihnen, ich möchte ja nicht, daß Sie von mir irritiert sind" (274).[56] The Maler, despite his various physical symptoms, acknowledges that his sickness is primarily psychological, and that his speech is both the vector and the disease itself. He continues to represent an irritant for the Famulant. The final, most macabre of the Maler's stories of his solo strolls ushers in the climax of the novel.

This final story is "Das Viehdiebgesindel" and it takes place on the twenty-fifth day (289). The title of the anecdote is placed directly below the diary-like heading *Fünfundzwanzigster Tag*, doubling it, and doing so, competing with it for importance,

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[55] Cf. Gößling, who also sees "[d]as Kafka'sche Verwandlungsmotiv" in the Maler's (not the Famulant's) dreams (175-176).

[56] Earlier, the Maler refers to himself as a "Fremdkörper" – a term which Bernhard uses again in *Korrektur* to describe Roithamer's relationship to his family's estate.

just as the objective observation of Strauch has slowly given way to identification with the painter, but also unleashed the narrator's own literary creativity. This doubled title shows, on the formal level, how the importance of the clinical report and its sequentially numbered days has broken down and the literary anecdote has taken on prominence.

In this final story, the painter relates how, on another of his walks, he came across a mountain stream turned red: "Das ist Blut, weiß Gott, das ist Blut!" (291). He runs eagerly to the source of the blood, then crawls on his belly more cautiously, only to surprise some cattle thieves who are in the middle of butchering their stolen animals. They flee, leaving body parts scattered in the snow. After his account of scaring off the thieves, the painter says "Ich will das Bild 'Abschlachtung' nennen," and proceeds to describe the grisly scene of animal slaughter in visual and textual terms:

> Man sah deutlich die Fluchtspur der Schlächter. Man sah auch die Antriebsspur des von ihnen entführten Viehs. Man sah die Finsternis der Gestirne, ebenso den gemeinen Mordproletarismus. Man sah das Wort „schutzlos" da auf der Erde, da im Schnee, diese Geheimschrift, müssen Sie wissen, und man sah das Wort „Niedertracht" deutlich am Himmel (293).[57]

Strauch's "word transfusion" (145) has materialized on the landscape, and he reads his language back to the Famulant. He goes on to describe how he frolicked in the bloody scene ("Ich warf rote Schneebälle! Rote Schneebälle warf ich!"), prying open one of the dead cow's eyes before picking up a bloody headscarf as evidence of the crime and

[57] Here, the painter externalizes his speech, placing his words on the landscape and then "reading" them back to the Famulant. His language gains a material dimension. This image resonates with the Famulant's attempt at characterizing the Maler's language earlier in the novel: "Was ist das für eine Sprache, die Sprache Strauchs? Was fange ich mit seinen Gedankenfetzen an? Was mir zuerst zerrissen, zusammenhanglos schien, hat seine wirklich ungeheuren Zusammenhänge'; das Ganze ist eine alles erschreckende Worttransfusion in die Welt, in die Menschen hinein [...]. Diese Ausbrüche kommen auf mich herunter wie Felsstürze" (118).

returning to the inn (293).

After telling the Famulant his ghoulish story and showing him the blood-stained headscarf, the Maler requests that the Famulant keep the story to himself: "Eine kopflos publik gemachte Zeugenschaft, und gar in einem so widerwärtig berauschenden Fall, führt in den unglaublichen Ekel gestrenger Gerichtsmeierei. Ich halte mich da heraus" (296).

This final anecdote, and the Maler's attempt to draw him into a conspiracy of silence, finally pushes the Famulant over the edge: "Ich ging in mein Zimmer und sagte mir, aber so, daß es laut gesagt war und von den Wänden zurück auf mich herunterfiel: ‚Das halte ich nicht mehr aus!'" After pacing for a few minutes and trying to distract himself by reading Henry James, he throws the book on the floor and is overcome by disgust (297).

The next series of events displays the extent to which the Maler has insinuated himself into the Famulant's thoughts. He goes into the kitchen, but his thoughts keep returning to Strauch as he listens to the Wasenmeister and the Wirtin discuss the institution of the hunt. Unable to escape Strauch's thoughts, he attempts to go back to his room without the older man hearing him, but is stopped in the hallway:

> Er aber hatte mich schon gehört und mich mit dem Anruf: „Kommen Sie!", der ein strikter Befehl war, zu sich in sein Zimmer gezogen. […] Er wollte mich bei sich haben. Ich fühlte es. Als ob er mich in seinen Mantel hineinzwängen und diesen Mantel fest und für allezeit zuknöpfen wollte, war alles, was von ihm ausging (298).

In the next moment, however, the painter orders him to leave the room. Even though the younger man wants nothing more than to leave, in doing so he is once again following the painter's orders:

> Ich ertrug es nicht mehr und lief hinunter und aus dem Haus. In der frischen Luft fand ich aber bald wieder meine Beherrschung. Ich hatte das Gefühl, als hätte mich der Maler, als hätte mich Strauch, als hätte mich dieser Mensch schon in seiner Gewalt (ibid.).

He walks to the cemetery, muttering to himself along the way, but is unable to escape the sinister influence of the painter: "Auf dem ganzen Weg hatte ich nichts anderes gedacht und überhaupt nichts gesehen, immer nur gedacht, daß der Maler von mir Besitz ergriffen hat. Mich in seine Bilder, mich in seine Vorstellungswelt hineingezwängt hat" (298-299).

But even this idea, the notion that someone can be "forced" into having another's worldview is reminiscent of the Maler's thought: "Aber auch diese Vorstellung, dachte ich, ist eine Vorstellung des Malers. Ich bin nicht mehr ich. Nein, nein, ich bin nicht mehr ich, dachte ich" (299). The "infection" has reached its apex, the Famulant fearing that his personality has been subsumed into the personality of the older man. But this thought, too, originates in the painter's consciousness:

> Aber ist nicht auch dieser Vergleich, dieser verzogene Gedanke in meinem Gehirn, und ist nicht schon alles, was von mir gedacht und gesehen, von mir gesprochen und schon heruntergemacht wird, von Strauch? Am Nachmittag versuchte ich einzuschlafen, es gelang mir nicht. Ich ertappte mich hilflos ausgeliefert in den Sätzen und Ansichten Strauchs, in seinen „Morbiditäten" und „Absurditäten." Ich entdeckte mich fortwährend abgehackt durch den Mund dieses Menschen sprechend (ibid.).

In this passage, the confirmation of the Famulant's "infection" by Strauch is combined with the metaphor of the "Sprachrohr" which recurs throughout Bernhard's work, either as narration mediated through another character,[58] or, occasionally, as an explicit part of the plot itself. Curiously in *Frost*, however, the "Sprachrohr" metaphor is inverted: the Famulant discovers himself speaking through the painter's mouth, not the other way

[58] The familiar inquit method of indicating dialog found throughout Bernhard, often of the form "sagte er, dachte ich"

around. The borders between the two have become fluid, even as the Famulant's urge to escape from the older man continues to increase: "Erst in der Dämmerung, als der Fußmarsch schon bald zu Ende war, den ich mit Strauch unternommen hatte, konnte ich mich wieder von ihm abstoßen" (299). The forceful valence of the verb "abstoßen" brings out the urgency of the Famulant's situation, the predicament that demands he either submit to Strauch's will or rid himself of Strauch entirely.

The encounters between the painter and the Famulant recur, however, and the Famulant continues to record the older man's increasingly bleak and bizarre thoughts. At the same time as the Famulant's crisis comes to a head, the novel becomes ever more muddled on a formal level. The next titled inserts in the text are not stories so much as free associations, dream protocols or absurdist thought experiments. For example, on the twenty-sixth day, the painter relates a dream he has of his head expanding to fill the inn, killing everyone inside (301—302).

A later section, "Die Felsschlucht," proves to be a hybrid of the previous anecdotes and Strauch's attempts at metacognition. Beginning with the phrase "Wie das Gehirn plötzlich nur mehr Maschine ist […]," it initiates a kind of narrative thought experiment with a teacher as the main character: "Sie müssen sich eine Felsschlucht vorstellen, die von den schönsten Farben des Universums zugerichtet ist […] eine Felsschlucht, in die ein Mensch hineingeht, auf Befehl hineingeht" (308).

After this section, the Famulant is at the end of his strength. He stops writing for the day, proclaiming "Ich bin so erschöpft, ich bin unglaublich erschöpft . . ." (314). At this point in the narrative, the letters that the Famulant has written to Doctor Strauch are interpolated into the narrative. They represent a retrospective, a doubling of the

narrated events, but also offer new attempts at explaining Strauch's behavior.

In the first letter, the narrator formulates his assignment in terms which reverse the relationship between himself and the painter as he will come to experience it: "Es ist mir tatsächlich gelungen, in die Existenz Ihres Herrn Bruders systematisch einzudringen, nicht ohne eine gewisse mich selbst erschreckende Rücksichtslosigkeit und Unaufrichtigkeit […]" (ibid.).

The metaphorics of penetration here echo the anxiety that the Famulant will later experience, the fear that his self has been compromised through contact with the painter. At this point, however, the Famulant is still confident in his ability to understand the painter's illness, even if he does admit to the dangers inherent in talking to a man such as the painter, someone who "uninhibitedly proclaims forth his medical history" (315)[59]:

> An dieser Stelle muß ich sofort sagen, daß der ganze Sachverhalt, den ich hier in Weng vorgefunden habe, in der Person Ihres Herrn Bruders und in der, wie mir scheint, ihn vollkommen ausliefernden sowie ihm vollkommen ausgelieferten Umwelt, auf mich eine ungeheuere Faszination ausübt, der ich aber gewachsen bin (ibid.).

Early in the narrative, the narrator believes he can resist Strauch's speech, at once the symptom and vector of his illness. In the next letter, the Famulant elaborates his preliminary diagnosis. The village of Weng is a shock therapy for the painter, he claims, a shock which does not aim at healing the illness (317).

The next passage is, however, remarkable because it sets up the familiar constellation of nerves, immunity, heredity and language that will concern Bernhard throughout the rest of his work:

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[59] The full sentence reads as follows: "Meine Überraschung war also groß, plötzlich einem Menschen gegenüber zu stehen, der, ich möchte sagen, hemmungslos seine Krankengeschichte aus sich herausredet" (315).

> Ich glaube, es handelt sich um eine unverhältnismäßig gewissenlos – gegen alles gewissenlos –, in ihren brutalen Erreger (aus einer in Grenzen ineinander verführbaren Erbmasse) zurückkompensierte Krankheit, die aus der Erregung nicht mehr heraus kann, aus ihrem Begriff, ihrer Existenz. Kann ich von einer *inneren Erbfolgekrankheit* sprechen? (318).

The term *Erbfolgekrankheit*, not from standard medical vocabulary (or indeed *any* standard German vocabulary), is a portmanteau word of the terms "Erbfolge" (sucession) and "Erbkrankheit" (congenital or genetic illness or defect). In the context of the novel, "Erbfolgekrankheit" has the same denotations as "Erbkrankheit," but replaces the component "Erb" (derived from "Erbe," inheritance or heritage) with "Erbfolge," which refers to the succession of kings or royalty, or the legal distribution of the estate of someone who has died without a will. The Famulant's use of "innere" to describe the illness is unusual because of its polyvalence: does "innere" mean "internal to the body" as in "innere Medizin" (internal medicine) or does it indicate that the sickness occurs within the line of succession? Either way the Famulant's new coinage allows for the possibility that the painter's illness may be communicable not merely genetically, but also through elective kinship ties – like property in a testament.[60] My reading above which connects Strauch directly to the Nazi past suggests that the figure of the *Erbfolgekrankheit* encodes the problem of generational succession in Austria after Nazism in explicitly biologistic (but not racial) terms. The National Socialist past becomes a "disease" passed to the next generation (the Famulant) through *speech*, and

[60] This is Paul Buchholz's argument in an unpublished paper "Maimed to Monologue" in which he examines the painter's interest in non-biological types of reproduction, connecting this interest to the painter's misogynistic tirades (20-21): "[…] the student turns from *observer* into *offspring*" (22). Buchholz reads the anecdote "In der Felsschlucht," which I have referred to as a thought experiment above, as an example of the narrator's attempts at non-biological reproduction (he asks the Famulant to imagine a man going into a rocky canyon).

not genetic inheritance.[61]

In the fourth letter, the Famulant once again acknowledges that he has been "infected" by the painter's speech, combining metaphors of penetration with instrumentalization: "Er schiebt ganz einfach seine ganze Hinfälligkeit in Form von Sätzen in mich hinein, wie photographische Bilder in einem Lichtbilderapparat […]" (323-324). The Famulant is not only a projection surface for the painter's worldview, that is, not merely a listener, he is also a reproducer of this worldview, a device which mediates between the painter's consciousness and the rest of the world. This mediating role of the narrator occurs again and again throughout Bernhard's work. In the fourth letter the Famulant once again connects the Maler's thoughts with his sickness:

> Ich habe geglaubt, von Ihrem Bruder unangegriffen zu bleiben. Jetzt aber fühle ich mich von seiner, von dieser konsequent vorgehenden Krankheit erfasst. […] Tatsache ist, dass ich von den Gedanken Ihres Herrn Bruders durchsetzt bin. Nicht, noch nicht krank von ihm, durchsetzt von Lächerlichkeit selbst. […] Mir ist im Augenblick auch alles verdunkelt. Sie müssen verstehen, dieser Brief ist von einer Kopflosigkeit diktiert, für die ich nicht verantwortlich bin (324-325).

Strauch is an irritant for the Famulant, an irritation that nevertheless causes him to produce text. Even if Strauch's speech predominates within the narrative, the narrative itself is told from the perspective of the Famulant. *Frost*, if it is a story at all, is the story of a productive irritation, the poisonous influence of literary language recorded as speech which in turn spurs on the narrator to record and form this speech in his own way. While the painter has successfully reproduced his discourse through the protocols of the Famulant, this reproduction does not occur perfectly, that is, without the trace of the Famulant's influence on the text. This is a familiar "performative contradiction" within

[61] Cf. Martin, who reads Strauch as " the victim of a disintegrating society" who "also witnesses its destruction" (41) and interprets Strauch's illness, including the "Erbfolgekrankheit" in terms of general "decadence" unconnected to the Nazi past (42-43).

Bernhard's texts: the "reproduction" of the painter's consciousness, which supposedly effaces completely the distinction between the Famulant and the painter, nevertheless results in a text marked visibly by the Famulant.[62] The Famulant's agitation, his irritation at the hands of the painter results in a literary text. The painter's excessive, obsessive language results in the Famulant producing agitated, excessive writing, which, though influenced by the painter's discourse, is not equal to it. The Famulant confronts Strauch as a threat, but in the end manages to counter the threat that he poses by incorporating this threat.

V. Performing Infection: The *Heldenplatz* Scandal.

Many of Bernhard's other major novels exhibit dynamics similar to *Frost*, but it would be a repetitious exercise to go into great detail on all of them here.[63] The reading of *Frost* above is meant to trace the complex and at times indirect ways in which the trope of language as infection is present in Bernhard's very first literary publication and clearly, if subtly, linked to the legacy of National Socialism in Austria. Not all of Bernhard's subsequent major prose works are explicitly (or even implicitly) concerned with the legacy of National Socialism,[64] but similar dynamics of "discursive infection" can be read in all of them, up to and including *Alte Meister*, where the connection to the Nazi

[62] This process is analogous to the one described by Elisabeth Strowick (see pp. 58-60 above).
[63] For example, *Korrektur*, like *Frost*, is also the story of the narrator's encounter with another's language, the story of an "infection" which is nevertheless incomplete and finally overcome. In *Korrektur,* the process of infection is staged as an *Erregung* caused by a character who has bequeathed his language – this time in the form of his writings – to his friend. While the relationship between Roithamer and the unnamed narrator of *Korrektur* is fundamentally different from that of the Famulant and Strauch because they are the same age, there is a similar movement in the book, towards the gradual and total occlusion of the narrator's individual discourse by the discourse of the dead friend.
[64] Nevertheless, many of Bernhard's other prose works do, of course address the *NS-Zeit*, including, most notably *Auslöschung. Ein Zerfall* (his last published novel during his lifetime) which I will not discuss here.

past disappears entirely but the "Sprachrohr"-motif (i.e. the relationship between Reger and Irrsigler) restages the relationship of the Famulant and the Maler in *Frost* in a comedic context.

I will argue in this section that it was not Bernhard's late prose but the text of *Heldenplatz* and the scandal it provoked which provide the final piece of evidence for my proposition that the "infectious" dynamic in Bernhard's texts is always connected to the National Socialist past in Austria.

The *Heldenplatz* scandal began when theater critic Sigrid Löffler, who had obtained the text of *Heldenplatz* from a (still) unknown source, published some of the most provocative passages in a column on August 1, 1988 in the magazine *Profil* (Burgtheater 4). For a few weeks, there was no reaction, but after this "incubation," *Heldenplatz* fever seemed to break out all over Austria.[65] The play, which had been commissioned by Claus Peymann as part of the *Gedenkjahr 1988* commemorating the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, tells the story of the Schuster family, Viennese Jews who return from their exile in England in 1988, only to find that there are now "more Nazis" in the Austrian capital than in the year of the *Anschluss*. The uproar that ensued in the wake of the leaked play text could be seen as an exemplary "viral" event: not only did the medial mechanisms of scandalization make it difficult to tell the "inside" of the performance from the outside, but it also seemed that any attempt by politicians to combat Bernhard's polemics only disseminated them further.[66]

I will argue that it is fruitful to think of Bernhard's discourse as "viral" not only in the way it circulated through the media, upsetting distinctions between aesthetic

[65] Francoual hints at this notion of "fever" in her article, without mention of *Heldenplatz* (249).
[66] For more on the critical topos of "viral" discourses and metaphors, see Mayer and Weingart 21-23.

categories such as "text" and "performance"[67], but also within the purview of the historical context central to the play itself: the Nazi past. As Jennifer Kapczynski has demonstrated, the figure of National Socialism as national illness was in widespread use in postwar Germany, but with a therapeutic inflection that often recapitulated the Nazi regime's drive to "purify" the national body (17). Kapczynski's study focuses on the postwar era, in Germany, bracketing the question of the nature of the Nazi biopolitical regimen.

Roberto Esposito, in a work which goes beyond his initial investigation of "immunity" in *Immunitas* (an analysis which, as I mentioned above, informed Elisabeth Strowick's reading of Bernhard's autobiography) offers a reading of Nazi biopolitics centered on the notion of "immunization." This, I will argue, is compelling as a framework for thinking through Bernhard's performative intervention in Austrian memory politics. Esposito claims that the Nazi regime sought to effect the "purification" of the so-called *Volkskörper* not through a simple excision of "foreign" elements but rather according to a logic that incorporated ever-greater amounts of the very ill which it purported to defend against. National Socialist biopolitics sought to "immunize" the racialized national body *against* death through a constant production *of* death (Esposito 2008 116).

I argue that Bernhard's pathogenic polemics uncannily recall this homeopathic procedure through the literary recoding of fascist speech. In rechanneling this speech but

[67] I would venture to say that the *Heldenplatz* scandal, read in terms of the dichotomy between "drama" and "theater" that Hans-Thies Lehmann lays out in *Postdramatic Theatre* (46-48), is a counter-example to the trend in the 20th century that slowly disempowered the text as a component of the performance in favor of the performance itself. In the case of *Heldenplatz*, most of the "theater" which took place happened in the media and during public protests, not in the Burgtheater, and was (at least proximately) caused by the "drama" (i.e. the dramatic text) leaked to the press.

directing its polemic thrust against the Nazi past, Bernhard launches a literary "vaccination" of the Austrian public sphere, which in its viral effects of necessity blurs clear distinctions between the cause and effect of Bernhard's insistence on Austrian malevolence. This ambivalent performative effect articulates itself not only in Bernhard's public provocations, but also within scholarly and literary encounters with his language (as I demonstrated above). I argue that this complex of work and reception culminates in the *Heldenplatz* scandal in 1988.

Astonishingly, this performative power of Bernhard's language crystallized in an editorial cartoon by the renowned Austrian caricaturist "Ironimus," which was published on October 22, 1988, at the height of the *Heldenplatz* scandal (Burgtheater 137). In it, Bernhard is shown equipped with long, threatening claws, sitting at his desk, a quill in one hand and an oversized syringe in the other. He is writing a play called *Hawličekplatz*, a reference both to the Austrian *Unterrichtsministerin* Hilde Hawlicek who was responsible for the funding of *Heldenplatz*, and of course, to the play itself.[68] The quill and the syringe are visual puns on German terms used to describe polemical writing: "Giftfeder" (a "poison pen") and "Gift spritzen," to shoot or inject poison. The caricature suggests that Bernhard will use his poison pen on both supporters (like Hawlicek) and enemies alike, that he is likely to repay Hawlicek for her support by attacking her in his next play.

I would suggest, however, that the syringe in his hand, as a medical instrument that can bring about either death or healing, condenses and reifies a whole complex of ambivalent metaphors of national illness and health expressed in the newspaper debates

[68] Hawlicek caused controversy during the *Heldenplatz* debate when she suggested that, while she would not have written or staged *Heldenplatz*, she believed that Bernhard and Peymann should have the freedom to do so (Burgtheater 36).

about *Heldenplatz*, which in turn relate to the contentious memories of the Third Reich in the Austria of the late 1980s. The caricature simultaneously encapsulates another metaphor that became a cliché in connection with the *Heldenplatz* scandal: that of all of Austria as a stage performing a play written by Bernhard. In my reading of *Heldenplatz* and the surrounding scandal, I will suggest that Bernhard's poisonous speech "contaminated" the Austrian present with the National Socialist past thorough a mediatized "counter-infection" which is similar both to older notions of theater, like Antonin Artaud's "theater of cruelty," and to newer conceptions of media scandal such as the "viral videos" of the 2000s. These two metaphors, of Austria as a theater full of involuntary actors and Bernhard's poisonous language that injects the past into the present, converge in the figure of infection. In what follows, I will trace the concept of infection along the two routes suggested by my reading of this caricature: the first, Austria as theater, and second, the "theater piece" played out in the media as an "illness."

In the past decade or so, "infection" has become increasingly important as a theoretical construct not only in narratological approaches to literature like those discussed in the sections above, but also in German theater scholarship, which employs the term metaphorically to discuss the affective force that performance can exert on its audience. This scholarship explicitly opposes "infection" to "reception," a term that posits a cognitive or reflective model for spectatorship. In their introduction to the 2005 book *Ansteckung: zur Körperlichkeit eines ästhetischen Prinzips*, Mirjam Schaub and Nicola Suthor describe "infection" as a metaphor for the dynamics of viewership in the theater:

> Der Begriff der Ansteckung schlägt [im Gegensatz zur Rezeption] ein weniger intellektgeleitetes, als vielmehr ein körperlicheres Modell von Einflußnahme vor.

> Wir haben nicht die Wahl, wir können uns nicht bewußt für oder gegen das „Angesteckt-“, „Fasziniert-“, „Berührt-Werden“ entscheiden. Ansteckung im Sinne eines unvermittelten Affiziert-Werdens findet statt (oder auch nicht statt) [...]. Die Zufälligkeit, die Unmittelbarkeit, die Plötzlichkeit, aber auch die innere Notwendigkeit, die Unvermeidlichkeit müssen in der Begriffsbildung mitgedacht sein (9).

The sudden, “immediate affectedness” under discussion in this passage is certainly present both in the scholarly and literary encounters with Bernhard that I discussed above and in the outraged public reaction to the leaked text of the *Heldenplatz* play. Indeed, Andreas Razumovsky ironically described the Austrian view of *Heldenplatz* as a “foreign infection” in his piece for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled “Ausländische Infektion: Die Ausweitung des Burgtheater-Skandals.” In what follows I will read the medically inflected metaphors found in newspaper columns on both sides of the *Heldenplatz* issue as symptomatic for this “infection” insofar as they all imply a notion of national or physical intactness which has either been violated or must be restored.[69] But precisely because they rely on the metaphorical grounding of the national body, these newspaper contributions also recapitulate uncannily Nazi propaganda, which was itself concerned with the “health” of the “Volkskörper.” My reading, therefore, relies on a metaphorical connection between biopolitics and media theory.

This does not mean, of course, that the Nazis were the first to link the realms of theater and medicine. Indeed, Aristotle made this connection in his discussion of catharsis (Fischer-Lichte 35). In a book chapter on infection at the theater, Erika Fischer-Lichte traces the historical fortunes of this term, which has been used to describe the experience of spectatorship by authors ranging from St. Augustine to Antonin Artaud and beyond (36-37). According to Fischer-Lichte, infection (*Ansteckung*) and catharsis are related

[69] See also, Susan Sonntag, *Illness as Metaphor*.

concepts with nevertheless important distinctions (36-37). Both describe a liminal state: while catharsis initiates a transition from a sick body to a healthy body, infection moves in the opposite direction (35). Infection, however, is more ambivalent because it can result in either death or immunity (37, 43).

Fischer-Lichte's argument centers on the idea that the actor and the spectators must be physically present together for an "infection" to take place in the theater (49). However, as I have briefly mentioned, the *Heldenplatz* scandal took place primarily in the media, precisely the opposite of the "corporeal co-presence" that Fischer-Lichte mentions (37). Nevertheless, I claim that two other approaches to media and the theater, when viewed in combination with Fischer-Lichte's essay, demonstrate that *Heldenplatz* can indeed be read as a mediated infection of sorts, a sort of missing link between Artaud's ideal theater in "Theater and the Plague" and the viral videos of YouTube.

The American media theorist Douglas Rushkoff's 1994 book *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*, posits its eponymous notion of the "media virus" through recourse to the idea of a cultural "immune system." Rushkoff is explicitly concerned with the way new, user-controlled types of media overthrow traditional hierarchies, "infecting" the mediascape with subversive ideas. He argues that media events of the 1990s, like the Rodney King beating, are related to other, pre-programmed media campaigns that activists use to "inject" subversive messages into the media. In cases like the O.J. Simpson police chase and the marketing of "smart drugs" messages circulated seemingly irresistibly through the media.

In what follows, I will rely mainly on the newspaper articles collected by the Burgtheater in the volume *Heldenplatz. Eine Dokumentation*. Although not an entirely

comprehensive collection of every newspaper piece written about the play, it nevertheless offers a broad spectrum of responses which in turn provide ample evidence for the phenomenon that I term "infection."[70]

This evidence, which I read in symptomatic terms for the outbreak of the Bernhard-induced media virus, comes in the form of physiological metaphors which diverge along two main paths: the first, the pathologization of Bernhard's work and of the author himself, the second, the metaphor of Bernhard as a physician whose work can "heal" Austria. However, these two tendencies converge in a third metaphor which, though dependent on the previous two, nevertheless sublates them through its combination of the positive and negative, the poison and the cure: Bernhard's work as a vaccination. The metaphor of vaccination not only anticipates my reading of the results of the *Heldenplatz* scandal, it also provides a connection to Bernhard's works' uncanny restaging of the dynamics of Nazi biopolitics.

Contributions of columnists in right-wing newspapers like the infamous *Kronenzeitung* tend to pathologize Bernhard's work. For the most part, this pathologization takes the form of a reflexive patriotic response that is tied to a gesture of defending the integrity of Austrian identity. Columnists write about Bernhard's "pathological sounding orgies of curses" (Burgtheater 18) or his "nearly pathological hatred of Austria" (ibid. 22). Hate-mail sent to the Burgtheater employs similar vocabulary: "Thomas Bernhard is a psychopath," reads one letter (ibid. 54). Richard Nimmerrichter, *Kronenzeitung*'s infamous "Staberl," devoted several columns to *Heldenplatz*, in one of which he repeated this pathological trope: "Die ordinären

[70] Sigrid Löffler discusses the shortcomings of this volume from her perspective in an interview with Maria Fialik (Fialik 17).

Behauptungen [im *Heldenplatz*-Text] wollen wir erst gar nicht zurückweisen. Dafür ist der Psychiater zuständig“” (ibid. 70). One particularly graphic letter to the Burgtheater goes well beyond the idea of Bernhard as mentally ill, linking him to the AIDS virus in a gesture reminiscent of the novelist Guibert's much more refined description of Bernhard's influence: “[Bernhard] soll Aids bekommen oder er hat es schon” (27). Closely related to this tendency is the claim that Bernhard has besmirched Austrian through his venomous rhetoric (“Besudelung”) (23, 24, 33). This of course implies that Austria is somehow otherwise “clean” were it not for Bernhard's insults, but it is also closely tied to the “immunological” drive to cleanse Austria of Bernhard's stain.

The second, positively-valenced aspect of this medical metaphor is that of Bernhard as surgeon or doctor. The filmmaker Ferry Radax, for example, describes his friend Bernhard as follows:

> Mit der Sonde seines Geists ortet er, wie ein guter Internist, mit geradezu prophetisch-diagnostischem Blick, wo immer noch die Metastasen des Faschismus wuchern, die in seinen Augen immer noch den Österreicher zu einem verseuchten Charakter machen (Burgtheater 130).

Here, Bernhard is a diagnostician who must find the cancerous remains of fascism. In his article for the *Falter* about the physical *Heldenplatz* as a *Gedächtnisort*, Leonhard Schmeiser uses a similar, yet decidedly more active image to describe Bernhard's role::

> Auf den analytischen Eingriff Bernhards reagiert der Patient präventiv mit der Forderung nach stärkerer Zensur, zur Rettung der eigenen durch angestrengtes Vergessen erworbenen Identität (ibid. 191).

In this account, Bernhard is a surgeon charged with operating on that recalcitrant patient, the Austrian public. While Radax and Schmeiser find Bernhard's influence to be therapeutic, their imagery is rooted in the realm of biology and medicine. In this sense,

they draw from a similar metaphorical inventory as the right-wing columnists who see Bernhard himself as diseased.

One of these other, negative iterations of the metaphor of disease can be found in an article by Hans Haider in *Die Presse*, who posits the play *Heldenplatz* as a tumor. In an article which connects the poverty of the Austrian theater to the poverty of Austrian politics, Haider quotes the Bernhard character Professor Guggenheim (from *Elisabeth II*), whose temperament could be seen as prefiguring Robert Schuster's. He writes: „Das war wohl die Keimzelle der ‚Heldenplatz'-Wucherung. Staatsgedenktaggemäß wählte Bernhard einen jüdischen Professor als Hauptfigur [...]" (ibid. 222). In this passage, fascism is not compared to cancer, but rather the theatrical confrontation with fascism is compared to cancer. Haider makes it clear that this juxtaposition is because Bernhard has chosen fraught historical models for his characters' rhetoric:

> [Bernhard] schreibt die Heroisierung des von Kulturverlustängsten geplagten Geistesmenschen fort, mit der die Literatur nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg auf den Zusammenbruch der alten Ordnung reagierte (und der oft genug dem Faschismus vorbetete) (ibid.).

Bernhard's theater is described as the metastasis of a prefascistic disease. Read alongside Radax's quote above, images of illness and healing collide: *Heldenplatz* appears as the precursor to the disease which Bernhard as "oncologist" must eradicate.

Two articles by Peter Sichrovsky on the *Heldenplatz* debate also juxtapose metaphors of illness, but without the therapeutic valence of Radax's writing. Sichrovsky accuses Bernhard and Peymann of allowing „[h]istorisch entstandenes Unheil" to appear as „blinde Notwendigkeit" – and therefore as implicitly excusable:

> Nichts Schlimmeres könnte dem Theater geschehen, würde der Ruf nach absoluter Freiheit der Kunst erhört. Der wütend bellende Hund, auf den man mit Gleichgültigkeit regiert, ist auf kurz oder lang ein Fall für das psychiatrische

> Tierheim. Die Kritik und die Empörung über ein Theaterstück ist wie ein Therapievorschlag von einem Kranken. Aber die Künstler sollen sich um Gottes willen nicht plötzlich als die ‚Götter im weißen Mantel' sehen (ibid.115).

Sichrovsky combines the pathologicization of Bernhard à la Staberl (although he proves to be much more insightful than the *Kronenzeitung* columnist when it comes to literary form) with Radax and Schmeiser's figure of Bernhard as physician while at the same time including the reaction to *Heldenplatz* as part of the "illness." Sichrovsky's account here has Bernhard mustering his own illness against the illness of society at large.

A few days later, however, Sichrovsky joins the ranks of these same enraged audience members in an article entitled „Stürmt den Heldenplatz." In this piece, Sichrovsky suggests the public reaction in Frankfurt to Fassbinder's *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* (audience members occupied the stage, preventing the performance) as a possible model for reacting to *Heldenplatz*. He condemns the „hysterisch[e], dumpf[e], undifferenziert[e], neurotisch[e] Geschrei" that Bernhard puts in the mouths of his Jewish characters (ibid. 187). Sichrovsky fears that *Heldenplatz* could promote anti-Semitism: „Der Jude war für die meisten Österreicher vor dem Krieg der Fremde, und blieb es nach dem Krieg. Was in dem Stück von ihm bleibt ist die dumpfe, psychopathische Wut eines Fremden" (ibid.).[71] Sichrovsky pathologizes the anger of the Bernhard characters, not Bernhard himself. By suggesting that Bernhard's staged condemnation of anti-Semitism could in fact increase anti-Semitism in the public sphere, Sichrovsky's article implicitly argues for the immediate effectiveness of Bernhard's language.

These medically-inflected metaphors in the Austrian press are also linked to concerns about the integrity of Austrian national identity, especially in contradistinction to German identity. The owner of the *Kronenzeitung* Hans Dichand, writing under his

[71] s.a. Huber 132.

pseudonym "cato," tied the cause for stopping *Heldenplatz* to the struggle for Austrian self-determination in the face of its larger neighbor (33). Humbert Fink calls for a type of resistance to *Heldenplatz* which parallels the convictions of Carinthian patriots who fought to join the Austrian state (58). These and other appeals to Austrian national integrity coincide with physiological metaphors insofar as they rely on the notion of an intact national unity. In a related defensive gesture, the German director and Bernhard-collaborator Claus Peymann was frequently compared to a foreign conqueror, or even Hitler and the Nazis. For example, in an article for the *Kronenzeitung* Kurt Steinitz describes the „Normalbürger im Ausland" who can't understand why the Austrians tolerate Peymann's „ruhrgermanisches Besatzungsregime an der Burg" (Burgtheater 80).[72] In another article for the *Kurier*, Jens Tschebull extends this metaphor, leaving little doubt of the fear of nationalist contamination that underpins his satirical tone:

> Ich vertrete den Standpunkt, man könnte die vielschichtige Angelegenheit auch so sehen: Da marschiert ein nordischer Vetter aus Dingsda – ich glaube Bochum war der Name –, von lokalen Kollaborateuren gerufen und bejubelt, mit einer disziplinierten Leibgarde aus eindrucksvollen Schauspielern und raffinierten Regisseuren in Wien ein und besetzt alle wichtigen Posten mit seinen Leuten, wie die Preußen anno 1938 (Burgtheater 143).

Other manifestations of this trope represent Peymann's uncompromising public stance or demanding rehearsals as fascistic.[73] These comparisons between Peymann and the Nazis shift the source of "infection" outside the borders of Austria. The most egregious of these statements come close to recapitulating the myth of Austria as Nazi Germany's "first victim" in that they place a German (Peymann) in the role of an Austrian (Hitler).

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[72] See also Millner 253.

[73] See, for example, a letter to the editor in *Die Presse*: „Wie bei einer Orchesterprobe wurde gleich zu Beginn der Ton angegeben. Peymanns: ‚... da werden sich die Wiener daran gewöhnen müssen' rief die fatale Erinnerung an die ‚österreichischen Schlappschwänze' aus dem Vokabular der braunen Machthaber aus Berlin wach, die 1938 Österreich beglückten" (Burgtheater 170).

In a similar vein, both letter writers and *Feuilletonisten* are quick to draw parallels between Bernhard's project and the politics he is attacking. Perhaps the crudest of these is a letter to the editor comparing Bernhard directly to Hitler and calling for his institutionalization (which could just as easily be his "quarantine" - see my discussion of Francoual's use of this concept above):

> Hätten ihn [Hitler] die Menschen damals in eine Heilanstalt gebracht, wäre uns viel Leid erspart geblieben. Leider hat er aber mit seinem Wahnsinn Andere [sic] angesteckt. [...] Man sollte mit Thomas Bernhard machen, was man mit Hitler versäumt hat [...] Hitlers gesprochenes Wort und Bernhards geschriebenes Wort löst [sic] die gleichen Empfindungen aus [...] (Burgtheater 124).

This equation of "Hitler's spoken word" with "Bernhard's written word," which both produce the "same feelings" through the process of infection, is a less refined version of the accusations made against Bernhard by other columnists and cultural functionaries during the *Heldenplatz* debate. The Austrian vice chancellor Alois Mock compared *Heldenplatz* to a violation of the Austrian *Wiederbetätigungsgesetz*, which forbids National Socialist activities: "Kein Freiraum, auch nicht der der Kunst, ist grenzenlos. Hawlicek müsste auch einschreiten, wenn ein Stück unter das Wiederbetätigungsverbot fällt" (Burgtheater 45). Although Mock posits here, for rhetorical effect, a (more than dubious) symmetry between hate speech against Austrians and hate speech against Jews, his comparison quickly became a simple equation in the Austrian press, and even later in the scholarly secondary literature on the *Heldenplatz* scandal: Gitta Honegger, in her otherwise excellent biography of Thomas Bernhard, misreads this quote, claiming that Mock called for *Heldenplatz* to be banned under the *Wiederbetätigungsgesetz* (289). She further links Bernhard's language to National Socialism by suggesting that the complaints about Austria in *Heldenplatz* echo the language of beer halls where fascism

was born and that Bernhard's style is indebted to Nazi rants (290, 303). Fatima Naqvi has also noticed the resonance between fascist or nationalist rhetoric and the views of the Schuster family, claiming that "the Schusters are victims who themselves tend toward the absolute rhetoric of fascist ideology" (412).[74]

This equation is not due to a simple bad faith on the part of Bernhard's political opponents but is part of his language's "viral" effects. This reading suggests that Bernhard's infectious discourse and the public "Erregungen" it causes simultaneously function as "Erreger" which shoot the "poison" of the past into the present, as the political cartoon I described above suggests.

To understand this connection in the context of *Heldenplatz*, we must trace the provenance of the intra- and extradiegetic *Erregungen* that Bernhard's infectious performance incites. Indeed, I will agree with the scholars and commentators above who see a similarity between Bernhard's character's diatribes and fascist speech. As I have demonstrated above in the case of the novel *Frost*, these moments of incensed arousal (which, in turn, cause agitation in their audience) almost always take the form of a male character's polemics that are formulated in categorical terms and directed against either another character or, just as frequently, the Austrian state or institutions.

Thomas Cousineau has proffered an historical explanation for this recurring structure, arguing that "Hitler and the Jews" are the "avatars" of Bernhard's narratives of persecution (33). His reading brings out the genealogical affinity between the prototypical Bernhard rant and those of Nazi orators, i.e. the shift in signifiers that

[74] This tendency to see fascist rhetoric within the rhetoric that Bernhard opposes to it proves that the dynamic of "immunization" that I delineated in *Frost* above is present to a large extent in *Heldenplatz* as well, and that it is directly connected to the memory of fascism in Austria.

positions "the Austrians," instead of "the Jews," as an absolute evil that threatens to overwhelm Europe, demonstrating this inversion in a parallel reading of *Der Untergeher* and *Mein Kampf* (93-94). Naturally, drawing too close a comparison between Bernhard's characters and fascist dictators threatens to blur the lines between the literary tirade and actual hate speech, and Cousineau approaches this boundary with his claim that Bernhard's work creates a "fictional *immediacy* that invites us to imagine what it must have been really like to live in a world ruled by a madman" (33).

Heldenplatz does not only restage the past through the use of fascist rhetoric, it also offers a unique and at the same time prototypical example of how polemics circulate within Bernhard's texts. At the same time, it is also a clear demonstration that the reaction to Bernhard's texts (see Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler's maxim above) is often more important than the texts themselves. *Heldenplatz,* as a literary work, is not nearly as refined as other Bernhard plays (*Die Jagdgesellschaft* or *Der Theatermacher* are much more complex in their formal construction and characterization), but its overall staging – considered in the widest possible sense – could not have been better.

The actual plot of *Heldenplatz* is simple. Professor Josef Schuster, a recently returned Jewish émigré to England, has recently committed suicide by jumping from the window of his apartment overlooking Vienna's Heldenplatz. In the first scene, Schuster's housekeeper Frau Zittel recounts the late professor's opinions on everything from proper reading material for her mother to the correct way to fold a shirt. In the second scene, Olga and Anna, Schuster's daughters, and Professor Robert Schuster, his brother, go for a walk in the Volksgarten, and Anna and Robert take turns describing how terrible life in Austria is in 1988, with Robert doing most of the talking. In the final scene, the family

and other guests gather in the apartment and eat dinner. While Robert Schuster continues his polemics against almost all things Austrian, Frau Schuster begins to hear the crowds from 1938 greeting Hitler on Heldenplatz. As the crowd's cries become unbearable, Frau Schuster collapses into her soup and the play is over.

In the first scene, Frau Zittel, Professor Schuster's former head of household, and Herta, his maid, sort the dead professor's belongings. Frau Zittel holds forth on the dead professor's oddities, pausing occasionally to instruct Herta or heap scorn on her: "In Graz hättest du ja nur seinen Wintermantel / hinter ihm hergetragen du dumme Gans" (18). Here, Frau Zittel is not only concerned with maintaining her own position in the household hierarchy, she is also channeling the dead professor's abusive personality. This becomes clear as Zittel recounts one of Schuster's outbursts when she was unable to fold a shirt correctly (in the original production, Anneliese Römer, playing Frau Zittel, indicates that she is quoting her former employer by gesturing at approximately eye level, often impersonating his voice and manner of speaking as well):

> So sagte der Professor so / und winkelte die Hemdsärmel ein / so Frau Zittel so so so / er warf mir das Hemd ins Gesicht / und ich sollte das Hemd zusammenlegen / unerbittlich / Die Dummheit der Menschheit kennt ja keine Grenzen / Neinnein Frau Zittel ich bin ja nicht verrückt / ich bin ja nur genau Frau Zittel aber nicht verrückt / ich bin ja nur genau Frau Zittel aber nicht verrückt / ein Genauigkeitsfanatiker bin ich Frau Zittel / ich bin nicht krank ich bin nicht krank schrie er / ich bin nur ein Genauigkeitsfanatiker / Professor Schuster ich kann es nicht ich kann es nicht sagte ich / Unerträgliche Person schrie er unerträgliche Person [...] (26-27).

In print this scene comes across as excessively harsh, but in the original production the two women exchange smiles and laughter at times when recalling Josef Schuster's outbursts, a reminder that Bernhard's polemics represent a weakened and ironized version of real hate speech. This discrepancy between the affective weight of the printed

text and the relatively harmless form it takes in performance helps explain why the premiere saw the end of the *Heldenplatz* scandal, and is evident in the next scene in the Volksgarten as well.

Frau Zittel's abusive behavior towards Herta in the first scene forms the germ of the tirades to come; the play as a whole repeats on a macro level the microstructure of her rant. Echoes of fascist rhetoric are present here on the level of the signifier: Frau Zittel, quoting the dead professor Schuster, claims that he did not want any "Untermenschen" at his funeral, a term with a clearly historically loaded past.[75] Fatima Naqvi offers a catalogue of some of Josef Schuster's blatantly offensive attitudes, which include prejudice towards Asians, the disabled and the blind (414). In a similar reading, Gitta Honegger points out the protagonists of *Heldenplatz* sound astonishingly like the unrepentant Nazis of *Vor dem Ruhestand* (Honegger 2002, 139). She attributes this fact to the dynamic of language itself:

> Language speaks. It constitutes culture. The victim merges with the perpetrator in the stranglehold of language that keeps restaging their shared history. […] The real drama is located within the language. The minimal physical action on stage is its melodramatic perversion. The speakers are exchangeable. Their actions are no longer motivated by choices and are instead animated by grammar (ibid.).

This reading, however, posits the German language itself (whether used by Germans or Jews) as the source of the poisonous rhetoric that Bernhard's characters spout. In doing so, it threatens to flatten the difference between literary speech, propaganda and Bernhard's literary tirades.

What neither Naqvi nor Honegger emphasize in their readings of the dynamics of language in Heldenplatz, however, is how the rants of Josef Schuster are voiced through other characters. Having died before the play began, he is never present on stage. His

[75] See also Naqvi 414, as well as numerous newspaper articles (Burgtheater 105).

discourse is dependent on his heirs to carry it forth. This is exactly what happens in the remainder of the play. As the overall level of excitement in the play begins to climb from Frau Zittel's inaugural monologues, Josef Schuster's language manifests itself in other characters.

The second scene introduces three new characters, two of whom, Robert and his niece Anna, carry on the pathogen of the categorical polemic. Here it is once again a female character, Anna, who begins the crescendo of invective, which Robert Schuster will continue once he appears. Her claim that "es gibt jetzt mehr Nazis in Wien / als achtunddreißig" (65) is an echo of Josef Schuster as quoted by Frau Zittel in the first few lines of the play: "Jetzt ist alles noch viel schlimmer / als vor fünfzig Jahren hat er gesagt" (11). Anna Schuster continues her polemic until her uncle Robert arrives and takes over, scarcely allowing her and Olga another word, in the same way as Frau Zittel dominates the conversation with Herta. Robert Schuster, also a professor (making him even more explicitly a doppelganger or avatar of his brother), employs identical rhetorical devices (repetition and climax) in his rants against Austria.

In the final scene, the process of discursive infection reaches comical levels. New characters, including Professor Liebig and Herr Landauer, either merely quote the dead professor (in the case of Herr Landauer) or spout polemics with an amusing likeness to the speech of Robert and Josef Schuster. Professor Liebig for example claims "Es ist nur eine Frage der Zeit / daß die Nazis wieder an der Macht sind / alle Anzeichen sprechen dafür / die Roten und die Schwarzen spielen alles den Nazis in die Hände" (135).

In the original production of *Heldenplatz*, Wolfgang Gasser plays most of Robert Schuster's tirades against Austria more as the complaints of a bitter old man than the

ranting of a fascist dictator, including most of the incendiary lines in the Volksgarten which caused the most uproar during the time leading up to the production. In the last scene, however, during the famous final sequence in which the cries of "Sieg Heil!" are piped over loudspeakers (focalized, the audience knows, through the consciousness of Frau Schuster) Gasser's gestures coincide uncannily with the rhythmic cries of the crowds on Heldenplatz in 1938. As the volume of the recording increases, Gasser must speak louder and louder in order to be heard over the shouts that his character, Robert Schuster, cannot hear. In performance, two temporal and narrative planes collapse, [76] with the effect that Robert Schuster appears, for a few moments, as the cause of the unseen crowd's jubilations, and thus as a stand-in for Hitler. He becomes a sort of *Sprachrohr* for both authoritarian speakers (his dead brother and Hitler) simultaneously. This is not only a collision of the past and present, the perpetrators and victims (as Naqvi rightly points out), it is also the final evidence for the provenance of the "Bernhard virus."

While Bernhard is frequently accused of using his characters as a mouthpiece for his own opinions, *Heldenplatz* takes this practice to the extreme, generalizing a single voice to all of the major characters.[77] Here, Bernhard repurposes his trademark artificiality that eschews dialogue in favor of monologue, and shows the uncanny origins of his invective.[78] Although it is common in Bernhard's plays for most characters to speak in similar voices, there is often only a single tyrannical male character who rants against Austria or the other characters. In *Heldenplatz*, however, there are multiple characters, including female characters, decrying Austria as well. This has the effect of

[76] cf. Naqvi 418.
[77] s.a., once again, Honegger 2002, 139.
[78] Schmidt-Dengler 1989, 107.

making the generalized polemicizing voice all the more apparent – and comical. Rather than merely diagnosing the Austrian illness of repression, *Heldenplatz* models infection in the form of discursive imitation that has its origin in the polemics of a dead male tyrant. The play presents his discourse as a sort of virus, a code that spreads to other characters.

From my readings of *Heldenplatz* and *Frost*, it should be clear that the metaphor of the virus (as disease and as poison) not only describes one strain of Bernhard reception, it also captures an important quality of the circulation of discourse within his texts themselves. While the full elaboration of this dynamic in all of Bernhard's works is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the short analysis I have provided shows that much of Bernhard's writing models the infectious quality of its reception: in *Frost*, the narrator begins to reproduce and imitate the language and thought of the painter Strauch; in *Verstörung*, Fürst Saurau's monologue positively overwhelms the doctor's son, to the point that he is unable to finish his own story, compulsively returning to the Fürst's speech at the end of his narrative.[79] In other novels, the language of dead characters inhabits and threatens to overwhelm the minds of the living; *Korrektur* and *Der Untergeher* are further examples. Even in his last completed novel, *Alte Meister*, the thematic of the *Sprachrohr* is humorously recast in the relationship between the characters Reger and Irrsiegler. The final moments of *Heldenplatz* reveal the poisonous provenance of the "Bernhard virus" – the language of authoritarianism.

[79] Honegger refers to Strauch and Saurau as "pathologically charismatic" (39); later she describes the narrator's "infection" by Strauch in terms of an actor learning a script (224-225), "rehearsing the language of another" (227).

Bernhard's polemics against the Austrian state in *Heldenplatz* seem to take the form of a program of immunization or homeopathy, which mobilizes the traces of the fascist past against their recurrence in the Austrian present, not through a frontal attack, but rather according to a strategy that absorbs and transforms the structures of fascist language, deploying this language against itself. Günther Nenning, writing in *Die Zeit*, recognized this property of *Heldenplatz* in 1989:

> Heimito von Doderer erzählt, das staatliche Institut, wo Impfstoff gegen Tollwut erzeugt wurde, habe amtlich geheißen „Bundesanstalt für Wut." Also das ist jetzt das Burgtheater. Dr. Bernhard erzeugt aus Wut Impfstoff. Ebendrum ist Thomas Bernhard jetzt unser österreichischer Nationaldichter, der einzige, den wir derzeit haben (Burgtheater 192).

This program of active inoculation, the aesthetic correlate to the same contradictory logic that, according to Esposito, drives "all discourses of modernity" towards self-destruction, is not without danger (Esposito 2004 16). Later events bore out the "autoimmune" potential latent in the "Bernhard virus": the rightwing politician Jörg Haider, after first calling for *Heldenplatz* to be banned, later adopted Bernhard's rhetoric in his crusade against funding for the arts and universities (Honegger 289). Bernhard's language remained virulent, but his polemics had been absorbed, at least temporarily, into the politics of right-wing demagoguery he despised.

If Bernhard's "inoculation" seemed to fail, it is perhaps because he offered his prophylactic after the "disease" itself had passed. Bernhard's artificial characters, speaking in a single, generalized voice of the male tyrant, do not offer any hope for moving beyond an aestheticized "paradigm of immunization." The pathogenic nature of his staged polemics forecloses this possibility. To read the etymology of "pathogenic" literally: Bernhard's figures give birth to their own pain.

VI. Nachspiel: *Heldenplatz* and Bernhard's legacy today

Although seldom performed after its 1988 run, *Heldenplatz* was staged in 2010 in Vienna, this time not at the *Burgtheater* but at the Theater in der Josefstadt. This time, the characters' outbursts were met with laughter, not shock, and even the Austrian Bundespräsident applauded (Huber 129). Bernhard's polemics were no longer virulent, and even the appropriation of his diatribes against the government by right-wing politicians like Haider seemed to be a thing of the past.[80] Bernhard was now celebrated as an Austrian national author, and the scandal-ridden provocateur Peymann was now the leader of the most financially successful theater in the *Bundesrepublik*, the Berliner Ensemble, where a giant flag bearing Bernhard's face flew throughout the year 2011. If there was an "immune" reaction to Bernhard's "media virus," the effect was to "immunize" Austria *with* Bernhard *against* Bernhard.[81]

[80] In a distant echo of the numerous biologically-inflected metaphors I have uncovered in this study, Martin Huber suggests that it was the "virulent gewordene" question of the Nazi past in Austrian in the 1980s which made the Heldenplatz scandal possible (135).

[81] Martin Huber argues that this effect can be seen in a positive light, in that the "critical" view of Austrian history has become mainstream in the years since *Heldenplatz*, and therefore no longer provokes anyone (135).

Chapter 2. Schlingensief's Cinematic Homeopathy

I. "Dr. Schlingensief": the Provocateur as Physician.

Austrian Nobel Prize-winner Elfriede Jelinek's proclamation that Christoph Schlingensief had been one of the "greatest artists of all time," whose death was "as if life itself had died" was only the most superlative in a string of accolades in the German media after the passing of one of the nation's most provocative artists since Joseph Beuys (FAZ, Standard).[82] Schlingensief, who had first gained mainstream attention after his cinematic restaging of German reunification as *Das deutsche Kettensägemassaker* and for screaming "Tötet Helmut Kohl" at the Venice Biennale earlier in his career, had gone on to host a series of talkshows on the music television station VIVA and stage Wagner's *Parsifal* at Bayreuth. At the end of his life, he wrote a best-selling memoir about his lung cancer diagnosis and treatment, *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein* (2008), and gained support from former Bundespräsident (and member of Helmut Kohl's party), Horst Köhler, for his dream of building an *Operndorf* in Burkina Faso.[83]

There are some obvious reasons, of course, for Schlingensief's fame within Germany, including his telegenic personality and his non-threatening, boyish good looks that made him seem "der Lieblings-Schwiegersohn der Nation,"[84] despite his *enfant terrible* artistic persona. There was also his willingness to provoke and engage in

[82]In fact, Beuys was a frequent point of comparison for the German press when explaining the art of Christoph Schlingensief, probably because Beuys was also a frequent point of reference for Schlingensief himself (Schlingensief 2010 209). In perhaps his most famous appropriation of Beuys' imagery, Schlingensief projected a timelapse film of a decaying hare as part of his Bayreuth staging of Wagner's *Parsifal*.

[83] S.a. Malzacher who also describes the process of appropriation by the cultural establishment which set in after Schlingensief was asked to stage *Parsifal* at Bayreuth (188).

[84] The "Schwiegersohn" sobriquet was in widespread use to describe Schlingensief's charm. See, for example, Mathias Lilienthal in the Biennale program (263).

dialogue with politicians and celebrities in public forums, and last but not least, his tragic and public decline after being diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer.

Schlingensief's embrace by the art world, which reached its preliminary pinnacle when his design for the German Pavilion won the Golden Lion at the 2011 Biennale in Venice, could be easily dismissed as one stage in the familiar dialectic of rejection, canonization and forgetting that characterizes the reception of so many provocative artists. It is surely true that Schlingensief's cultural currency will fall from its current inflationary heights eventually. But what makes Schlingensief's popularity especially striking is that he was not only beloved among the artistic elite, but his appeal spread to the right-wing *Bild Zeitung* and the German national Catholic newspaper.[85]

Since the Biennale, the Goethe Institut has brought the full program of Schlingensief's films to the United States, a gesture that suggests an attempt to recoup the prestige of German arthouse film, which reached its apogee outside of Germany in the heyday of the New German Cinema.[86]

Strikingly, this medial canonization was informed by tropes of national disease and healing that ran throughout Schlingensief's work itself. The man who had styled himself as "Dr. Schlingensief" on his website for cancer patients ("Geschockte Patienten – Wege zur Autonomie"[87]) was now proclaimed to have been a "pathologist" by *Spiegel* magazine:

> Dieser Mann war Pathologe. Er benutzte den Tod wie ein Werkzeug, mit dem er seine Zeit sezierte. Er setzte Krankheit ein mit dem ganzen Pathos und mit der Wut eines Mannes, der nicht an das gemeine Konzept von Gesundheit glaubte. Eröffnete sich seinem Krebs und seinem Sterben auf eine Art und Weise, die nicht

[85] This fact was remarked on by Carl Hegemann during the Schlingensief-Symposium organized by the Elfriede-Jelinek-Forschungszentrum in 2011 (See Janke 2011).
[86] The Goethe-Institut in Washington, DC showed his films in November 2011.
[87] As of this writing, still online at www.geschockte-patienten.org

> exhibitionistisch war, wie viele dachten, sondern authentisch: Schlingensief lebte in Gegenwehr zur Gegenwart" (Diez and Reinhardt 115).

Tropes of national disease or health are as old as the metaphor of the nation as body, which dates back at least to Plato (Esposito 2008 17). What is different, however, in this popularized notion of Schlingensief's performativity, is the negative valence of his artistic therapy, and its connection to German identity. This negative trajectory of healing that occurs through wounding is made manifest in the presence of disease, but not in "the vulgar conception of health." I will pursue the historical and aesthetic implications of this biopolitical imagery throughout this chapter.

II. Homeopathic Overdose: Parapraxis in *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*

It is significant that the authors of the *Spiege*l article quoted above are not offering their own interpretation of Schlingensief's work, but almost certainly glossing an interview that he gave about his films, in which he offers the following statement (transcribed from the original oral interview):

> Und wenn man jetzt mal den ganzen Kontext so betrachtet, Deutschland, dann könnte man (oder auch Wiener Aktion, also auch im Theater), dann beobachtet man die Situation und macht eigentlich einen Krankheitsbefund auf. Also man muss aber dazu den Organismus manchmal auch, um überhaupt etwas röntgen zu können, dazu bringen, dass er einen Krankheitsherd auch zeigt. Und das ist auch die Verwechslung bei mir, dass die Leute oft meinen, ich will provozieren, [...] als Sohn eines Apothekers, was ich schon oft gesagt habe: Mein Vater hat die Leute mit Mini-Portionen Gift geheilt. Er hat ihnen Gift gegeben und dadurch hat der Organismus sich wieder selber praktisch reguliert. Das heißt, es ist eine Selbstprovokation. und so ungefähr, glaube ich, wären die Deutschlandbilder auch zu verstehen.[88]

[88]A related concept, the idea of Schlingensief's film *Terror 2000* as an "antidote," was proffered by Andreas Kilb in *Die Zeit*: "Aber gleichgültig, ob man Christoph Schlingensief für einen infantilen Scharlatan oder einen genialen Avantgardisten halt (was vielleicht gar kein Unterschied ist): Seine Filme sind noch immer das wirksamste Gegengift gegen den Biedersinn des deutschen Gremienfilms" (Kilb).

Here, Schlingensief places himself in the tradition of his father, a pharmacist. This quote comes from an interview in 2005 titled "Schlingensief und seine Filme" and predates his diagnosis with cancer, but seems to foreshadow the medicalized discourse that surrounded his art and personality post-diagnosis. By comparing his own frenzied films to the effects of a poisonous medicine that activates the immune system, Schlingensief recalls the practice of homeopathy, in which a harmful substance analogous to a more dangerous illness is given to a patient in a diluted form.[89]

In contrast to "allopathy," the basis of standard medical treatments, in homeopathy poison is used against poison; there is a homology between the toxin and the cure. This homeopathic claim for his art is the major thread that connects Schlingensief's films about Germany to his later performance pieces about cancer. In fact, just a few years after he gave this interview, he was scheduled to give the plenary address at the annual convention of the *Deutscher Zentralverein homöopathischer Ärzte*, the professional organization for German homeopaths.[90]

Schlingensief's comments in this interview are especially interesting in light of the work of Eric Santner, who in his 1990 book *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany* also develops a notion of homeopathy. As I discussed in the introduction, for Santner, filmmakers of the New German Cinema were faced with the task of forming a postwar German identity free of the libidinal ties to the images provided by Nazism. In his view, films like Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's *Hitler. A Film from Germany* represent an attempt to decathect the narcissistic attachments and projections of

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[89] The context of this quote is the early film *Mutters Maske*, partially based on the film *Opfergang* (1944) by Veit Harlan, which itself uses disease as a structuring element.

[90] See www.homoeopathie-kongress.de: "Informationen rund um den Homöopathie-Kongress 13.–15. Mai 2010 in Köthen" (1).

power that the Nazi media and propaganda apparatus had created, by revisiting precisely those same fantasies of omnipotence in a controlled way. Through film, the "poison" of the Nazi past could be mobilized homeopathically to help create a new German identity (21).

If we take Schlingensief's own reading of his artistic project at face value, reading it alongside Santner's take on New German Cinema, there would be little to distinguish Schlingensief's political intervention from other filmmakers of the New German Cinema who undoubtedly influenced him, like Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. I believe, however, that while Schlingensief's images and topics echo those of the New German Cinema, there is a clear and manifest difference in tone and affect in his films that distinguishes them from other filmmakers. Not only that: another key difference, I will argue, is the fact that they come after, and cite the films of, the New German Cinema, creating a sort of deliberate *doppelbödige Epigonalität* that can be seen most clearly in his films on Germany. Films like *Terror 2000* and *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* present themselves as acts of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but simultaneously, through the recycling of tropes, actors and even characters from other New German Cinema films, comically overdetermine their claims to come to terms with the past. What results is not merely a parody of the New German Cinema or an homage to it, but rather what I will term, through a twist on Eric Santner's terminology in *Stranded Objects*, a cinema of "homeopathic overdose."

I believe the films *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* (1989) and *Terror 2000* (1993) are the most salient examples of Schlingensief's radicalized homeopathy. Shot just before and just after the fall of the Berlin wall and German reunification, they form the bookends to

what has been called Schlingensief's "Deutschland-Trilogie."[91] The middle film of the series, *Das deutsche Kettensägemassaker*, is by far Schlingensief's most well-known work, and will not be dealt with here.

The title "100 Jahre Adolf Hitler" sets up the expectation that the film will contribute to the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Kristen Vander Lugt has described it as sounding like a "celebratory anniversary video" (40). Indeed, the film's title is a provocative jab at Germany's institutionalized memorial practices on at least two levels: not only does it refer to a historically fraught anniversary[92] (Hitler's 100th birthday), it is also set in a location and at a time that has become a site of ambivalent memory practices in the postwar period: the final days in Hitler's bunker. The so-called *Führerbunker* is important enough to have been included in the German rewrite of Pierre Nora's *Les Lieux des memoire*s as an "Erinnerungsort," (Fest 129) and, as the controversy caused by Lars von Trier at Cannes in 2011 demonstrates, the bunker is often invoked to express sympathy for Hitler as a suffering human being.[93] The 2004 movie *Der Untergang* is only one recent example of the large number of films that focus on German wartime suffering, including Hitler's, and it has since become a critical cliché to say that Schlingensief's film feels like a parody *avant la lettre* of *Der Untergang*.

Reading this film with Santner's theoretical apparatus suggests a way to understand Schlingensief's homeopathic claims for his cinema. After all, the final hour in the bunker has to do directly with the loss of identity provided by the *Übervater* Hitler,

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[91] This name is meant to evoke both Fassbinder's "BRD-Trilogie" (*Lola*, *Die Ehe der Maria Braun* und *Die Sehnsucht der Veronika Voss*), and Rosellini's Germany Trilogy (*Trilogia Tedesca*) while simultaneously distancing Schlingensief from it (s.a. Vander Lugt 51). Curiously, Vander Lugt does not mention Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's trilogy of the same name, which includes the films *Ludwig*, *Karl May* and *Hitler*.

[92] S.a. Maubach 40.

[93] Von Trier was quoted as saying "What can I say? I understand Hitler. He did some wrong things, absolutely, but I can see him sitting there in his bunker at the end […]" (Higgins).

precisely because it is the site of Hitler's suicide. In fact, many aspects of the film seem to demand an "elegiac" reading: to name one example, the song typically played at soldiers' funerals, "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" is played loudly in the background throughout the film. Might Schlingensief's film represent another mobilization of fascist imagery as a way to come to terms with the remaining libidinal ties to exactly these narcissistic projections? Vander Lugt suggests as much when she writes: "The film's main purpose, then, is to deconstruct the 'Hitler myth,' to address the irrationality and pornographic violence of Nazism — and its continued presence — head-on, that is: irrationally and pornographically" (41).

This appraisal is still more or less in keeping with the homeopathic claim that Schlingensief makes for his art; indeed, it is in line with what Eric Santner claims about Syberberg in an article he wrote after the publication of *Stranded Objects*:

> If I understand Syberberg correctly, there can be no immunity against fascist ideology, against the much-discussed fascination with fascism, without the material support of elements of fantasy. In other words, all *Ideologiekritik* – all antifascism – is of necessity "anaclitic" with respect to fantasy; it must, as it were, lean on the perverse materiality of fantasy if it is to be more than mere rote citation of politically correct positions (Santner 1992, 22).[94]

Vander Lugt's reading of the film, while capturing this important aspect, does not account for the differences between Syberberg's *Hitler* film and Schlingensief's. I believe, however, that there is a decisive difference between Schlingensief's approach to the Nazi past and Syberberg's. The key question that remains unanswered is what sort of

[94] The trajectory in Santner's thought from "homeopathy" to "immunity" is significant, I believe, for other reasons to which I will devote more attention in subsequent sections concerning Schlingensief's later performance piece *Mea Culpa*.

libidinal work a 50-minute Hitler film can do that a six-and-a-half-hour Hitler film cannot.

My subsequent reading of this film will demonstrate how it both employs the "homeopathy" of the New German Cinema and mobilizes the New German Cinema against itself in an attempt to move beyond it. *100 Years of Adolf Hitler* is far from the interrogation of the fascination of Nazi imagery and mythology which *Hitler. Ein Film aus Deutschland* aims to be. Schlingensief's aesthetics are ugly, the performances are absurd and hysterical, borrowing from horror films, German expressionism, and the cinematic style of the American filmmaker John Waters.[95]

The film, which was shot in 16 hours in a World War II-era bunker in Mühlheim, Germany, makes claims to historical authenticity (by showing actors stretched to their physical limits in an actual bunker) and at the same time radically undermines these claims through over-the-top performances and willful disregard for historical facts. The well-known narrative of Hitler's final days becomes a foil the film uses to display, at every turn, its absolute failure to tell the story "correctly." The key events in this narrative include the marriage of Hitler and Eva Braun, Hitler's suicide and the suicide of Josef and Magda Goebbels after the murder of their children. Schlingensief's actors fail, in a blatant manner, to reenact these events. Much of the film is devoted to other ritualistic performances that are either inappropriate or conspicuously botched: there is a last meal, a Christmas celebration, and the birth of a child of sorts.

The question we must ask as viewers is why Schlingensief made a film that stages its own failure so spectacularly. The film scholar Thomas Elsaesser provides a plausible

[95] Schlingensief acknowledges Waters' influence in an interview with Florian Malzacher in the book *Art without Borders* (210).

answer in the context of another discussion of the work of mourning in German cinema. In an essay on the films of Alexander Kluge, Elsaesser repurposes the Freudian term *Fehlleistung* – literally, a failed performance or achievement – for his discussion of the inability of German film to signify guilt for the Shoah directly. *Fehlleistung* refers to what is more commonly known as the "Freudian slip" and is translated into English as parapraxis. Parapraxis, according to Elsaesser, can be seen as the first step in a Freudian process of remembering, repetition and working through. "I define parapraxis for my purposes," he writes, "not as the slip of the tongue or the lapse in attention but as a kind of effort, a kind of persistence, usually one with unexpected or unwanted results, including typical reversals or displacements in time and space" (184). As an example he calls our attention to a scene at the end of Fassbinder's *Marriage of Maria Braun* in which the protagonist puts a rose on a hat stand and a hat on a flower vase (Elsaesser is actually incorrect; it is her purse, not her hat).

Elsaesser reads this deliberate performance of failure as an "allegorical" means to reflect on the "failed performances" surrounding public commemorations of the Shoah and other crimes of fascist Germany that repeatedly resulted in faux pas by German politicians and intellectuals (188).[96]

The most notorious example of one such failed performance – and one that he mentions – is a 1988 speech given by Philip Jenninger, who was, at the time the president of the Parliament, commemorating the 50th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. In trying to explain the fascination that Nazism held for the masses, Jenninger slipped into a narrative mode so that he appeared to be identify with and have sympathy for the perpetrators.

[96] He mentions several other incidents, from Kohl and Regan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery that contained graves of Waffen-SS soldiers to Martin Walser's attempt to pay his respects to the victims of Auschwitz by remarking that it was used as a "moral cudgel" against the Germans (188).

Elsaesser's notion of the "allegorical" nature of parapractic narratives in the New German Cinema once again recalls Santner's reading of the "mourning play" at work in the works of Syberberg.

The different ways in which Schlingensief and Syberberg both use and renounce narration is the central difference between their Hitler films, which gives rise to the other more obvious distinctions in style. In a radicalization of Brecht's Epic Theater, which disrupts Aristotelian action to "show" how social relations are encoded in plot, Syberberg's actors neither represent (in the Aristotelean sense of mimesis) nor "tell" a coherent, overarching story.[97] Their monologues circle around the means by which the Nazis invested the image of Hitler with identificatory power for the masses. Telling this "story" means that Syberberg's film must eschew these very identificatory mechanisms. *Hitler. Ein Film aus Deutschland*, therefore, takes place mainly on a stage scattered with props, where actors recite monologues, sometimes through the mouths of puppets. Historical locations, like the *Reichskanzlei*, are evoked through the use of painted backgrounds of an artificiality which is never meant to be forgotten. Syberberg's film, in other words, consciously disavows the seductive power of films that seek to suppress their own mediality and draw the viewer into a world of specular identification. In Anton Kaes' terms: "[Obwohl] der Titel *Hitler. Ein Film aus Deutschland* ausdrücklich betont, daß es sich um einen Film handelt, versucht Syberberg nichts mehr, als ihm das 'typisch Filmische' auszutreiben" (139).

Schlingensief's film also employs what could be called *Verfremdungseffekte*, but in the form of a continuous narrative feint, which begins with the film's initial intertitle,

[97] Syberberg's film could be said to be "postdramatic" in the sense of Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (trans. 2006).

"30. April 1945 Führerbunker 17.00 Uhr." The act of fixing the temporal and physical location of the film's action suggests that it will lay claim to cinema's prosopopoeic promise of giving a voice and face to the dead.[98] This Aristotelian unity of time and place, of the "last hour in the Führerbunker," is, however, consistently undercut by a cinematic performance that continuously gets the historical story wrong.[99] Schlingensief's narrative/mimetic failure, which relies on the audience's pre-existing knowledge of the sequence of events and cast of characters within the Führerbunker, contrasts markedly with Syberberg's conscious avoidance of an overarching historical narrative.

There are other, more obvious contrasts between the two films. The visual language of Schlingensief's film could not be more different from Syberberg's staid camera. Syberberg, who got his start as a filmmaker filming Brecht's Berliner Ensemble rehearse, embraces a visual synthesis between the stage and the screen (Kaes 141). His long takes and wide camera angles suggest that he is filming a theater production of the *Hitler* film. In most shots in the *Hitler* film, the camera moves slowly, if at all. This intentional *Verfremdungseffekt* is paradoxically connected to Syberberg's wish to reinvigorate forgotten cinematic trends of "non-mimetic" cinema that created a magical world (Kaes 140). While Syberberg uses long takes, actor monologues and audio montages to impede the audience's consumption of cinematic images, Schlingensief employs pseudo-dialogues, a hand-held camera and a single, swaying spotlight to accelerate time in the bunker. Instead of lasting a full hour as its subtitle promises, Schlingensief's film clocks in at just 51 minutes.

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[98] C.f. Maubach, who sees this intertitle as a jab at pretentions of historical accuracy (37).
[99] S.a. Maubach 46.

The films both converge and diverge in their deployment of what Eric Santner calls "mourning play," a concept which I have discussed at length in the introduction to this dissertation. While Syberberg's characters play with puppets of Goebbels and Hitler[100], Schlingensief's characters act like puppets themselves (for example, in the scene directly following Hitler's suicide, which I will discuss below). These differences have to do, I will argue, with Schlingensief's ambivalent stance towards the New German Cinema.

After a few moments of darkness accompanied by sounds that suggest an air raid, followed by a few credits, the film's first visual appears in the form of a clapboard with Udo Kier's name on it. Kier, himself a veteran of films by Fassbinder but also Paul Morrissey, where he played Count Dracula and Doctor Frankenstein, is shown seated at a table. The signature mustache and uniform indicate that in this film he is playing another cinematic monster: Adolf Hitler.[101]

In this first shot, Kier/Hitler is smoking a cigarette while reading a film script from behind a box of film stock. He mumbles the word "Schnapps" – a reference to his alcoholism in this version of events– followed by the words "Wim, Margarethe, Nico, et cetera." This is a clear reference to Wim Wenders, Margarethe von Trotta and Nico Hoffmann, seminal directors of the New German Cinema. Kier pauses for a moment as if perusing the script, then stands, covering a map of Germany behind him in an alcoholic embrace: "Ganz Deutschland ist meine Heimat," he mutters, while a booming voiceover echoes him: "Ganz Deutschland ist meine Heimat." This statement is immediately

[100]Kaes mentions the childish aspect of Syberberg's film as well (150-51).
[101] S. a. Vander Lugt, who calls Hitler a "monster" as well (40). Indeed, Kier's cape-like greatcoat in this first scene is perhaps meant to allude to his role as Dracula. It is an example of the "citational casting" which Schlingensief employs throughout his œuvre.

intercut with audio of Wim Wenders accepting the director's award for his film *Der Himmel über Berlin* at Cannes, accompanied by Richard Strauss' *Morgenrot* from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, itself a cinematic cliché since its use in Stanley *Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey*. The film cuts away from Kier massaging the map of Germany to a television set showing Wenders at the Cannes award ceremony "We can improve the world's pictures," says Wenders in this clip, "and thereby improve the world."[102] This use of film and voiceover from film (later we hear what appears to be a fragment of a Hitler speech ["hunderttausend lernen einheitliches Denken"] at about 22:25) is also a redeployment of techniques used by Syberberg in his *Hitler* film.

The next shot shows a board reading "Rolle 1," then the film quickly cuts again to yet another clapperboard snap down and a young boy singing a Saint Martin's Day song. He is cut off sharply by a voice off-screen that shouts "Aus, Ruhe!", and the credits begin to roll, accompanied by a jovial ragtime-like piano tune reminiscent of a Varieté-Theater revue. The credits continue, but are interspersed with shots of the boy singing "Sankt Martin, Sankt Martin, breit' den Mantel aus, marschier' für uns von Haus zu Haus" – at this point he has a memory lapse, but then recovers – "lass uns sicher drunter stehn, bis die Sorgen vorüber gehen. Sankt Martin, breit den Mantel aus für Ute, Volker, Wim und Klaus." These names are of course references to other filmmakers of the New German cinema, yet another clear indication that the film is not only about Adolf Hitler and the legacy of Nazism, but also about film itself.[103]

I will demonstrate, however, that in the course of the film, Schlingensief manages to employ this self-referential intertextuality in a way that transcends "postmodern" play

[102] S.a. Vander Lugt 41 for another description of this opening scene.
[103] S.a. Vander Lugt (39).

with the works of his predecessors, making a statement about the legacy of the New German Cinema. This is hinted at already in the first scene after the credit sequence, where we see Hermann Fegelein, played by veteran Fassbinder actor Volker Spengler in a sweatsuit, run up to a peephole and mutter a quote from Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*: "Die Frist ist um, und abermals verstrichen sind sieben Jahr' / Voll Übermut warf mich das Meer ans Land."

This quote, absurdly out of place in the bunker, suggests that, like the hero of *Der Fliegende Holländer* who has the chance to escape his curse every seven years, Germany (and German film) must compulsively revisit the Nazi past at regular intervals (indeed, this idea is already alluded to in the title). At the same time, it suggests that this very *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has taken on a ritualistic, ossified nature, with the undead Hitler returning (as in Syberberg's film) as the dictates of German memory culture require.[104]

By restaging this confrontation with the past in exaggerated, comic terms, the film hopes to provide a way to move beyond it. In this spirit, Schlingensief's casting choice of Spengler gestures towards one of the most anarchic, unhinged films of the New German Cinema, Fassbinder's madcap comedy *Satansbraten* (1976). In this movie, Kurt Raab plays a former "poet of the revolution" who has hit a rough patch of writer's block. In a long series of farcical episodes too detailed to recount here, Raab finally identifies with fascism and promises his publisher a new work with the title "Der Faschismus wird siegen oder keine Feier für den toten Hund des Führers." Volker Spengler plays alongside

[104] S.a. Vander Lugt (42). This quotation can also be read as an allusion to what has become the most iconic still from Syberberg's film: that of the actor Heinz Schubert as a toga-clad ghostly Hitler rising from the grave of Richard Wagner.

Raab in the film as the poet's mentally challenged brother who spends his time doing breeding experiments with flies.

In Schlingensief's film, although he is ostensibly playing Hermann Fegelein, Spengler instead reprises his role from the Fassbinder film. He spends much of the movie delivering some variation on his catchphrase from *Satansbraten*: "Fliegen ficken!", though he truncates it to the simple obscenity "ficken." This is not only a gag for those "in the know" about the Fassbinder film, it is also an attempt to position *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* in the tradition of the most unhinged Fassbinder experiments, which stand in stark contrast to the (comparatively) more staid films of Wenders or von Trotta. Margit Carstensen and Udo Kier are also Fassbinder veterans, and their presence in this film is a clear gesture towards the continuation of his legacy, even if they do not quote other roles as explicitly as Volker Spengler.[105] Fassbinder's legacy appears here in a doubled role: both as the specter of his incomplete work, and as a reminder of the anarchic potential that his films unleashed. Fassbinder's name is noticeably absent from the litany of other filmmakers of the New German Cinema targeted throughout *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*.

Returning to the filmic sequence, we are now in the world of the bunker. With credits still rolling, another clapperboard comes down and is pulled away. The shadow of the cameraman is clearly visible across a doorway out of which Martin Bormann steps, biting into a sausage. Alfred Edel, another veteran of the New German Cinema from movies by Alexander Kluge and others (including Syberberg's *Hitler. Ein Film aus*

[105] Fassbinder has an ambivalent position within the tradition of the New German Cinema. Eric Rentschler refers to him as both the "guilty conscience" and "calling card of the New German Cinema." (qtd. in Fisher and Prager 17).

Deutschland), appears as Hermann Göring, running from the end of the hall towards Bormann. "Verrat, Verrat!" he exclaims, "Verraten ist unser Schicksal."

The next scene shows Magda Goebbels and Eva Braun emerging from a bathroom, then cuts to another shot of the boy who sang the Saint Martin's carol at the beginning. "30. April 1945 Führerbunker 17.00 Uhr" reads an intertitle. The credits are now over.

Spengler, still reprising his puerile role from *Satansbraten*, sits on the floor next to a tiny Christmas tree, singing the carol "Leise rieselt der Schnee." St. Martinstag (on November 11th), and Christmas Eve are both wildly out of place in April, of course, and the fact that the characters are celebrating them here can be attributed to the film's hyperbolic approach to "parapraxis." This continues a few scenes later, when Fegelein leads the cast in a procession around a makeshift Christmas tree as they sing "Stille Nacht." Eva Braun appears in her capacity as matriarch, distributing gifts consisting of empty wrapping paper and bows to the other characters. This is the first of several stagings of ritualistic events which are out of place, including the visitation of a newborn child and the marriage of Eva Braun and Magda Goebbels.

Despite the title of the film, Hitler is a minor character.[106] In this first scene, he is conspicuously absent, a fact remarked on by Bormann: "Verstehe nicht, wo er bleibt. Immer diese Unpünktlichkeit. Seit Stalingrad liegt er besoffen im Bett und ignoriert die Essenszeiten."

A few moments later, announced by a drum-roll on the soundtrack and Eva Braun, who pounds on the table and shouts "Achtung, der Führer!", Udo Kier appears briefly to retrieve schnapps from a stash in the bunker's cellar. The film's portrayal of

[106] S.a. Vander Lugt 40.

Hitler as drug addict is only the radicalization of a widespread trend in German culture which seeks to counter the image of Hitler as an ascetic who eschewed the pleasures of meat, sex, tobacco and alcohol, living only for Germany.[107]

Here, the Hitler character's overblown love for schnapps and intravenous drugs recalls the excess of bohemian artists. At one point, in fact, a voiceover reminds us "Hitler war auch Künstler," right after we have seen Kier dip his naked buttocks in a liquid that appears to be paint and then stamp them onto a canvas. At least two other commentators have remarked on the way that this film recycles tropes of performance art, a practice that Schlingensief used continuously throughout his career, especially in his works for the stage (Vander Lugt 43, Maubach).

Instead of suffering pathetically or raving manically, Udo Kier plays Hitler almost completely devoid of affect. In the next scene, he is seen lying on his back while a scantily-clad nurse administers a dose of drugs. The soundtrack and lighting of this part create an atmosphere suggestive of a semi-pornographic low-budget horror film.

After a brief shot of the clapperboard, the film cuts to Dietrich Kuhlbrodt as Goebbels on the toilet. Martin Bormann appears and the two discuss whether or not they should tell "him" (meaning Hitler) about Fegelein. Fegelein, played by Volker Spengler playing his character from *Satansbraten*, appears from offscreen to deliver his catchphrase from the film, while he slaps the two men in the face, pretending to spit at them, before running back down the hall. "Diese Sau, diese deutsche Sau!" exclaims Bormann. "Eine deutsche Sau," remarks Goebbels flatly. Adjectives like "deutsch" and nouns like "die Vorsehung" (providence) which were ubiquitous in Nazi discourse,

[107] See Marcel Atze, *Unser Hitler*, a book-length treatment of the "demythologization" of Hitler in postwar German literature.

circulate here totally stripped of their original meaning or context. Similarly, the cast of characters and the well-known sequence of events that occurred in the final hours in the Führerbunker are also recombined and transformed absurdly. In the rest of this scene, for example, Alfred Edel appears as Göring, telling the two men that Fegelein has betrayed them all by being caught with a prostitute. This mishmash of signifiers (like "deutsch" which Eva Braun is especially fond of employing nonsensically), events and characters all displaced from their "proper" location in the historical narrative is another symptom of this film's overdetermined parapraxis. This failed performance is always, however, dependent on a dominant historical narrative.

The most prominent example of the film's strategy of parapraxis is its depiction of Hitler's suicide. Instead of providing the cathartic climax of the story, it occurs about halfway through the film, conspicuously at the "wrong" time. The scenes concerning this well-known story warrant close attention for the way in which they concentrate the cinematic and narrative techniques found throughout the film.

The sequence begins with Hitler kissing and caressing the corpse of his nurse, "Schwester Morell," who is lying in a coffin. Eva Braun appears beside him. "Was willst du?" he asks her. "Ich will dich trösten, ich will dir helfen!" replies Eva, offering him something that she claims is morphine. "Schmeckt gut, nach Nüssen," says Hitler, playing on the audience's knowledge that cyanide tastes like burnt almonds, and that in the established historical account of his suicide, Hitler took cyanide before shooting himself in the head. "Nach Nüssen! Nach Walnüssen, Haselnüssen, Mandeln! Alles was es gibt! Lass sie dir schmecken die Nüsse der Deutschen!" she shrieks, as Kier begins to foam at the mouth. The soundtrack, a sort of menacing drone that recalls a horror movie,

begins to climax as the film cuts briefly to Goebbels having sex with his daughter. Then we catch a brief glimpse of Hitler as a corpse, before cutting to a close-up of a wide-eyed Kier, seemingly in the afterlife or in the midst of a near-death experience, his eyebrows and moustache covered in white tape. "Grüß mir Schwester Morell," says a booming voice that seems to come from the beyond.

The film cuts back to Goebbels and his daughter and wife lying in bed, then to Bormann, Fegelein and Göring lying together in another bed. Suddenly, there is the awaited gunshot signaling Hitler's suicide, which occurs, of course, after we have already seen Hitler's corpse. Göring, Fegelein and Bormann all jump up with a start. Fegelein lets out a scream, which the Goebbels family appears to hear in another room. "Was war das?" exclaims Magda Goebbels, "Mein Gott," adds Joseph, in deadpan.

The characters all run to the room where Hitler has last been seen. A martial drum roll on the soundtrack announces their arrival in solemn procession into the room, much as the same drum roll earlier accompanied Kier's first appearance as Führer in front of the other characters. The camera and spotlight follow Magda Goebbels (played by Margit Carstensen) down to the face of a "dead" Hitler, who sits on the ground staring blankly into space. As Magda shakes him, repeating a refrain of "Hallo!", Kier begins to drool a steady stream of water (not blood) from his mouth, the first example of the overblown parapraxis of this scene. Martin Bormann rushes into the shot and slaps the clearly conscious Kier several times on each cheek. "Der Führer. Ist. Tot!" he says in a halting diction. A screaming Fegelein comes running in from down the hall and yells "Heil mein Führer!" as Edel repeats "Ich bin Reichskanzler. Ich!" beside him.

As Fegelein leaves the room, again muttering his catchphrase from *Satansbraten* but this time adding "Eva," Braun herself appears, in uniform, with what we can take to be Hitler's mustache attached to her upper lip. Her arm is extended in Hitler's characteristic idiosyncratic salute. This cross-dressing is more parapraxis embodied: instead of mistaking a vase for a hat rack, as in *The Marriage of Maria Braun*, some of the characters mistake Eva Braun for the Führer, because she is wearing his mustache. But this misidentification is presented as a conscious choice: at first not all the characters are convinced. "Verrat. Verrat," says Edel/Göring, reprising his line from earlier in the film. "Das ist doch Eva," says Magda Goebbels, coming in for a closer look. But Bormann assures them both: "Das ist der Führer," he says, as the soundtrack swells once again with "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden." Eva then produces a pistol and begins to fire in the air.

"Die Frau hat Recht, der Bart ist falsch," says Göring, still incredulous, as Bormann grabs the ostensibly lifeless Kier, raising his arm in a Hitler salute as if he were a puppet. "Heil!" scream the characters. This motion recalls Syberberg's use of marionettes in the *Hitler* film. Instead of a lifeless puppet employed for the purposes of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, Schlingensief's actor operates another live actor, pretending he is a dead Hitler, in an act of over-the-top parody. Schlingensief's film takes the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the New German Cinema to a grotesque and extreme conclusion, the point at which it refuses even to get the *Verfremdung* that undergirds its aesthetic program right. In this moment, Schlingensief's film suggests that strategies of gesturing obliquely towards unspeakable historical guilt have become exclusively self-referential, pointing only back to themselves.

In the melee that ensues as the scene continues, we encounter several more trivial examples of parapraxis: Göring, determined to get to the bottom of the mustache mystery, grabs a dagger by the blade (not the handle) and uses it to menace Bormann, putting him in a headlock and dragging him into the hallway. As the two enter the hallway, Göring releases Bormann, who casually remarks, "Hermann, hör doch auf mit dem Mist." "Niemals," replies Göring. The two men pace up and down the hallway as the camera follows.

"Ich werde Reichskanzler oder sonst nichts," says Göring.

"Ohne die Sympathie des Führers wirst du niemals Reichskanzler werden," replies Bormann.

"Der Führer ist tot. Tot, tot, tot!" Göring says.

"Ach, und wer ist das da drin?" asks Bormann, indicating the room they have just emerged from.

"Weiß ich nicht. Der Führer ist tot."

"Woran erkennt man normalerweise den Führer?"

"Der [sic] Führer?" says Göring pausing for a beat, "na, an dem Bart!"

"Und wer trägt jetzt momentan ein Bärtchen?"

Here Göring pauses again for a moment before exclaiming, "Der Führer!"

"Na also," says Bormann.

"Verstehe."

The two men return to the room they have just left to find Eva/Hitler smooching Magda Goebbels. "Heil mein Führer," says Göring, finally accepting the fact that Eva has taken Hitler's place, "Heil, heil, heil."

The feature most associated with Hitler's visual appearance – that is, his mustache – has become unmoored from its original owner and is now circulating as a signifier among various signifieds. Here once again, performed failure is staged as a self-referential game. This example is illustrative of the key difference in the way in which parapraxis is expressed in Schlingensief and the way it functions in films by directors of a different generation like Herzog, Fassbinder and Kluge. When the older filmmakers employ absurd, misdirected effort, it always seems to be an honest attempt at gesturing towards historical guilt or finding ways to break out of patterns of violence. For example, when the character Gabi Teichert in Kluge's *Die Patriotin* tries to dig through history with a shovel in her backyard, she is looking for something *good* about the German past.

While similarly misplaced effort, lapses in attention and temporal displacements structure every aspect of Schlingensief's *Hitler* film – ranging from Hitler's dog Blondi (who is played by a Great Dane, not a German Shepherd) to anachronistic references to other films and numerous historical inaccuracies (for example, the presence of Hermann Fegelein and Martin Bormann, neither of whom was in the bunker at the end [Vander Lugt 40]) – the film revels in self-referential and intertextual parapraxis for its own sake.

This makes *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* a hyperbolic repetition of and reflection on both the inadvertent "failed performances" of German public memory and the deliberate "performed failures" of New German Cinema. Schlingensief's film seems to want to fail more decidedly and conspicuously than any film of the New German Cinema before.

Schlingensief's statements about the film are therefore questionable (here in the translation by Kristen Vander Lugt):

> That's the problem with this whole Neo-Nazi scene and all those things […]. We haven't said 'Dig that shit up, wear it out, use it,' then it'll spin itself into

> nothingness and become tattered and no one will have any interest in putting on an old jacket. That doesn't happen, of course, because high society always comes in and says 'No, for God's sake, cover it up, build a temple, madness, careful, beware, not one wrong word, and so on' (s.a. Vander Lugt 42).

While there is doubtless some truth to Schlingensief's statement above, it also suggests that his version of homeopathy is an overdose. More than merely taking a swipe at Wim Wenders' ambitions to change the world through pictures, Schlingensief simultaneously takes the "performed failure" of the New German Cinema to its radical conclusion, demonstrating the limits of the "homeopathic" approach to coming to terms with the past.

The metaphor of the "overdose" takes on concrete form in a scene near the end of *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, when Magda Goebbels poisons her children. This event has come to stand metonymically for the barbarity and perversion of the Nazi regime. In Schlingensief's film, it becomes an allegory for his solution to the legacy of a *Vergangenheitsbewältiung* that has become ossified.

This scene is once again introduced by a clapperboard with the words "HITLER," "Schlingensief" and "Bärenklau" (the name of the cameraman) clearly visible. Margit Carstensen, as Magda Goebbels, stands among her children. With the now-familiar ominous music in the background, the spotlight illuminates Magda as she distributes what appear to be tubes of lipstick to the children, but which the audience knows (because of the bunker narrative) must contain doses of cyanide. She addresses several of the children by name as she distributes the ampoules: "Margarethe, lieber Wim, Hans mein Schatz." This collection of names is unmistakably intended to remind the audiences of Margarethe von Trotta, Wim Wenders and most likely Hans-Jürgen Syberberg. What Magda/Carstensen says next, however, sharply traces the polemical trajectory of this scene (and indeed the entire film):

"Wenn ich hier alles sehr nüchtern und frei von Sentimentalität betrachte," begins Carstensen in the same gruff diction that she has employed throughout the film,

> muss ich zugeben, dass meine Freundschaft zu Euch, meine lieben Kinder, auf das Konto meiner Irrtümer gebucht werden kann. Ihr habt mich fast überall gehemmt, und werdet Deutschland in der Zukunft hemmen. Aus Dankbarkeit, dass ihr Euch ruhig und selbstbezichtigend verhalten werdet, werden sie Euch schätzen. Aber . . . dann werden sie Euch kritisieren . . . und . . . einfach mal abtun. Und später lächerlich machen. Es wäre wirklich ein Irrtum, Euch als ebenbürtig zu betrachten, obwohl ihr gar nicht ebenbürtig seid.

The camera dwells for a few moments on the faces of the children who now appear to be asleep, before Carstensen continues: "Ihr werdet Euch zurückziehen. Und Eure Vergangenheit vergessen. Oder in einer ganz penetranten Art verleugnen."

This last line could be read as an admonition to the New German Cinema in the face of the historical rupture represented by the Berlin wall, a premonition of the "cinema of consensus" which will come to displace the New German Cinema in the 1990s (Rentschler 260). Margit Carstensen, in her doubled role as Magda Goebbels and as a living incarnation of the Fassbinder tradition (she appears, like Spengler, in an ancillary role in *Satansbraten* as well as in several other Fassbinder films), crystallizes the polemic thrust of *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*. The fascist past, embodied by the character Magda Goebbels, has "poisoned" an entire artistic generation (represented by the filmmakers Wenders, von Trotta and Syberberg) but the unfulfilled Fassbinder tradition, embodied by the actress Carstensen, simultaneously provides the means through which this poisoning may be overcome. The most striking aspect of this scene, however, is that Schlingensief recodes the historical scene most illustrative of the immunitary *dispositif* of

National Socialism as a parable directed against the New German Cinema.[108] He stages what could be called the "autoimmunity" of the cinematic coming to terms with the past at the historical nexus of the "autoimmunity" that caused the collapse of Nazi Germany.

Schlingensief's film, through a radicalization of tendencies latent in a certain tradition of the New German Cinema (i.e., Fassbinder's *Satansbraten*) seeks to overcome the very tradition of the New German Cinema. This is a "homeopathic" procedure, but not in the sense that Schlingensief claims or a reading based on Santner would suggest. Schlingensief's film does not seek to decathect narcissistic attachments to the images provided by Hitler, but rather to counter a tradition which in 1989 had arguably become narcissistically attached to this very process. Through the exaggerated, overdetermined use of elegiac tropes ("Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" plays almost continuously) and meta-*Verfremdungseffekte* (i.e. the use of a "dead" Udo Kier as a Hitler puppet, in a grotesque parody of Syberberg's *Hitler* film) *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* signals the need to move beyond not a confrontation with the Nazi past, but confrontations with the Nazi past that threaten to make *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* itself a new totem around which German national identity may be formed (to borrow Santner's psychoanalytic vocabulary). In the words of the culture critics BAVO who have written on "over-identification" as a strategy of the avant-garde:

> Over-identification […] is closer to Søren Kierkegaard's 'emetic', which entails deliberately swallowing too much of the loved poison – overdoing it – so as to be

[108] According to Esposito, the National Socialist biopolitics were inverted into thanatopolitics through a radicalization of the immunitary *dispositif* which sought to protect the racialized body from death through a constant introduction of death, eventually resulting in a murderous "autoimmune" reaction in the last days of the war, which saw the killing of Germans by each other (deserters, for example) (Esposito 2008 138). The murder of the Goebbels children is perhaps the most poignant illustration of this "autoimmunity" precisely because the blond children were often touted as Aryan racial ideals.

> able to break with it for good, to cut the ties with the ambivalent love object (BAVO).[109]

In *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, Schlingensief is not over-identifying with a right-wing discourse (as he would do several years later during the famous Viennese *Container-Aktion*) but rather with the leftwing aesthetic of parapraxis. Much like his later *Die 120 Tage von Bottrop* (which proclaimed itself to be the "last" New German Film) *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* represents a filmic emesis of the New German Cinema.

It is equally important to remember that this film was shot at the end of 1989, directly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but before reunification (Vander Lugt 42). At the end of the film, Hermann Fegelein and Eva Braun place a doll that Magda Goebbels has given birth to in a basket and float it down a river, in a Moses allegory for the uncertain future of the two Germanys after the fall of the Wall. As the baby floats away, we hear the voice of the politician Franz Josef Strauss (present throughout the film through allusive puns like the use of the music from *Also sprach Zarathustra*, composed by his "Namensvetter" Richard Strauß), who praises the Germans for their sacrifices and accomplishments in war in what Vander Lugt calls a "conveniently elliptical act of remembrance" (41). This ending suggests that while the limits of "performed failure" may have been reached in the cinema, the "failed performances" of German politics continue to accompany Germany on its path to reunification.

By the same token, it suggests that new aesthetic means must be found to confront a new historical era, whatever form this era may take. At the time the film was made,

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[109] This quote comes from a discussion of the "Yes Men," a performance-art collective that mounts medial stunts to expose the ideology of neo-liberalism. In the very next section of the essay, however, the authors discuss Schlingensief's (in)famous *Container-Aktion*, "Bitte liebt Österreich," as a deliberately ambiguous use of "over-identification." *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* is not ambiguous in the same way as "Bitte liebt Österreich." In the following section on *Terror 2000* I will detail how Schlingensief's over-identification becomes inscribed into the imagery of his illness in his final performance pieces.

reunification was far from a foregone conclusion, though it was clear that there had been an historical rupture with unforeseeable consequences. That Schlingensief's critique of the New German Cinema with its own means is not meant as a gesture towards "normalizing" Germany's relationship to its past in the spirit of conservative historians in the 1980s, becomes clear in the subsequent two films in the Deutschland-Trilogie, *Das deutsche Kettensägemassaker* and *Terror 2000*. The former film makes Germany look like anything but a "normal" country, and the latter confronts the resurgence of nationalism and anti-foreigner violence in the newly reunited Germany head-on, making free and liberal use of (neo-)Nazi imagery.

These subsequent films, which continue Schlingensief's aesthetics of the overdose, were also occasioned by failed public performances. According to Schlingensief, he had the idea for *Das deutsche Kettensägemassaker* when he witnessed what he interpreted to be an inadvertent betrayal of the staging behind a supposedly spontaneous display of nationalist sentiment after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This parapractic scene begins the *Kettensägemassaker* film: Richard von Weizsäcker stands next to Helmut Kohl in front of the Berlin Wall. Believing his microphone to be off, he turns to Kohl and says "Jetzt sollte die Nationalhymne kommen."

Terror 2000 is also concerned with failed performances in politics and the media relating both to anti-foreigner violence in the wake of reunification and the so-called Gladbeck hostage crisis, in which the media interfered in police actions and may have actually precipitated the death of a hostage. I will argue in the next section, however, that *Terror 2000* is an exploration of another type of failed performance as well, one that unites both the New German Cinema and Hollywood, that is, the inability of film to form

the tropes it deploys into coherent political messages. In dealing with this aspect of *Terror 2000*, I will return to the figure of the marionette.

III. *Terror 2000*: Schlingensief's Hollywood *Marionettentheater.*[110]

Aesthetic formalization, Hollywood pedagogy, and violence

In a 1999 interview with Antje Hoffmann, Carl Hegemann, a dramaturg who worked closely with Schlingensief throughout his theater career, had this to say about Schlingensief's planned "return to the theater," which Schlingensief had previously dubbed a "Sackgasse" (Antje Hoffmann's question is presented first):

> A.H.: *Noch mal zur Frage. Warum zurück zum Theater. Schlingensief hätte doch zum Beispiel auch zurück zum Film gehen können, dessen Grenzen er ja vielleicht mit dem Theater zu überwinden versuchte. Warum aber nun der Weg zurück zur Sackgasse Theater und nicht ganz zurück zur Sackgasse Film?*
>
> C.H.: Der Witz an der Geschichte ist, dass man im Bewusstsein, dass es sich um eine Sackgasse handelt, in diese Sackgasse so rein geht, als würde sie sich vielleicht doch öffnen. So, wie Heinrich von Kleist gesagt hat, das Tor zum Paradies ist verschlossen, aber wenn wir den Weg um die ganze Welt machen, finden wir vielleicht eine Hintertür, wo es wieder auf ist. Also dass etwas eine Sackgasse ist, braucht einen nicht daran zu hindern, den Weg trotzdem einzuschlagen. Vielleicht gibt es ja nur Sackgassen [...] (293).

Hegemann is referring, of course, to one of the most famous (and puzzling) texts of German Romanticism, Kleist's "Über das Marionettentheater." He has hit on an important component of Schlingensief's aesthetic with this seemingly off-the-cuff remark. The passage he is referring to reads as follows:

> Solche Mißgriffe, setzte er abbrechend hinzu, sind unvermeidlich, seitdem wir von dem Baum der Erkenntnis gegessen haben. Doch das Paradies ist verriegelt

[110] I take the impetus for this title from Bianca Theisen's article "Comitragedies: Thomas Bernhard's Marionette Theater," MLN Vol. 111, No. 3 Apr 1996.

> und der Cherub hinter uns; wir müssen die Reise um die Welt machen, und sehen, ob es vielleicht von hinten irgendwo wieder offen ist (Kleist 342).

This excerpt comes near the end of Kleist's text, which could be described as a series of enigmatic anecdotes presented in the form of a dialogue between two acquaintances, the first person narrator and "Herr C.," a popular dancer at the opera (the "er" in the above-quoted text). Surprised to find a famous artist so often in attendance at the marionette theater (which the narrator considers to be a vulgar form of entertainment), the two characters engage in a conversation about "grace" ("Grazie") and consciousness. The narrator is surprised to learn that the dancer thinks that lifeless marionettes, because of their lack of consciousness, have the potential to be more graceful in their motions than human dancers. They follow the "Gesetze der Schwere," because their limbs are lifeless. Furthermore, they are *antigrav*, because they are suspended on strings (342).

Two anecdotes follow, the first concerns a young man who, while drying his foot after bathing, catches a glimpse of his reflection in a mirror and realizes that he resembles a famous sculpture of a boy picking a thorn from his foot. When he tries to replicate the procedure, however, he can never achieve the same perfect mimesis which he attained so innocently at first.

The next incident, this one related by the narrator, concerns his trip to visit a Lavonian nobleman, who has trained a bear to fence. Though an expert fencer, Herr C. is defeated by the bear. The bear is able to parry every one of Herr C.'s thrusts, because it is completely unaffected by his feints. This is, claims Herr C., due to the fact that the bear was less capable of reflection than he:

> Nun, mein vortrefflicher Freund, sagte Herr C..., so sind Sie im Besitz von allem, was nötig ist, um mich zu begreifen. Wir sehen, daß in dem Maße, als, in der

> organischen Welt, die Reflexion dunkler und schwächer wird, die Grazie darin immer strahlender und herrschender hervortritt. – Doch so, wie sich der Durchschnitt zweier Linien, auf der einen Seite eines Punkts, nach dem Durchgang durch das Unendliche, plötzlich wieder auf der andern Seite einfindet, oder das Bild des Hohlspiegels, nachdem es sich in das Unendliche entfernt hat, plötzlich wieder dicht vor uns tritt: so findet sich auch, wenn die Erkenntnis gleichsam durch ein Unendliches gegangen ist, die Grazie wieder ein; so, daß sie, zu gleicher Zeit, in demjenigen menschlichen Körperbau am reinsten erscheint, der entweder gar keins, oder ein unendliches Bewußtsein hat, d. h. in dem Gliedermann, oder in dem Gott.
>
> Mithin, sagte ich ein wenig zerstreut, müßten wir wieder von dem Baum der Erkenntnis essen, um in den Stand der Unschuld zurückzufallen?
>
> Allerdings, antwortete er, das ist das letzte Kapitel von der Geschichte der Welt (345).

This is the end of the anecdote, quoted here at length because what could be loosely called its aesthetic program is laid out here. The extent to which we must "believe" the aesthetic theory that this text seems to proffer is, however, very much open to debate.[111]

Kleist's enigmatic text is important for my reading of Schlingensief's film insofar as it forms the basis for an essay by Paul de Man, "Aesthetic Formalization: Kleist's *Über das Marionettentheater*," which I believe illuminates the intervention that *Terror 2000* makes both in the discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and mediatized violence in a general sense.

There are several aspects of this essay which make it fruitful to employ in a reading of Schlingensief's consciously ludicrous, trashy and obscene film. De Man's essay performs a close reading of Kleist's story, revealing the text's ideological investment in questions of aesthetic formalization, pedagogy, violence, and the problems of linguistic signification. At first glance, these reflections seem to have little to do with Schlingensief's film, an audiovisual text, which at no time presents itself as an object intended for either aesthetic education or edification (in fact, it does quite the opposite).

[111] S.a. Mehigan (95).

In what follows, however, I will make clear that the film is also invested in questions of the relationships among aesthetic formalization, pedagogy and violence in the cinema – a materially distinct semiotic space, where all of these terms of necessity receive a different type of inflection than in language.

The aspect of Schlingensief's film which, in my analysis, draws it together with de Man's reading of Kleist's anecdote, is its reflection on both Hollywood genre film and the New German Cinema. On one level, *Terror 2000* is a parody of the American film *Mississippi Burning* (1988), but shot against the background of a newly reunified Germany in 1992 instead of the Mississippi of the 1960s. The elements – racial violence, helpless or corrupt law enforcement, and the continued legacy of hatred – make the American film a perfect model for Schlingensief's skewering of Germany in the early 1990s.

The formalization that takes place in *Mississippi Burning*, though not the same as in de Man's analysis of Kleist, nevertheless creates compelling parallels between Schlingensief's film, Kleist's romanticism, and Hollywood's spectacles of cinematic violence. In de Man's reading, it becomes clear that German Idealism had a homeopathic impulse, not in the sense of the (pseudo)medical practice, of a tiny dose meant to spur on the body's natural healing power, but in the sense of a full-on embrace of the disease in the hopes of curing it. De Man indicts this urge near the beginning of his essay:

> The idea of innocence recovered at the far side and by way of experience, of paradise consciously regained after the fall into unconsciousness, the idea, in other words, of a teleological and apocalyptic history of consciousness is, of course, one of the most seductive, powerful, and deluded topoi of the idealist and romantic period (267).

Terror 2000 demonstrates that Hollywood films like *Mississippi Burning* share this potent delusion as well, through their homeopathic mobilization of violent tropes. *Mississippi Burning* proves to be a great example of the power of tropes to undermine intended meaning, the danger that aestheticized violence may reverse its moral trajectory once deployed. A brief excursus on how violence is used in *Mississippi Burning* will serve to elucidate how it relates to *Terror 2000*, both on the level of the plot and beyond it.

***Mississippi Burning*: American *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the pedagogy of violence**

Mississippi Burning takes its name from the FBI file "MIBURN" on the murders of three civil rights workers during the summer of 1964 (Toplin 2002 79). This murder forms the exposition of the film. The three workers, on their way to investigate the burning of a black church, are menaced on the highway by several other cars. After one of the cars turns out to be a police car, they pull over. After exchanging just a few words with the workers, a huge, thuggish man holds a gun to the head of the driver of the car. The audience hears a gunshot, then catches a quick glimpse of the blood from the driver's head as it splatters across the face of the man in the back seat. This brief image becomes a touchstone for the outré violence in Schlingensief's *Terror 2000*.

After this exposition, the viewer joins the protagonists: two FBI agents, Anderson, a southerner (played by Gene Hackmann) and Ward, a northerner (played by Willem Dafoe) on their way to investigate the disappearance of the three civil rights workers. From the first scene onwards, there is clear tension between the two main characters.

Ward seems to take his assignment seriously, believing that he can get to the bottom of the racial violence plaguing Mississippi through traditional police methods. The older Anderson, on the other hand, is reluctant to stir things up in the town, seeming at times cynically resigned to the climate of terror which he believes is so entrenched that it will never change. He spends much of the film in the role of a spectator – and pedagogue – watching as the younger agent's methods fail, while at the same time slowly insinuating himself into the good graces of some of the townspeople.

The two men quickly realize that the sheriff's office of the town is comprised of several prominent members of the KKK, and that one deputy in particular was probably involved in murdering the missing civil rights workers. Ward's attempts to use the rule of law to track down the killers fail repeatedly, in some cases causing damage to innocent bystanders: a young black man whom Ward had attempted to question at a lunch counter is later beaten and brutalized by Klan members. Ward persists in his intent to use the rule of law to apprehend the criminals, and manages to convict the same group of men suspected in the murders for their involvement in another beating. The presiding judge, however, suspends their sentence, claiming that their crimes were "provoked" by "outside elements."

The turning point in the film coincides with the film's pedagogical thrust as articulated in the relationship between the two agents. Anderson has been using his charm to win over the wife of the deputy whom the FBI suspects to have been involved in the murders. He succeeds in getting her to tell him the location of the three bodies, which are then recovered by FBI agents. Members of the local Klu Klux Klan, including the informant's husband, brutally beat her in retaliation for leaking the locations of the bodies

to the FBI. The hospital where she is recovering from her wounds becomes the staging ground for the turning point in the relationship between the two FBI agents.

Anderson, who has developed a romantic interest in the woman over the course of the investigation, is enraged upon seeing her in the hospital bed. Ward, sensing that Anderson is going to take the law into his own hands and kill the woman's husband, grabs the older man, threatening him with a revolver. "We'll do it your way," he says. Instead of dissuading Anderson from vigilante violence, Ward is actually arguing for a more orchestrated vigilante campaign against the KKK, something that Anderson has advocated from the beginning of their investigation. Ward has finally internalized his teacher's lesson, and demonstrates this by pulling a gun on his older mentor and holding him down against the hood of a car.

The rest of the film is focused on the FBI's use of terror against the KKK, which involves an increasingly direct appropriation of KKK tactics, with the roles of victim and perpetrator reversed. In one episode, the FBI kidnaps the mayor of the town (a known KKK sympathizer) and takes him to a remote cabin, where a black FBI agent (whose existence is completely anachronistic because of J. Edgar Hoover's bigoted recruitment policies [Toplin 2002 80]) menaces him with a razorblade, threatening to castrate him if he does not reveal his knowledge about the murders. In this scene, the FBI agent makes it clear that his action is a symmetrical reflection of the violence that the Klan has perpetrated on black males.

One of the final violent episodes in *Mississippi Burning* is an object lesson in this same type of imitative, "homeopathic" violence. One of the conspirators, a Klan member who has been a minor character thus far, wakes to find several men outside his house

dressed in Klan hoods. He scrambles into his truck to escape, but is immediately pursued by other Klansmen in a pickup. They chase his vehicle to a deserted area, overpower him, and place a noose around his neck, before Anderson and Ward appear at the last moment, trailed by a large group of FBI agents who chase the Klan members into a cornfield. Once Anderson and Ward have extracted a pledge to testify from the terrified man who has nearly been lynched, we see the supposed Klansmen stop and remove their masks, exchanging slaps on the back with their pursuers. The whole thing has been a ruse to intimidate the man into testifying against his friends (Toplin 1996 37).

FBI agents, in order to combat a terroristic threat, have had to become the very terroristic threat they are fighting. In order to fight against the Klan, they have taken on the uniform and tactics of the Klan. It is not an exaggeration to say that the entire plot of *Mississippi Burning* is a pedagogical tale involving increasing formalization of "homeopathic" violence, culminating in this final scene, where the FBI not only dresses up as the Klu Klux Klan, but adopts the formal structure of their tactics as well. In this sense, the film offers an aesthetic "education" of its own.

In this capacity, however, *Mississippi Burning* is also an act of American *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and (at least in the critical estimation) mostly a spectacular failure, despite its box office success. Indeed, it has become, like films such as Oliver Stone's *JFK*, almost paradigmatic for critical illustrations of the way that Hollywood deals with history.

One example serves to illustrate the myriad objections that critics raised against the film upon its release:

> Understandably, perhaps, the filmmakers seem to believe they need the dramatic tension of the murder case to keep up audience interest in the story. Yet the story

> they tell is an atrocious distortion of history. As *Mississippi Burning* would have it, the only thing happening in that state during the summer of 1964 was, on the one hand, a fight between local white racists and, on the other, heroic FBI agents sent to the rescue of submissive, illiterate, quaking black people unable to stand up for themselves […]. [T]he only war we see is between white people. That, of course, is the problem. How can a movie about Freedom Summer feature no black protagonists?" (Chafe 276-277)

In his book *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (1996) Robert Brent Toplin lays out a kind of formalized taxonomy of the ways in which Hollywood films deal with the past. Although Toplin's analysis in this work remains caught in the questionable dichotomy of aspects of Hollywood films that either "distort" historical facts or present them authentically (i.e. "history" remains an axiomatic concept somehow external to its telling), he nevertheless offers a rejoinder to those who are suspicious of the use of the dramatic form in telling stories about the past, arguing that historical films can offer important insights into the motivations of historical actors, albeit in a speculative mode (4-5).[112]

He devotes the initial chapter of his book to *Mississippi Burning* as an exemplar of the first item in his taxonomy of Hollywood's narrative strategies: "Exercising Artistic License: Communicating Through a Mixture of Fact and Fiction" (23). In his analysis, it becomes clear that the narrative legitimation for "fighting fire with fire" is initiated through the narrative dynamics of genre. The two characters, Anderson and Ward, whose pedagogical relationship sets the plot into motion, are based on one of the screenwriters' admiration for *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, a film directed by John Ford and

[112] One example of this rather naïve concept of historiography: "Although all historical dramas contain degrees of fictionalization (some of them a considerable degree) they can make significant contributions to the public's appreciation of the past" (Toplin 1996 5). Toplin never questions the central assumption here, that there can be "degrees" of fictionalization within a wholly fictional genre. He does, however, go on to compare historical films to both historical novels and historians who employ "literary" styles (ibid. 6-7).

starring John Wayne. In the film, a by-the-book lawyer from the east is schooled in the lawless ways of the west when he encounters a violent criminal gang (Toplin 2002 79, Toplin 1996 31). This intertextual relationship demonstrates the power of cinematic tropes to escape the intentions of the filmmaker and take on lives of their own. Though these are clearly not to be equated with the linguistic tropes that de Man discusses in his essay, the self-referentiality of the cinema as medium, like the self-referentiality of language outlined by de Man, which "thrusts, but never scores," applies to cinematic confrontations with history. This aspect of *Terror 2000* is what I will focus on in my reading.

Schlingensief's cinema of the "homeopathic overdose" puts him squarely in the tradition of German Romanticism, and I am not the first one to suggest that Schlingensief's larger aesthetic project has a neoromantic dimension.[113] Schlingensief's actors, however, are far from the graceful marionettes of Kleist's anecdote. Overweight or disfigured by heavy make-up, they hurl themselves across the screen in a clumsy orgy of cartoonish violence. Indeed, Schlingensief's project could be said to be one of aesthetic *de-formalization*: through plays with visual and narrative cinematic tropes, he exposes the mechanistic nature of Hollywood films that stage violence as a means for overcoming violence. On another level, this film is, just as much as the *Hitler* film, also about the New German Cinema's need to allegorize and restage the fascist past.

The premiere of *Terror 2000* represented a turning point in Schlingensief's career: not only did the film cause a furor in Berlin, where members of the left-wing *Autonomenszene* interrupted a screening of the film, breaking into the projector room and destroying the reels with acid (Vander Lugt 40), but it also got the attention of Mathias

[113] See for example, Florian Malzacher 197.

Lillienthal and Frank Castorf, who subsequently invited Schlingensief to the Berliner Volksbühne where he would try his hand as a theater director (Lilienthal 260).

According to his coauthor on the film, Oskar Roehler, who is now an accomplished screenwriter and director in his own right (*Elementarteilchen* [2006], *Jud Süß – Film ohne Gewissen* [2010]), Schlingensief was fascinated with the visual choreography, earnest tone and threatening atmosphere of *Mississippi Burning*. In an interview on the *Terror 2000* DVD, Roehler has this to say about the film's intertextual nature:[114]

> Wir haben uns *Mississippi Burning* damals angeguckt, auch weil das so eine weit entfernte Vorlage vielleicht auch war, um dieses ganze Ding irgendwie zu strukturieren, da es diesen korrupten Sheriff gab, da es [...] diese Ku Klux Klan gab, das Böse war überall.

I would argue, however, while the German context of the film separates it clearly from the 1960s American South, watching *Terror 2000* alongside *Mississippi Burning* makes a "plot arch" of sorts visible, one that critiques both the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the New German Cinema and the representation of cathartic violence that characterizes Hollywood's approach to history. The intertextual relationship between *Mississippi Burning* and *Terror 2000* has never been commented on in great detail in any of the scholarly works on *Terror 2000* but is essential in understanding the action of the film.[115]

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[114] This quote comes from an interview with Roehler on the DVD of *Terror 2000* put out by Filmverleih 451 in Berlin.

[115] Cf. Hoffmann 240, who points out the apparent discrepancy between the "Handlungsgeschehen" and "Fabel" in the film. If we take *Mississippi Burning* as the basic structuring component behind the film, this seeming contradiction is obviated. We also have an answer to the quandary posed by Hoffmann: "Die Fabel kann inhaltlich nicht beschlossen werden, weil die Polizei und die Täter sich zu einem Opfer vereinen. Die Fabel wird benutzt, um sich von ihr aus in mehreren Bahnen entfernen zu können. Sie wird benutzt, um mittels der Verfolgung der Täter durch die Polizisten eine Stimmung eines neonazistischen, außer Kontrolle geratenen Deutschlands zu zeigen und zusätzlich die Stimmung eines authetischen Geiseldramas wachzurütteln" (242). This reading would seem to suggest that Schlingensief merely wants to evoke the atmosphere accompanying a hostage situation. Interestingly, at least one showing of *Terror 2000* really did turn into a hostage situation of sorts, when a mentally disturbed woman refused to allow audience members to leave the cinema (see Umathum 58-59).

Roehler's influence on this film becomes even more interesting in the present historical moment, in light of his subsequent success as a director. In the introduction to their edited volume *The Collapse of the Conventional. German Film and its Politics at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, Jaimey Fisher and Brad Prager argue that Roehler's films, especially *Agnes und seine Brüder*, reinforce the importance of the New German Cinema for contemporary German filmmakers, even as they distance themselves from their predecessors (23). In *Agnes und seine Brüder*, they argue, this happens through the film's visual and narrative allusions to Fassbinder's *In einem Jahr mit 13 Monden*. Though Fisher and Prager are careful to emphasize the differences between the two filmmakers, they claim that Fatih Akin is also working with Fassbinder as a "foil," for example, by casting Hanna Schygulla in the film *Auf der anderen Seite*. It is clear that the same is true – albeit at a different historical moment – for Schlingensief's films. Not only does he employ casting choices that directly reference Fassbinder films (Volker Spengler, Udo Kier and Margit Carstensen), he also has actors explicitly quote their own previous roles in Fassbinder films. One good example of this is Volker Spengler playing his character from *Satansbraten* in *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, as mentioned above.

The effect of what I call Schlingensief's "citational casting" is that actors like Kier, Carstensen, and (as I will detail in this section) Peter Kern, seem not only to be actors from the heyday of New German Cinema playing new roles, they are in a sense playing themselves from a decade or so earlier. That is, they are not so much playing roles as playing actors playing roles, in a trash cinema Shakespearean mousetrap. This citational casting forms another element in Schlingensief's *Marionettentheater*, creating a kind of crucible for the New German Cinema and Hollywood.

In *Terror 2000*, Fassbinder is not the only other New German Cinema auteur who is cited through Schlingensief's casting choices. Another filmmaker who plays a demonstrably important role throughout Schlingensief's œuvre, though he is (surprisingly) seldom mentioned in connection with Schlingensief in the scholarship, is Hans-Jürgen Syberberg.[116] I showed in the discussion above the way that Schlingensief's *Hitler* film is in many ways an answer to Syberberg's *Hitler* film, and I will show that the references to Syberberg link *Terror 2000*'s indictment of Hollywood with an indictment of the New German Cinema. To return to the theoretical conceit I have borrowed from de Man, *Terror 2000* demonstrates not only how filmic tropes undermine the putatively emancipatory messages that Hollywood purports to convey in films like *Mississippi Burning*, but also how similar tropes also undermine the post-Brechtian political cinema of filmmakers like Syberberg.

I will now demonstrate this dynamic through a short reading of the film, focusing mainly on the scenes and incidents which reference other films or filmmakers. *Terror 2000* begins with a picture of a "heile Welt": an idyllic shot of what purports to be the city of Gladbeck, Kreis Recklinghausen, as we are told by the close-up of a sign. After a few moments of a nondescript street scene accompanied by a folksy, relaxed guitar melody, the film changes to black and white and the camera enters an *Asylantenheim*.

"Der nun folgende Film schildert einen authentischen Fall aus dem Jahre 1992," says an authoritative male voice as the camera meanders through the home, showing families of asylum seekers, "Deutschland hat sich verändert. Die Asylantenheime sind überfüllt." In the next shot, which shows a room full of empty beds (in stark contrast to

[116] Maubach, for example, does not mention Syberberg in his entire study of the Deutschland-Trilogie.

the claim made just a moment before), the man continues, as if giving voice to the nightmare of anti-immigrant politicians:

> Die Regierung findet sich auf dem Rückzug. Die Polizei vor Ort ist allein gelassen. Ein großer Teil der Bevölkerung ist außer Kontrolle geraten und leistet offen Widerstand. Nur die Fachleute bemühen sich um Klärung der Lage, doch bisher vergeblich.

Over pictures of smiling asylum-seekers, the voice-over then exhorts viewers to enjoy the next few minutes which will show them "die Welt, in der wir leben," which is a world of "Liebe, Angst, Sexualität und Tod."

"Gute Unterhaltung," concludes the voice-over, just before the title screen appears, announcing in yellow lettering reminiscent of a horror film the name "TERROR 2000" and then the film's subtitle "DEUTSCHLAND AUSSER KONTROLLE." Like *Mississippi Burning*, which begins with the murder of three civil rights workers, *Terror 2000* also clues its audience into the crime which must be solved from the outset. Instead of three freedom riders travelling through Mississippi in the summer of 1968, the furniture superstore owner Bössler (Alfred Edel), his son Bössi, and Manni Jablonski (played by Udo Kier) murder the social worker Peter Fricke[117] (played by American writer Gary Indiana, who also appeared in Fassbinder films) and a Polish family he is accompanying on a train trip through the former East Germany. Schlingensief stages this initial murder as a gory spectacle, exaggerating elements from the parallel scene in *Mississippi Burning*. Brandishing a gangster-style tommy gun, Bössi bursts into the boxcar of a train and shoots the parents of the family, saying "eins für die Mami, eins für

[117] Peter Fricke (1939-) is also the name of a German film and television actor.

den Papi," and then, turning to Fricke, who has just been strumming a protest song on the guitar, "eins für den Sozi."[118]

The Polish family is not dead, however. Bössi begins to rape the Polish girl, but is then stopped by his father and Manni Jablonski, who is dressed in a black shirt and clerical collar. "Wir sind hier nicht zu Hause," Bössler scolds, while Jablonski executes Fricke with the pistol he has previously held in his own mouth, causing the Polish family to be splattered with fake blood in what is the first of many references to the visual language of cinematic violence employed in *Mississippi Burning* (see my description above of the first scene in that movie).

After this initial murder scene, which is less coherent than I have been able to convey here and is almost certainly mostly incomprehensible without knowledge of *Mississippi Burning*, the film cuts to the credit sequence. The soundtrack now consists of a wistful song over synthesized strings. The lyrics are in English, but reveal themselves to be nonsensical upon closer listening.

The film then introduces the representatives of the law, Peter Körn (played by Peter Kern) and his partner Margret (played by Margit Carstensen), on their way to the (fictional) eastern German city of Rassau to investigate the disappearance of Fricke the social worker (who we have just seen murdered in the previous scene) and his charges, the Polish family. The pair arrives in Rassau just in time to witness a carnivalesque publicity stunt for the local furniture store in which a motorcycle daredevil attempts to

[118] The setting of this initial scene in a boxcar is clearly meant to evoke the Holocaust. Fricke's statement to the Polish family (in a heavy American accent), that he will bring them to "ein Lager für Polen, Juden und Neger" underscores this intended reference, and further supports the reading that I lay out here: that Schlingensief's film takes aim at American as well as German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (s.a. Hoffmann 243).

jump a row of steel cabinets with catastrophic results. The stuntman loses control of his motorcycle, yet manages to stay atop it long enough to smash into a CDU campaign sign emblazoned with a gigantic portrait of Helmut Kohl, splattering the chancellor with blood and disfiguring his own face.

In the ensuing melee, Bössler (the crooked Sheriff and owner of the furniture store whose advertising stunt has just been ruined) and Inspector Körn enthusiastically exchange gunfire. The parodistic intentions aimed at Hollywood convention are clear both in the rogue Sheriff's American uniform, and his coarse language. After mumbling to his slack-jawed nephew in Bavarian dialect, he curses the stuntman (and his own son, "Bössi" who has been emceeing the event), calling them "Ficker," a German calque of the ubiquitous English obscenity. Edel continues to employ this idiosyncratic insult throughout the film.

During this initial encounter, Margret chastises her partner for firing his pistol at Bössler. "Peter," she shouts "was hast du denn vor? Du kennst den Mann doch gar nicht!" At this point, however, the film flashes back to the scene of the so-called "Gladbecker Geiseldrama," and it becomes clear that Kern's character was the police commander tasked with stopping a group of hostage-taking bank robbers. As it turns out, the Gladbeck hostage takers were none other than Bössler (now a representative of the law), his nephew and Jablonski (now a local priest). Inspector Körn's past failure has come back to haunt him, and he is now even more determined to bring the local outlaws to justice.

The "Gladbecker Geiseldrama" refers to a series of tragic events which unfolded in Gladbeck in 1988 when two men robbed a bank and then holed up inside it, demanding

ransom money and a getaway car (Maubach 93).[119] After receiving a car, they picked up the girlfriend of one of the robbers. Then, pursued by journalists, they sped down the autobahn towards Bremen, where they commandeered a passenger bus and took even more hostages. The catastrophe that followed was a case of the media interfering directly in a police action. Not only did the throng of journalists' cars impede the movement of police and ambulance crews, but camera teams stood by filming while a hostage lay dying after being killed by one of the bank robbers (ibid. 94). Furthermore, in certain cases the media interfered directly, helping the kidnappers in the hopes of getting the scoop on the story: an editor from the Cologne tabloid *Express* went so far as to join the kidnappers in their getaway car and show them the way out of inner-city Cologne (ibid. 96). The hostage-takers eventually released all of their prisoners except for two, which included an attractive 18-year old named Silke Bischoff, who provided a perfect focal point for the cameras. Bischoff was later killed by her captors as the police attempted to storm their parked car. Schlingensief's film references this medial fetishization of Bischoff through the character of "Wibke," who is represented by a blonde wig that circulates between various characters (Maubach 107-108, Hoffmann 241).

This German background overlays the basic story taken from *Mississippi Burning*. Like the southern FBI agent portrayed by Gene Hackmann, Körn is eager to physically assault the suspects in the Polish family's disappearance. Unlike Hackmann, he does not wait for the acquiescence of his partner before proceeding in his campaign of intimidation and assault. After their initial encounter, Körn pays a visit to Bössler and his

[119] See Maubach 93-100 for a detailed accounting of how the "Gladbecker Geiseldrama" relates to the film's overall send-up of what he calls "fragwürdige Medienstars," a group including hostage-takers, faith-healers and the neo-Nazi Michael Kühnen. Maubach concludes: "Schlingensiefs Abschluss der Deutschland-Trilogie kann somit als Aufforderung zu einer neuen Debatte über die Verantwortung der Medien verstanden werden" (98).

nephew, roughing them up in a scene which in its violent choreography recalls incidents straight from *Mississippi Burning*.

Other parts of *Terror 2000* also reference the American film. In *Mississippi Burning*, agents Ward and Anderson stay in a rundown hotel where Ward asks "where does it come from? All this hate?" This question becomes "Wo kommt er nur her… all dieser Hass?" in Schlingensief's film. In *Mississippi Burning*, Klan members burn a cross outside the hotel where Ward and Anderson are staying, a scene which is parodied when the local neo-Nazis burn a swastika in front of the home for asylum seekers where Körn and his partner are staying. A member of Bössler's entourage wears a KKK-style hood through much of the film.

During the balance of the film, while Körn attempts to track down the missing Polish family, Bössler and Jablonski continue their campaign of terror against the asylum seekers living in the town of Rassau. The bodies of the Polish family are found and interred in a ceremony officiated by Jablonski and attended by the German Minister of the Interior. Shortly afterward, the asylum seekers, whose costumes, mannerisms and language seem to have been lifted from a catalogue of racist caricatures, prove to be no better than the crooked sheriff and his men, and descend on the town in a mob, raping and assaulting the townspeople.

Körn continues his violent investigation into the activities of the outlaw sheriff, but increasingly sees the gap between himself and the criminals closing. After the funeral for the Polish family, he dons a Nazi uniform. The scene during which this final transition between the lawman and the criminal is staged deserves closer attention for the way in which it situates Schlingensief's project vis a vis the New German Cinema.

"Peter, du bist kein Nazi. Du bist gut. Der Innenminister ist ein Nazi, du nicht," says Carstensen, following Kern, who is dressed in a brown Nazi uniform, down a hallway.

"Ich bin beim BKA, Margret, ich bin ein Nazi!" he insists, pushing past her on his way into the adjoining room.

"Aber Peter, die Nazis sind schlecht. Sie vergessen die Liebe. Sie wollen nur imponieren. Aber wir, wir wollen das Gute! Die Nazis wollten nie das Gute!"

While putting on a beret-style hat, completing his uniform, Körn replies: "Ich bin voller Hass, Margret. Margret, ich bin voller Hass!"

Clad in his Nazi uniform, Kern now pays a visit to Bössler's wife Martina, first winning her over with his rendition of the showtune "Springtime for Hitler," then violently interrogating and sexually assaulting her.

Later, still wearing his Nazi uniform, Körn returns to Margret, who is worried because he has been gone all night. He manhandles her as well, throwing her into a headlock and pushing her up against a wall, exclaiming "jetzt hör mal zu: das gehört zu meinem Programm, das ist meine Methode, verstehst du?" This scene is illustrative of the program or method of Schlingensief's film as well. In its exaggerated cinematic violence devoid of slick Hollywood aesthetics, Schlingensief's film makes simulated murder and rape completely unpalatable. This is not because Schlingensief's staged violence is realistic, but precisely for the opposite reason: its clumsy, amateurish aesthetic allows an audience anaesthetized to screen violence to experience it in a new light.

Furthermore, once he puts on the Nazi uniform, Peter Kern, the actor, is in fact reprising one of his roles from Syberberg's *Hitler* film, a famous sequence in which he

performs the final monologue from Fritz Lang's *M*. while wearing an almost identical uniform. In referencing this role (which in turn references another role), Schlingensief exposes a parallel between the *Verfremdungseffekte* of the New German Cinema and Hollywood's aestheticized violence. Both pursue their own version of a romantic aesthetics characterized by a procedure of homeopathy or immunization. In Syberberg's case, this leads to an endless "elegiac loop" (as Santner suggests [149]) while in the case of *Mississippi Burning*, generic tropes cause any potential historically instructive value of the film to be undermined through a pedagogy of violence which increasingly erases the distinction between the law and criminality.

By the end of *Terror 2000*, much like in *Mississippi Burning*, the difference between perpetrators and policemen is so effaced that the two sides become formally equivalent in their terroristic tactics. In fact, the film ends with Inspector Körn having a hysterical breakdown and ultimately joining the kidnappers in the back of their car as they leave town. This breakdown happens precisely at the same point in the plot in *Terror 2000* as it does in the corresponding scene in *Mississippi Burning*: when the agents visit the female love interest in the hospital. In Schlingensief's version of events, Körn becomes entirely incoherent with rage, screaming and foaming at the mouth as he is pursued by a group of reporters.

Unlike *Mississippi Burning*, *Terror 2000* offers no clear moral standpoint from which the orgy of violence it presents is to be judged. Antje Hoffmann suggests that this moral stasis actually becomes a performative means of offering identification with the standpoint of a victim of terroristic violence. This is because of the extent to which the film can be said to victimize its audience:

> Ein Bild jagt in "Terror 2000" das nächste, und jedes Bild für sich genommen stellt eine Verletzung im körperlichen wie im psychischen Sinne dar. [...] Es ist die Stimme des Titels, die Stimme eines allumfassenden Terrors, die Schlingensief präsentiert. Nichts und niemand bleibt verschont. [...] Es wird geschossen, es wird vergewaltigt, es wird gemetzelt und gefoltert. [...] Bewirkt Bewegung in einem Film normalerweise auch beim Rezipienten Bewegung, so bringt die chaotische Vielfalt der Bewegungen in diesem Film eigentlich eine Beklemmung, einen Zustand des Stillstands, die Bewegungslosigkeit im gerichteten Sinne für den Konsumenten mit sich (242-243).

With this reading, she connects *Terror 2000* to Schlingensief's other works which allegorize the National Socialist past through the metaphor of the wound (243). This metaphor, complete with its concomitant biopolitical packaging, is revisited and recast in Schlingensief's final performance pieces, with the important caveat that what was once a national wound is now (also) a personal one, and the aesthetics of "homeopathy" are no longer pushed to the most radical extent possible, but rather called into question explicitly.

V. Conclusion: the Transformation of National Pathology in Schlingensief's Late Works

In 2008, after Schlingensief was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer afflicting nonsmokers, he began to keep a diary using a voice recorder. His reflections were later published in a book called *So schön wie hier kanns im Himmel gar nicht sein*. Tellingly for my study, he returns in these reflections to the same complex of illness, fascism and art thematized in his work, claiming that he had been "infected" with cancer by Wagner's music at Bayreuth. Strangely enough, his doctors had indeed traced the onset of his cancer to almost exactly the time he had been working on *Parsifal* (Schlingensief 2009, 157-158):

> Ich wollte die Inszenierung so gut machen, dass ich mich von dieser Musik genau auf den Trip habe schicken lassen, den Wagner will. Er selbst war vielleicht abgebrüht genug und hat das abreagieren können. Aber ich glaube inzwischen, dass es sich tatsächlich um Todesmusik handelt, um gefährliche Musik, die nicht das Leben, sondern das Sterben feiert. Das ist Giftzeugs, was Wagner da verspritzt hat. […] [D]a haben die Nazis viel Spaß gehabt, das war genau deren Welt. […] Bayreuth ist wirklich ein Fascho-Laden […] (171).

Here, not only does Schlingensief employ the language of immunity ("abgebrüht," "abreagieren," "gefährlich," "Giftzeugs … verspritzt") but makes an explicit association with fascism and the historical vicissitudes of the Bayreuth festival. The final lines of the opera *Parsifal* also serve as a concise summary of Eric Santner's appraisal of the homeopathic tactics of the New German Cinema (145). Parsifal, returning from his years of wandering, brings with him the spear which Klingsor had stolen from Amfortas and used to stab him.

"Nur eine Waffe taugt," sings Parsifal, holding the spear aloft, "die Wunde schließt der Speer nur, der sie schlug" (Wagner 82).

This metaphor of doubled wounding is congruent with Esposito's description of immunity in *Immunitas.*[120] This aspect of Wagner's music, as a sort of pharmakon in the Derridian sense, is present in Schlingensief's memoir as well. After listening to the overture to *Tristan und Isolde*, he remarks: "Ich merkte gerade, wie gern ich weiterleben würde, auch um diesen 'Tristan' noch zu inszenieren" (163). An opera that is arguably a consummate celebration of death provides the impetus for Schlingensief to wish for a longer life. This aspect of Wagner's music, as both a poison and a cure, goes back to Nietzsche: "Ist Wagner überhaupt ein Mensch? Ist er nicht eher eine Krankheit?"

[120] The relevant passage is as follows. According to the logic of immunization, "[Life's] salvation thus depends on a wound that cannot heal, because the wound is created by life itself" (Esposito 2011 8).

(Nietzsche 21) And later: "Die Krankheit selbst kann ein Stimulans des Lebens sein: nur muss man gesund genug für dieses Stimulans sein" (22).

Later, Schlingensief used quotes from these two Wagner operas to bookend the "ReadyMadeOper" *Mea Culpa*, which premiered at the Burgtheater in Vienna in 2009. A restaging of *Parsifal* begins the opera, and Isolde's *Liebestod* ends it. In the first act, a seemingly contextless interjection by a female actor suggests that the name of the opera (specifically, the part concerning guilt) is connected in some way to the German past. A woman interrupts a character playing Jörg Immendorf's widow, saying:

> Wir Deutschen bekommen deshalb so viele Oskars in Amerika, weil wir in jedem unserer Filme zeigen, dass wir gesündigt haben. Merke also, bekenne deine Schuld, und man wird dich auf Händen tragen. Sag ihnen, dass es dir leid tut, und man wird es dir danken.

This statement is, no doubt, connected both to the New German Cinema and to more recent German films like *Der Untergang* (which was nominated for an Oscar) which stage German guilt. Its presence in a piece which otherwise has little to do with the film industry is puzzling, however, unless we read it alongside the interrogation of the notion of "homeopathy" throughout the opera.

A bit later in the first act, this practice of homeopathic therapy is addressed directly: "Fremdes vernichtet fremdes," sings the Parsifal character, wearing a white doctor's jacket, "durch ähnliches wird ähnliches bekämpft." Then, in a clear textual reference to *Parsifal*: "Das Leiden schließt die Wunde die sie schlug."[121] The context of this part is the experimental treatment with mistletoe that the Schlingensief character is set to undergo in the ayurveda clinic. In this passage immunity is distilled to its very

[121] S.a. Malzacher 195.

essence. Instead of a spear, the wound itself (or, more properly, suffering) is doubled back on itself, uniting poison and cure.

But later in the opera this sort of therapy is called into question. Schlingensief's alter ego stands on the stage in front of a giant model of his tumor. A voice booms over the loudspeaker:

> Wenn der Mensch nicht schafft, in den Krebs hineinzukommen, wird der Krebs den Menschen besiegen.Wenn du es schaffst, in den Krebs hineinzudringen, dann kannst du ihn von innen heraus zerstören. Wenn du es nicht schaffst, dann bleibt der Krebs in dir, und wird dich von innen heraus zerstören. Du bist der Eindringling. Du musst in den Eindringling eindringen um den Eindringling zu besiegen. Du musst zum Krebsgeschwür deines Krebses werden. Dein Krebs muss Krebs bekommen.

A few moments later, the scene changes, and the Schlingensief character (who has literally tried to follow the advice to climb inside his own cancer) climbs out of the model of his tumor and says: "Der Krebs muss Krebs bekommen, sowas kann sich nur jemand ausdenken, der gesund ist. Der Eindringling. Was für ein Quatsch." In mentioning the German name of Jean-Luc Nancy's essay *L'intrus*, Meyerhoff/Schlingensief seems to suggest that the offstage voice has just quoted or paraphrased from Nancy's work. This does not seem to be the case. The most similar passage on cancer in *L'intrus* deals with the inseparability of the self and its cancer, and therefore is diametrically opposed to the sentiment Schlingensief is protesting:

> The *intrus* exposes me, excessively. It extrudes, it exports, it expropriates: I am the illness and the medical intervention, I am the cancerous cell and the grafted organ, I am the immuno-depressive agents and their palliatives, I am the bits of wire that hold together my sternum, and I am this injection site permanently stitched in below my clavicle, just as I was already these screws in my hip and this plate in my groin (13).

Not only that, Nancy is clearing arguing from experience (he writes in the first person throughout the autobiographical essay). Meyerhoff's protest here could perhaps be taken

to be ironic. Whatever its intention, however, this quote points us to the original passage of Nancy's work, suggesting that Schlingensief's confrontation with cancer is the point at which his aesthetics of illness in the (metaphorical) national body overlap with the illness in his real body.

On the aesthetic, and not only personal, level Schlingensief's work seems to define the limit of what can be gained through the homeopathic process of allegorizing the Nazi past. His final works reinscribe this insight into the narrative of his own struggle with cancer. Elfriede Jelinek, in an essay titled "Der Verschwender" included in the Biennale Program, suggests as much in her choice of metaphor. The essay begins with imagery clearly associating his appropriative aesthetics and his illness:

> Etwas hat auf diesen Menschen, auf Christoph Schlingensief, eingewirkt, daß er alles, was er aufgenommen hat, förmlich von sich geschleudert hat, seine guten Gaben alle freigegeben hat, daher kommt das Wort freigiebig. [...] Wie im Fieber alles hereinlassen, auch die bösen Keime, alles, alles willkommen war dem Christoph, denn es sollte ja dazu dienen, etwas draus zu machen und es, mit seinen Freunden, Mitarbeitern, Mitarbeiterinnen, dann wieder zu uns hinüberzulenken (237).

By the end of this short essay, Schlingensief's artistic personality has been hypostatized into life itself: "[u]nd am Ende war er das Leben selbst, und das Leben wurde zu ihm, buchstäblich in ihm verwandelt; er konnte sich in seiner Arbeit dem Leben gleichsetzen […]" (ibid.).

This essay echoes other critical tropes on Schlingensief, which already suggest that he is not to be associated with an avantgarde set to negate, but is more properly thought of as an artist of hyperbolic affirmation. His many borrowings from negative or more cynical artists are recycled in an endless stream of affirmation which is by turns shocking, amusing, banal and even offensive. Johannes Hoff, writing in the Biennale

program, argues that while Schlingensief's comments on Wagner's music strongly recall similar quotations by Nietzsche (see my discussion above), Schlingensief's work is however one of radical affirmation, not of negativity:

> Christoph Schlingensief war das glückliche Gegenstück zum unglücklichen Bewusstsein Friedrich Nietzsches. Er scheute weder das „Glück des Nehmenden" noch war sein Denken durch die Dialektik des Nein-Sagens infiziert. [...] Die Schlingensief'sche Kunst spricht eine andere Sprache. Es gibt in ihr keine Löschtaste, kein Nein – das hat sie mit der Sprache Gottes und der Sprache des Traums gemeinsam. Und aus diesem Grund wäre er niemals auf die Idee gekommen, die betörende Musik Richard Wagners mit einem „contra" zu erwidern (223).

Reading his cinema in terms of this same indiscriminate affirmation, it becomes clear that by radically affirming the artistic "homeopathy" of filmmakers like Syberberg, Schlingensief short-circuits the "elegiac loop" that Eric Santner bemoans at the end of his study, i.e., the art that continuously and mechanistically allegorizes German guilt, finally falling back into melancholy. Schlingensief, far from being a proponent of revisionist history or arguing for the "normalization" of the German past, instead suggests that many post '68 attempts at coming to terms with the past instead served the opposite purpose of wallowing in parental guilt. To put it in other terms: the self-defeating "autoimmunity" of the New German Cinema and other works by the 68ers is replaced by a kind of "co-immunity." This "co-immunity" for Schlingensief, means existing with the past, not trying to expel it, immunize against it or overcome it. In an interview with Thomas David published in the program accompanying the performance of *Via Intolleranza II,* the last piece that Schlingensief was able to work on, he further ties the need to protect oneself from every eventuality to the German (or first-world) character:

> Hier bei uns haben wir uns ja in ein Nest begeben, in dem wir eine Lebensversicherung, eine Laptop- und eine Hundeversicherung brauchen, um angstfrei Brötchen kaufen zu können, und aufs Spiel setzen wir das allenfalls für

> drei Wochen mit einer Rundum-sorglos-Versicherung für den Urlaub. Aber die Menschen in unseren Industrieländern leiden natürlich höllisch darunter, dass sie eigentlich schon gar nicht mehr da sind und das Leben vor lauter Versicherung kaum noch spüren, und wenn ein derart beschädigter Mensch dann nach Afrika reist, um dort zu erklären, wie es läuft, nimmt das groteske Ausmasse an (Schlingensief interviewed by Thomas David) [Swiss spelling of the original preserved here].

Still, *Mea Culpa* demonstrates the paradox that this radical openness – the seeming rejection of the immunitary principle of self/other distinction as evidenced, for example, in the quote from Jean-Luc Nancy above – in Schlingensief's case still retains a strongly narcissistic flavor. The final words of *Mea Culpa*, spoken by a character who has been variously introduced as the philosopher Rüdiger Safranski and a film or opera director, are as follows: "Alles was ich am anderen liebe, bin ich selbst. Ich liebe mich im anderen, ich erkenne mich selbst im anderen. Wir sind eins! Tschüss!"

When it comes to the German past, however, Schlingensief's work seems to remain within the realm of what we could call "co-immunity."[122] Schlingensief built a telling illustration of this phenomenon into his design for the memorial event in his honor, "Gedenken 3000," held at the Volksbühne in October 2010, which I attended. Upon entering the foyer of the Volksbühne visitors were greeted by what Schlingensief in his sketches for the installation had termed his "Valhalla": a row of photographs on wooden stands. Among Schlingensief's gallery, besides Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Richard Wagner, Josef Beuys and Alfred Edel, was a portrait of Adolf Hitler. This was a

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[122] In the above-mentioned interview with Thomas David, Schlingensief calls his confrontation with Nazism the "Urstoff" of his art:

> Meine besten Filme spielen in einem Bunker, einem Lager oder einem dunklen Mischmasch zwischen zerstrittenen Vorstehern von Grossfamilien und dem Dritten Reich. Das ist quasi der Urstoff meiner Arbeit, seit ich im Kinderzimmerchen nachts über Drehbüchern brütete. Kam ich mit einer Geschichte nicht weiter, habe ich sie in ein Lager oder ein Gefängnis verlegt, was zu einer enormen Konzentration führte und zur Reduktion auf die zentralen Fragen: „Was mache ich hier in meiner Zelle? Wie kann ich mich mitteilen? Wie komme ich hier raus?" Ich muss inzwischen aber nicht mehr jeden Raum mit den Namen „Drittes Reich" oder „Hitler" versehen [Swiss spelling from original preserved here].

final provocation to be sure, but also represents a break with the "autoimmunity" or "elegiac loop" of discourses of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the New German Cinema.

Chapter 3. Jelinek's "Parasitärdrama"

I. Introduction

I turn now to the final artist in my study, the Nobel prize-winning Austrian author and dramatist Elfriede Jelinek. Perhaps to an even greater extent than Bernhard or Schlingensief, Jelinek's work has been devoted to pushing the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust into the center of cultural life in Austria and Germany. Like the other two artists in my study, she has been both lauded and vilified for these attempts. Jelinek carefully cultivates a media image and persona through interviews, select public appearances, photographs and a web presence. In fact, her medial image has become such an integral part of her reception that directors such as Frank Castorf and Thriza Brunken have used photos or other representations of Jelinek in their stage productions of her works (Dürbeck 199, Naqvi "Post-Dramatic Stress Disorder" 92). This medial role has been the product of a calculated strategy of intervention on the author's own part as well as of oppositional media outlets and conservative politicians. It is, in other words, in many ways a relationship of reciprocal provocation.

The controversy surrounding Jelinek's strident denunciations of Austria reached its initial climax (prior to her Nobel Prize in 2004) in the mid- to late 1990s when she was the target of a campaign by the rightwing Freiheitspartei Österreich (led at the time by the notorious politician Jörg Haider) and the populist newspaper *Die Neue Kronenzeitung*, which had also propagated the *Heldenplatz* scandal in 1988.[123] This attention, which earned her the sobriquet of "Nestbeschmutzerin," has colored reception of her work in other countries ever since.[124] Well before Jelinek's Nobel Prize, Katrin Sieg claimed that

[123] For a partial description of these media campaigns, see El Raife 331.
[124] See Pia Janke, *Die Nestbeschmutzerin. Jelinek und Österreich* (2002).

Jelinek was "probably the best known feminist writer in the German language today" (Sieg 1994 147). Jelinek's fame within the German-speaking world reached such a level that "Jelinek fatigue" began to set in after the apex of her conflict with the FPÖ in the late 1990s.[125]

However, while interest in Jelinek's *prose* has most likely plateaued in the German-speaking world, her influence in the German-language *theater* scene seems to have grown in the years since the Nobel Prize. At the time of this writing, she has been chosen as the dramatist of the year ("Dramatikerin des Jahres") four times by jury of the Mülheimer Theatertage, most recently in 2011. Her pieces have been performed at the Berliner Theatertreffen (which invites only ten productions in all of Germany annually) several times in the past decade. It seems that Jelinek's work is as current as ever on German stages.

Furthermore, if her work was at first ignored in her homeland of Austria, it has now been institutionalized (at least in an academic context) to an extent that exceeds the cultural appropriation of Bernhard that I discussed in the first chapter.[126] The Office of the Austrian Bundeskanzler now funds the "Elfriede Jelinek Forschungszentrum," led by Professor Pia Janke, who has overseen two large bibliographies on Jelinek's work (one on secondary literature in general and one on the controversy surrounding Jelinek's receipt of the Nobel Prize), several collections of conference proceedings and essays, and a Jelinek-related online wiki called "JeliNetz," devoted to scholarly exchange on

[125] See Naqvi "Post-Dramatic Stress Disorder", who quotes Isolde Schaad asking already in 1999 "Jelinek lesen? Um Himmels willen, wer liest denn noch Jelinek?" (76).
[126] While Jelinek did indeed labor in relative obscurity for many years, her renown as a writer in her home country dates back to the early 1980s (Rosellini 48-49).

Jelinek's work.[127] It would be hard to find more than a handful of examples of other authors who have been subjected to such extensive institutionalization and integration into the apparatus of academic inquiry during their lifetimes.

All of this demonstrates that, like Bernhard and Schlingensief, Jelinek has gone from being a marginalized critic of mainstream culture to having an established place within it. Like them, she has struggled to continue to articulate her critical message from what is arguably a central (and highly-regarded) position in Austrian high culture. She faces the challenge of how to continue to unsettle a culture that now applauds her criticism.

This chapter will read Jelinek's 2011 essay, "Das Parasitärdrama" (first published in *Theater Heute*) both as a dramatized formulation and performance of Jelink's dilemma as an "internal outsider" within the Austrian high-culture scene. "Das Parasitärdrama" is appropriate to the concerns of this dissertation because, though it is a poetological essay that draws on Jelinek's previous ideas about the theater and gender, it also ties her work explicitly to the legacy of fascist biopolitics. In the essay, Jelinek directly invokes the most recognizable visual tropes of the Nazi extermination camps, appropriating the biopolitical metaphor of the Jewish "parasite" or "Schmarotzer" from National Socialist propaganda for her own role as artistic gadfly. The essay develops a poetics of the parasite that connects Jelinek's aesthetic strategy of media montage with her project of unsettling the biopolitical metaphors of health and wholeness that underlie the construction of Austrian nationalism. Through embracing the "parasitic" role ascribed to

[127] See Janke 2002, 2004 and 2005, and "JeliNetz": http://www.univie.ac.at/jelinetz/index.php?title=Hauptseite.

her by critics, Jelinek both rearticulates the political project behind her "pathographic" style and shows the limits of this same "parasitic" aesthetic.

II. Fractal relations: contemporary and historical contexts for "Das Parasitärdrama"

Jelinek's essay, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section, is a direct response to a set of scholarly and critical discourses surrounding her work, all of which are characterized by the observation (or, frequently, the complaint) that her writing, especially the dramas, always respond to something outside themselves and therefore cannot be understood without knowledge of the events or discourses they refer to. In "Das Parasitärdrama," Jelinek simultaneously concedes and rebuts these criticisms by making a powerful argument for the necessity of her "parasitic" style, formulated in this style itself. "Das Parasitärdrama," is a work-immanent poetics that is parasitic on the context to which it responds. This means that, like theatergoers watching one of Jelinek's plays, in order to understand Jelinek's recursive, performative response to objections about her writing, a scholarly reader of "Das Parasitärdrama" must have knowledge of the context from which these objections originate, a context which the essay itself does not provide. "Das Parasitärdrama" positions the reader within the parasitic field of "fractal relations" between texts and contexts that Michel Serres describes in his study of the parasite (see Introduction). This is why, before reading Jelinek's text proper, I will briefly describe a few of these contexts. They include Jelinek's previous work, scholarly discourses on Jelinek's texts, the anti-Semitic metaphor of the "Jewish parasite," and the origins of the term "parasite" in classical theater.

a. Scholarly and journalistic contexts

Scholarly and journalistic readings of Jelinek's texts form the first set of contexts to which "Das Parasitärdrama" responds. In 2005, one member of the Nobel Committee, Knut Ahnlund, stepped down in a belated protest against the choice of Jelinek's work the previous year. His polemic against Jelinek's work (which the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published in unabridged German translation) offers the ostensible explanation for his resignation:

> Doch hat der Nobelpreis 2004 für Elfriede Jelinek den Wert dieser Auszeichnung auf absehbare Zeit zerstört. Denn hierbei handelt es sich um ein monomanisches, äußerst schmal angelegtes Werk, um eine Textmasse, die ohne einen Ansatz zu künstlerischer Struktur aufgehäuft wurde. *Der parasitäre Charakter dieses Werkes ist offenbar* [my italics] (Ahnlund).[128]

Ahnlund's critique shows him to be an astute reader of Jelinek's work in the sense that he has apprehended the way in which her prose expertly imitates the linguistic register of the media. What he does not appreciate, however, is the value of placing this medial language under scrutiny by reframing it in a literary or theatrical context. Instead, he claims, Jelinek's texts merely feed off, and thereby reproduce, this misanthropic discourse:

> [Jelineks Werk] ist überlastet von den Früchten des Fernsehens und des Internet, durchzogen von einer fauligen Mischung aus Abscheu und Faszination. [...] Jelineks Nobel-Vorlesung trug zwar den Titel „Im Abseits", doch war der Titel unzutreffend. Dass sie im Abseits arbeite, geht auf eine Sinnestäuschung zurück.

[128] Though Ahnlund's use of this term is the most striking because of his position on the Nobel Committee, "parasitic" has also been applied to Jelinek's work in other contexts, for example, in the article "'One must have tradition in oneself in order to hate it properly': Elfriede Jelinek's Musicality," by Larson Powell and Brenda Bethman: "The passage [from *Lust*] lives parasitically off of various theological and poetic topoi [...]" (166). The context here, as in the Ahnlund quote, is Jelinek's reliance on other texts for her source material, but the tone of the article is certainly less polemical.

> Tatsächlich hält sie sich im Hauptstrom der Unterhaltung auf, in einem Genre, das sich immer mehr ausbreitet: in den „reality shows“ des persönlichen Unglücks und des privaten Streits. Jelineks Kritik an menschlichen und männlichen Unarten ist ein wunderlicher Zwitter. Die Satire, von der es heißt, sie sei ihre Waffe und ihr Anliegen, hebt sich selbst auf und wird zu einer Nachahmung dessen, was sie zu verhöhnen angibt. Ganze Bücher von ihr gibt es, die als gleichzeitig verlockender wie abstoßender Gewaltporno angelegt sind (ibid.).

Ahnlund has identified an aesthetic procedure similar to the notion of artistic homeopathy, which I discussed in the introduction and first two chapters of this dissertation. It is a type of writing that channels another medial discourse, exaggerating it and recoding it as literature for the purpose of turning it against itself. But Ahnlund seems to forget the specificity of the literary medium, the implied subjunctive mode accompanying all literary texts which distinguishes their discourse from the reality claims of the news media. His stance also requires further scrutiny insofar as it treats matters of literary reference as settled. But his strong reaction illustrates the dangers inherent in Jelinek's practice of literary homeopathy: instead of being received as critical, her texts run the risk of being taken to affirm or even amplify the most objectionable aspects of mainstream discourse. Like Thomas Bernhard, who was suspected of harboring the same cryptofascist views he condemned (see my account of comparisons between Bernhard, Jörg Haider and Adolf Hitler in the first chapter), Jelinek is accused of spreading the misogynistic, xenophobic content of everyday language that her texts set out to scrutinize. This has been remarked on by scholars as well as critics like Ahnlund. Elisabeth El Raife, writing before both Ahnlund's comments in 2004, summarizes this quality of Jelinek's dramatic writing as follows:

> Jelinek's plays thus operate as a sort of literary mimicry, which retains the form of the original text, but manipulates either the subject matter, the context, or elements of the language, thereby bringing aspects of the original which may have

> otherwise gone unnoticed into the foreground. In order for this strategy to work fully, in order for the relationship between old and new to to cause amusement or estrangement, the original texts must be recognisable to members of the audience. However, the sources from which Jelinek quotes are generally not acknowledged in her plays, and her intertextual references are also obscured by the fact that the original texts are often modified to the point where they are almost unrecognisable. As time passes and the boundaries between the original texts and the manipulated versions quoted in Jelinek's plays become increasingly blurred, the risk of audiences misunderstanding her intentions is likely to be further increased (340).

This echoes an earlier formulation by Erika Swales (writing about *Die Klavierspielerin* in 2000):

> But precisely this compositional mode [which acknowledges the dependency of the literary text on other capitalist culture products] (one thinks, for example, of *Die Liebhaberinnen*) proves tantalizingly ambiguous: its aim is of course that of critical exposure, but in its sheer aggressiveness it comes close to replicating the grip of the control system it sets out to criticize. In particular, the hard-hitting rhetoric can be said to overlap all too closely with the slogans and soundbytes of capitalist culture. In this sense, Jelinek's work exemplifies the familiar complexities of critically inflected mimicry. Furthermore, her ironically fractured intertexting, which since *Die Ausgesperrten* has become such a prominent feature, entails another set of contradictions. For this technique is grounded in, and expects from the reader, a considerable degree of 'Bildung'. *Lust*, for example, and above all *Wolken.Heim* are in fact dependent on that high-bourgeois culture whose institutions and mechanisms Jelinek regularly debunks" (438).[129]

All of this shows that while Ahnlund's critique of Jelinek is (arguably) a misunderstanding of Jelinek's program and the status of literary discourse, it is in many ways not a unique reading of Jelinek's work. Ahnlund's concerns about the "purity" of Jelinek's literary discourse are on a deeper level doubts about the ontological status of her works as "works" – that is, as aesthetic objects demarcated within the discourses of

[129] Matthias Konzett has analyzed this aesthetic as that of a "post-ideological" artist, who refuses to exclude herself from the critique she levels at society (Konzett 2001 98). He ties this practice to Jelinek's refusal to take on the politically correct role of the sentimentalized Jewish victim: "she instead dons the mask of the stereotype in order to deflect it back at its perpetrators," he writes (ibid.). In a similar assessment, Fatima Naqvi suggests that Jelinek does embrace a sort of victimhood by, paradoxically, aping the position of the victimizer. In Naqvi's account, Jelinek uses her authorial voice within her postdramatic texts as an "authoritarian" presence, employing the "public, victimized self" of the author to draw the audience's attention to the victimization inherent in everyday language ("Post-Dramatic Stress Disorder" 91-95).

"literature" or "theater." While performances of Jelinek's works (in theatrical venues) and publications of her texts (in established literary publishing houses) clearly mark her texts as "literary," her writing, because of its "parasitic" dependence on events outside the autonomous space described by modern art, seems to trouble the notion of the independent work.[130]

This is especially true, moreover, in Jelinek's recent "postdramatic" works, beginning with *Wolken.Heim*, which take the form slabs of text without indication of stage directions or dramatic figures. *Wolken.Heim* is a prototypically "parasitic" piece, made up solely of modified and juxtaposed quotations from the classical and modern literary canon (Kleist, Hölderlin, Celan and Benjamin) and prison letters from the Red Army Faction.[131]

In her reading of *Wolken.Heim* (1990), Evelyn Annuß describes how Jelinek has replaced the pronoun "ich" with the collective pronoun "wir" in the collage of quotations that make up the text of the play. Annuß's reading of Jelinek's textual procedure is connected to Serres' construction of the parasite through the way in which it ostensibly questions the rhetorical mode of prosopopoeia:

> Rhetorisch wird diesem Wir permanent seine Figurierbarkeit und Verortbarkeit verweigert [...]. Als Vertreter der einen Kollektivstimme, die den Sinn des Textes verbürgt, lässt sich das heterophone Wir nicht dingfest machen. Und genau darin besteht die Kunst der Rede in *Wolken.Heim*. Ihr kann kein Bild von ihrem Ursprung und damit kein Gesicht der Verständlichkeit zugeschrieben werden.

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[130] This troubling of the "work" must of course be understood in light of Jelinek's continuous critique of gender relations. See, for example, the 1997 conversation between Jelinek and Marlene Streeruwitz about their respective writing styles:

> Streeruwitz: „Das Problem ist, dass es keinen Werk-Begriff gibt für das, was Frauen machen. Wir müssen doch mit jedem einzelnen Werk erneut den Beweis vorlegen, während Männern gegenüber die Kontinuität ihres Schaffens im Vordergrund steht und von Werk zu Werk Wirkung aufgebaut werden kann. Bleiben wir nicht in Erinnerung?"
> Jelinek: „Eine Frau darf kein Werk haben" (Jelinek and Streeruwitz 1997).

[131] For a thorough analysis of all sources for *Wolken.Heim* and the way they were modified by Jelinek, see Annuß 139-249.

> Jelineks Wir ist die Potenz der Prosopopoiia, auch Kollektiva ein Gesicht zu verleihen, genommen (139).

Annuß has suggested that this unsettling of the reference "ich" is a general strategy that Jelinek deploys in her texts:

> Ob poetologischer Essay, Prosatext oder Theaterstück, -- [Jelineks] Zitierpraxis widersetzt sich der Illusion einer absoluten Gegenwärtigkeit des Sprechens. [...] [Jelineks Figuren] zeugen vom performativen Mechanismus der Prosopopoiia: der Gedankenfigur, durch die wir einen Text im Akt des Verstehens einer Person zuschreiben, diese also in unserem Sinn erfinden. [...] [Jelineks Verfahren] enthüllt den Inszenierungscharakter und die referenzielle Produktivität dieser rhetorischen Operation (ibid. 11-12).

However, Annuß' analysis seems to make Jelinek assume a positionless position, a "classic" poststructural point of view from which her prose can question the performative rhetoric of prosopopoeia without performing this same rhetorical function itself. It seems to suggest that there can be literature without reference, pronouns without the performative function of prosopopoeia. And yet *Wolken.Heim*, like all of Jelinek's texts, bears the easily distinguishable marks of her style. This literary marking means that the prosopopoeic function of the text is not completely effaced, as Annuß suggests, rather shifted onto another level: instead of indicating a speaking subject which the reader constructs, it marks the text as a literary creation of a specific author.[132]

The example of *Wolken.Heim* demonstrates that the generic and prosopopoeically produced linguistic purity which Jelinek's texts undermine on a *rhetorical* level are always intertwined with imaginations of *national* purity.[133] Through refusing to offer an

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[132] S.a. Naqvi ("Post-Dramatic Stress Disorder"), who argues that Jelinek's postdramatic theater (and the postdramatic theater in general) uses the crisis in identification it inaugurates in the actors and audience to shore up authorial authority (91).

[133] S.a. Annuß 139-249. In a similar vein, Matthias Konzett has worked out how Jelinek's play *Totenauberg* challenges the implicitly biopolitical notions of "*Gesundheit* and *Unversehrtheit*" [italics in original] (Konzett 2000 109).

intact, whole (and thereby "healthy") and generically coherent work which readers like Ahnlund seem to expect, Jelinek rearticulates her explicit attacks on the Austrian nation on a formal level.

Indeed, scholars have often argued that Jelinek's writing takes the form of a "pathography" which counters dominant discourses on the healthy nation with figures of a diseased nation.[134] In Mathias Konzett's preface to *Elfriede Jelinek. Writing Woman, Nation and Identity* (edited with Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger) "symptom" and its adjectival equivalent "symptomatic" themselves become symptomatic for a reading in the "pathographic" tradition of Jelinek interpretation:

> This volume of essays is an attempt to provide much needed information for the international reader to understand the *symptomatic* cultural landscape in which Elfriede Jelinek's works are staged. [...] [Jelinek's] *symptomatic* language of site and cultural geography invites transnational comparison regarding the construction of culture [...] [italics mine]"(7).

These two uses are followed by the section heading "International Significance and the Symptomatic Role of Austria." In this preliminary exposition, Konzett casts both the "cultural landscape" of Austria and Jelinek's writing as symptomatic. Since Jelinek's writing is no doubt a part of this "cultural landscape," this description seems to fold her writing back into this landscape, blurring the analytic distinction between the two (ibid.).

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[134] This notion of "pathography" can be compared to the "pathographic approach" which Alfred Pfabigen believes characterizes one strain of scholarly writing on Bernhard (see my discussion in Chapter 1). The difference is that the readings that Pfabigen criticizes all deal with Bernhard's personal illness. This is true for some extent in Jelinek's case as well insofar as she is also often seen as a "pathological" writer due to her agoraphobia and portrayal of troubled interpersonal relationships. These relationships are then frequently read back onto Jelinek's personal life, specifically the author's childhood as a gifted music student, her struggles with mental illness and her tumultuous relationship with her mother. Erika Swales, for example, devotes an article to the notion of pathography in *Die Klavierspielerin*, opposing it to "metaphorical sophistication" and arguing that *Die Klavierspielerin* is a perplexing mixture of both: "the novel both posits and relativizes itself as merciless pathography, it both validates and disparages itself as art" (448).

Jelinek's view of Austrian society is not simply "diagnostic," argues Konzett, his word choice unconsciously echoing the appraisals of Bernhard's cultural function as "oncologist" or "surgeon" in the popular press that I detailed in the Bernhard chapter (and indeed, prefiguring Christoph Schlingensief's stylization by journalists as a "pathologist"). Rather, her prose indulges in the Lacanian jouissance that Austria's pathological symptoms provide (Konzett and Lamb-Faffelberger 8). In this view of Jelinek's prose, Konzett, argues, "hyperbole rules and brings comic relief to the forces of repression that sustain the symptom as a camouflage of illness. The illness is finally allowed to resurface as illness" (9). Instead of the dubious aim of national "health," Jelinek's treatment "no longer attempts to cure the symptom but instead grants it a new life in a talking cure with no therapeutic end in sight" (11). In other words, Jelinek's writing functions along a similar "homeopathic" trajectory as Bernhard's writing, and as the claims that Schlingensief makes for his cinematic works: not as a discourse that attempts to treat an "illness" but as one which causes it to manifest itself.

There are shades of this "homeopathy" in other accounts of Jelinek's work as well, for example, in Marlene Streeruwitz's essay on Jelinek's 1996 play *Stecken, Stab, und Stangl*.[135] According to Streeruwitz, in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl*, "[d]as

[135] *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* is Jelinek's vicious theatrical satire of the Austrian media's coverage of the racially-motivated murder of four Roma men. In the wake of a bombing that took the lives of four so-called "Gastarbeiter," in which the perpetrator left a message calling for the Roma to leave Austria, some members of the right-wing Austrian political establishment brushed aside the possibility that the murders could have been the work of home-grown extremists (as was later shown to have been the case), and suggested instead that the men who were killed had been part of the drug scene and had therefore in some sense deserved their fate. Around the same time, the columnist "Staberl" from the *Kronenzeitung* (Richard Nimmerrichter, who had also written incendiary columns during the *Heldenplatz* scandal), ran columns suggesting that the existence of gas chambers at concentration camps was still an open question. This complex of toxic nationalism and historical amnesia fueled Jelinek's writing of the play. Her text is a skillful parody of the Austrian television media's hypocritical discourse of mourning interwoven with revisionist statements from right-wing newspaper columnists (like Staberl) on the Holocaust and diary entries by Fritz Stangl, the Austrian commandant of Treblinka and Sobibor, intermingled with quotes from

Krankheitsbild wird von der Ansteckung bis zum Tod durch Behandlung mit allen Symptomen geliefert" (260). Moreover, according to Streeruwitz, the play's exposure of the illness of Austrian society itself has an infectious quality in performance not unlike what Fischer-Lichte describes her article "Zuschauen als Ansteckung" which I dealt with at length in my discussion of *Heldenplatz* in Chapter 1. Her choice of imagery is congruent with the imbrication of illness, the memory of fascism and theater aesthetics that will concern me in this chapter.[136]

b. The "Jewish parasite"

It is this complex of nation and illness which forms the next set of contexts necessary for reading "Das Parasitärdrama": discourses of German and European anti-Semitism. Because of Jelinek's Jewish ancestry on her father's side (which she often mentions as an important influence on her biting wit and interest in the criticism of language), the title of "Das Parasitärdrama" arguably alludes to the notion of the "Jewish parasite," which has a long and unsavory history in German-speaking lands. The origin of this metaphor in the German language may be traceable to Johann Gottfried Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ward 56). In a section of this work titled "Hebräer," Herder describes both the history of the Jewish people as related by the Hebrew Scriptures and the Jewish influence on the European project of

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Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan. For more general background on this play and the series of incidents it responds to, see Riegler (267-269), Carp's interview with Jelinek, and Rosellini 105.

[136] Barbara Kosta also reads Jelinek's "deconstruction" of the concept of national identity in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* in biological terms. She points out that the word "Stecken," besides designating an object, shares a root with "verstecken" (to hide), but also "anstecken" which can mean both "to ignite" (as in the bomb that killed the four Romani men) or "infect" (88). Kosta does not develop the notion of "infection" thematically the way that Streeruwitz does. However, she does argue that the play stages the expulsion of the Roma victims' bodies from the Austrian nation like a "disease" or waste, tying this movement within the play to Kristeva's notion of the "abject" (92-93).

Enlightenment (68). Herder believes the Hebrew Scriptures have had both positive and negative effects on European culture. The positive effects include the doctrine of monotheism, a notion of recorded history (however flawed the chronology may be) and the scholarly virtures of "Sprachfleiß," "Auslegungskunst" and "Dialektik" (68-69). The negative effects include the perpetuation of mistaken ideas about historical events such as the Great Flood, and incorrect scientific models for the solar system (69). Finally, according to Herder, the universal quality ascribed to Mosaic Law by the people of Europe also inhibited the creation of systems of law more appropriate to the individual Christian nations of Europe. In describing this effect, Herder writes:

> So grenzet das erlesenste Gute durch eine vielfach falsche Anwendung an mancherlei Übel; denn können nicht auch die heiligen Elemente der Natur zur Zerstörung und die wirksamsten Arzneien zu einem schleichenden Gift werden? (70)

This metaphor, which employs familiar medical imagery of homeopathy or immunization, prefigures the notion of the "Jewish parasite" to which Jelinek's essay alludes. Herder continues with a discussion of the tenacity of Jewish identity in the face of persecution by Europeans, noting, however (in contradistinction to paranoid anti-Semitic theories), that there is no "superstitious" conclusion to be drawn from this fact, which is, after all, no more extraordinary than the persistence of the group identity of Parsis, Brahmins or Gypsies (71). His final sentence in this section seeks to capture this property in a botanical metaphor:

> Das Volk Gottes, dem einst der Himmel selbst sein Vaterland schenkte, ist Jahrtausende her, ja fast seit seiner Entstehung *eine parasitische Pflanze* auf den Stämmen andrer Nationen, ein Geschlecht schlauer Unterhändler beinah auf der ganzen Erde, das trotz aller Unterdrückung nirgend sich nach eigner Ehre und Wohnung, nirgend nach einem Vaterlande sehnet [italics mine] (72).

Herder's image plays on the literal meaning of "Stamm" as "trunk." In his account, the Jewish people become a type of rootless plant clinging to the "tree" of other nations.

Though Herder's metaphor is not racialized, it was adapted and transformed by later anti-Semitic discourses.[137] In the racial iteration of European anti-Semitism, which began roughly in the mid-nineteenth century and culminated in the Holocaust, metaphors of pestilence and contagion were commonly used to describe Jews.[138] In Germany, this practice can be found in writings from the Kaiserreich up to the infamous Nazi propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (Benz 18)[139], but the most infamous expression of this trope is found in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*:

> Bei den Juden hingegen ist diese Einstellung [zur Arbeit] überhaupt nicht vorhanden; er war deshalb auch kein Nomade, sondern immer nur Parasit im Körper anderer Völker. Daß er dabei manchmal seinen bisherigen Lebensraum verläßt, hängt nicht mit seiner Absicht zusammen, sondern ist das Ergebnis des Hinauswurfes, den er von Zeit zu Zeit durch die mißbrauchten Gastvölker erfährt. Sein Sich-Weiterverbreiten aber ist eine typische Erscheinung für alle Parasiten; er sucht immer neuen Nährboden für seine Rasse.
>
> [...] Sein Ausdehnen auf immer neue Länder erfolgt erst in dem Augenblick, in dem dort gewisse Bedingungen für sein Dasein gegeben sind, ohne daß er dadurch – wie der Nomade – seinen bisherigen Wohnsitz verändern würde. Er ist und bleibt der ewige Parasit, ein Schmarotzer, der wie ein schädlicher Bazillus sich immer mehr ausbreitet, sowie nur ein günstiger Nährboden dazu einlädt. Die Wirkung seines Daseins aber gleicht ebenfalls der von Schmarotzern: wo er auftritt, stirbt das Wirtsvolk nach kürzerer oder längerer Zeit ab (334).[140]

This metaphor relies, of course, on the notion of an otherwise intact or healthy biological collective of Germans (or "Aryans") who provided the "host" for foreign parasites. While Jelinek's writing has often challenged this imaginary "healthy" nation (see the discussion

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[137] S.a. Ward 56.
[138] See for example, Jürgen Bernatsky's discussion of Nazi propaganda posters: "Die durch das Plakat vermittelte Nachricht lautet demnach: Der Jude ist ein Parasit, Bazillus bzw. Virus, der für sein Wirtsvolk den Tod bedeutet" (394).
[139] Benz also mentions that the trope of Jews as "Parasitenvölker" is employed in the film *Der ewige Jude* (154).
[140] S.a. Ward 58.

of Konzett above), "Das Parasitärdrama" appropriates the anti-Semitic trope of the parasite in an unsettlingly direct fashion. In doing so, Jelinek both radicalizes her practice of (national, not personal) "pathography" and points to the traces of the biopolitical imaginary that adhere to contemporary medial discourse.[141]

c. The theatrical parasite

Finally, given the noxious history of the metaphor of the "parasite" in the service of eliminationist anti-Semitism, it would be easy to overlook the fact that the term itself did not originate in the realm of biology or racial biopolitics, but actually in the realm into which Jelinek reinscribes it in "Das Parasitärdrama": the theater. The Greek etymology of the term "parasite," like the second part of the compound title ("drama") already hints at such a connection to classical tradition. Indeed, despite the contention of the opening sentence of Jelinek's essay, which I will discuss in more detail below ("jetzt erfinde ich auch meinetwegen das Parasitärdrama"), the "parasite" as a theatrical figure has a long history in dramatic literature, or, more accurately, *comedic* literature (Damon 2-3). This tradition stretches back not only to Molière, whose titular character from *Tartuffe* is the paradigmatic comic parasite (as Serres' text reminds us), but to the most ancient texts of Western theater.

Matthias J. Pernerstorfer's article "Prolegomena zu einer Kulturgeschichte des Parasiten in der griechisch-römischen Komödie" sketches the history of this term in ancient times. The character type parasite or *parasitos* (meaning literally "beside the table") originated in Greek religion. Parasites were representatives of their respective

[141] Sigrid Berka suggests that the use of the metaphor of the vampire and the concern with blood also links *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* to this passage of *Mein Kampf* (382).

demos or polis who were permitted to participate in the feasts of the gods (100). Honored people who ate at the expense of the cult were also referred to as parasites.

In time, the "parasite" became a familiar figure on the stage as well. The term came to designate, in Pernerstorfer's account, an "arm[er] Schlucker" who arrived unannounced at the table of a rich man and traded stories for food and drink (103). This social transaction was still sanctioned under the rules of hospitality in ancient Greece (ibid.). Indeed, the parasite's lifestyle was seen as ideal: he could enjoy the fruits of wealth without its responsibilities (108).[142]

Pernerstorfer also emphasizes the dependent position of the comedic parasite, indicated by the prefix "para-," which always relates the parasite to something or someone else. The dramatic function of the parasite came to be analogous to the "Intrigensklave," a slave who helped his master in amorous matters through stealth and subterfuge (106). In the theatrical tradition, the parasite rose in importance as the love story took a central place within the plot of the comedy. He became not only a servant but also a friend. Nevertheless, the parasite always retained his position of dependence (103).

But when Greek theater came to Rome, the positive connotations of the term "parasite" fell victim to the process of cultural translation.[143] Roman society had no provision for uninvited (yet entertaining or helpful) guests in its system of hospitality, so the image of the "ideal" parasite was not adopted (114). Instead, "parasite" came to mean simply jester or joker ("Spaßmacher") outside of its explicitly theatrical context (115).[144]

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[142] For an exhaustive taxonomy of the characteristic attributes of the parasite, both in Lucian and earlier authors, see the study by Nesselrath.
[143] S.a. Damon 2-3.
[144] Michel Serres draws a connection between the playing card "joker" as a "wild" card and the notion of the parasite as a "blank" signifier which is nevertheless a catalyst. As far as I can tell, he never makes the connection to the meaning of "parasite" purely as "jester" in ancient Rome (213-214).

The term retained its positive connotations within the theater profession, where actors and theater workers came to designate themselves as "parasiti apollinis," thus connecting their trade to the cultic origins of the term (ibid.).

Pernstorfer's cultural history demonstrates that Jelinek's neologism "Parasitärdrama" is less an appropriation of a biologistic term to the stage than a return to the origins of the term which originated in the theater and found its way into biological discourse. This recourse to earlier meanings of the term carries important distinctions of course. Jelinek's essay, though a reaction to contemporary critical appraisals of her work, nonetheless partakes in an ancient tradition, and is intimately connected to theater aesthetics as well as Austrian history and identity.

III. "Das Parasitärdrama": a reading.

This brief foray into the historical, cultural and metaphoric contexts attached to the term "parasite" (including its most unsavory connotations) and Jelinek's previous work illuminates many aspects of Jelinek's essay, which I will now discuss in detail. "Das Parasitärdrama" is divided into three long paragraphs, each of them circling around the metaphor of the parasite in different guises. A generic play between autobiography, poetics, and fiction becomes apparent from the first sentence on and is continued throughout the essay in different iterations, making the essay itself "parasitic" on these other genres. The essay continuously reenters both Jelinek's discourse (through citations or allusions to her work) and its own discourse (through narrative self-reflection). This recursive procedure strongly recalls Serres' system of fractal relations which I discussed above, and in an important sense represents a performance of one of the main implied

arguments of the essay (which is also shared by Serres' appraisal of the parasite), namely that all representation is parasitic to something else, that there are no "facts" which exist apart from their mediated representations in language or images.

> The beginning of "Das Parasitärdrama" reads as follows:
>
> Ich habe schon das Sekundärdrama erfunden, jetzt erfinde ich meinetwegen auch noch das Parasitärdrama (man kann es auch Schmarotzerdrama nennen), nein, leider habe nicht ich es erfunden. Ich habe es nicht einmal bewusst gefunden" (Jelinek 2011).

Through the first-person pronoun "Ich," the text initiates a literary play with deictics which situates it between autobiographical reflection and literature.[145] The "ich" of the essay ostensibly indicates the author herself, via the reference to a previous essay on the theater, "Anmerkungen zum Sekundärdrama" (2010). This extraliterary claim is undermined through the markedly casual register of the self-reference "meinetwegen" (unsuitable in tone for a written formal acceptance of a prize, belonging rather to oral language), as well as the contrastive syntax of the second clause: "[...] nein, leider habe *nicht ich* es erfunden" [italics mine] instead of the unmarked word order "nein, leider habe ich es nicht erfunden." Both the inappropriate register and the "nicht" which decouples the "ich" from the verb have the effect of highlighting the linguistic "code" of the sentence, its status as mediated communication.

From this point on at the latest, it is clear that the "I" of the text is not equivalent with the author Jelinek, but rather part of a complex game of signification which does not, however, completely exclude reference to the real-life author. The intervening, almost intrusive presence of the "nicht" in this first sentence will become thematic as the

[145] In this sense, her strategy is similar to the one that Bernhard and Handke take in their autobiographical writings, according to Bianca Theisen (75, 84).

essay unfolds: the "parasitic" drama is itself this "not" this "nothing" which makes the space that surrounds it (and, by extension, the "code" of the discourse) visible.

The juxtaposition of the Germanic word "Schmarotzer" with the Greek-derived term "parasite" draws attention to the inscription of the essay's biological imagery in those discourses of racism and anti-Semitism which I mentioned above. In this sense, Jelinek's strategy is related to the "rhetorical inversion" of Nazi biopolitical propaganda which Jennifer Kapczynski notes in her study *The German Patient* (23). While the medial discourse on national health in postwar Germany in Kapczynski's analysis is for the most part an unconscious manifestation of latent ideas of the national body, Jelinek's appropriation of the trope of the "Schmarotzer" must be differentiated from this phenomenon because it takes place on a conscious and explicit level.

A few sentences after the opening sentence which I quoted, the "I" of the essay, speaking as the author, provides the rationale for the essay's title:

> Ich lese in einer Zeitschrift, daß ein Kollege meine Stücke parasitär nennt, weil sie sich so oft an einen Wirt klammern, ohne den das Drama dann nicht verstanden werden kann. Es ist dann nicht mehr ewig gültig, weil es an das Ereignis gebunden worden ist. Dem Ereignis macht das gar nichts, aber das Drama, das dann kein wirkliches Drama mehr sein kann, bringt es um, weil es nur andauert, solang man sich an das Ereignis erinnert (96).

Here, the narrative remains in the realm of the autobiographical. The "I" is staged as the author herself, reading a critique of her own work.[146] The "I" continues, ventriloquizing the review in question, but without the distancing subjunctive in which indirect speech is

[146] I have not yet been able to determine which (if any) specific review Jelinek may be responding to here. Since the essay concerns her theater work specifically, it is unlikely to be Ahnlund's essay, which addresses her entire œuvre and was almost six years old at the time of the writing. Rather, Ahnlund's essay can be read as representative of an entire academic and journalistic discourse surrounding Jelinek's work to which she responds here.

normally presented. This has the effect undermining the narrative authority of the "I," which seems to fade behind its own statement:

> Die Verderblichkeit der verderbenbringenden Realität, die gehört nicht auf die Bühne (wo eh gar nichts hingehört, nur diejenigen, die sich selbst als hingehörig, nein, nicht als zugehörig betrachten) (ibid.).

In the next sentence, however, the autobiographical narrator returns:

> Vielleicht aber doch? Was ist da, bevor es entdeckt wird? Wer nicht lebt, wie ich, eine widerwillige Nichtlebende, entdeckt auch nichts, der muß finden. Und finden kann er nur, was ihm vorgesetzt wird, denn die Wirklichkeit ist ja trotzdem immer noch die Vorgesetzte der Autorin, sogar wenn die sie kaum zu sehen kriegt (ibid.).

This paragraph reasserts the reference of the "ich" to Jelinek as a person, or at least to Jelinek as a character constructed by the media. Two parts of the paragraph reference the most widespread popular narrative about Jelinek's personal life, which is the agoraphobia that prevented her from accepting the Nobel Prize in person. The first, her self-designation as "widerwillige Nichtlebende" evokes not only clichés about the trade-off between living and writing so often found in accounts of the lives of authors, but also gender-specific accounts of female authors whose writing was pathologized because it was considered a masculine pursuit that kept them from normal domestic duties. At the same time, this moniker resonates with a common trope found throughout Jelinek's work, (for example, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen; Stecken, Stab und Stangl* and *Die Kinder der Toten*): the "undead." This theme also recurs in Jelinek's manifestos on the theater. For example, in her earliest poetological essay on the theater, "ich möchte seicht sein," Jelinek writes that in her ideal theater „Leute sollen nicht etwas sagen und so tun, als ob sie lebten" (103). Furthermore, the notion of the "undead" in Jelinek's writing has inspired numerous scholarly studies. To name a few examples, there is the article "Necropolitics: Reading the Revenant Body in Elfriede Jelinek's *Stecken, Stabl und*

Stangl and *Bambiland*," in which Kristin Vander Lugt argues that Jelinek's texts mobilize figures of the undead in order to oppose the "politics of life" – one could read this as biopolitics – and at the same time to draw attention to the limits of postmodern identity politics, which can at times fetishize the "unknowability" of the other, thus freeing the subject from the burden of ever trying to get to know him or her (212-220). Similarly, the title of Evelyn Annuß' book *Elfriede Jelinek. Theater des Nachlebens*, plays on the idea of the "undead" or afterlife. Numerous other scholars trace the notion of the "undead" and its use as a metaphor for women authors in *Krankheit, oder moderne Frauen.*[147] More recently, Fatima Naqvi has summed up the aesthetic function of the "undead" in Jelinek's œuvre as follows:

> Living deadness becomes the thematic fulcrum of Jelinek's works with their revenants and also their stylistic *movens.* The emphasis on a living deadness paradoxically lends animation to these texts with their syntactical and semantic fireworks [...]. Jelinek's engagement with life after mass death—engagement, that is, with death in the midst of life, as well as with the breach of life following such death – also influences how she deals with her undead predecessors: the authority of the past has been radically called into question while at the same time retaining a hold on the present. Jelinek's allusions to literary forebears endow this living corpus with a strange afterlife, too ("After Life" 4).

This parallel between the autobiographical "ich" of the essay and "undead" characters in Jelinek's dramas created via the figure of the parasite is an ongoing theme of the essay. The "I" of the essay plays a game with reference, comingling the autobiographical "ich" of the author with the parasitic character of her dramatic writing. At the same time, the play with the verb "vorsetzten" and the noun "Vorgesetzter" in the passage quoted above strongly recall the titular pun in Jelinek's acceptance speech for the Büchnerpreis, "Was uns vorliegt. Was uns vorgelegt wurde." This is but one example of the recursive procedure underlying the "parasitic" writing process. In constantly turning

[147] For example, Berka 373 and Erdle 337-339.

back on Jelinek's own work, the essay sets up a "fractal" pattern of relationships like what Serres outlines in his study of the parasite. Instead of applying the adjective "parasitic" only to the work, "Das Parasitärdrama" inscribes the author within the parasitic role of her work. I will work out the implications of this narrative "graft" in the following sections.

The first paragraph goes on to describe the dynamics of textual creation as that of drinking. This is in keeping with the metaphor of the parasite, but also allows Jelinek a pun on the word "Quelle" (meaning on German both "source" and "spring"):

> Der Bericht, die vielen Botenberichte sind die Quellen, von denen ich zu trinken versuche, aber ihr Strahl ist sehr dünn, und es sind so viele Strahlen, ich sage jetzt ausdrücklich nicht: kein Grund zum Strahlen!, aber oje, da steht es schon, da steht es immer schon, noch bevor ich es zurückrufen kann, wegen Mängeln, so mach ich es leider oft. Ich kann nichts auslassen (96).

This passage has the characteristic mix of registers ("aber oje") that I identified in the first sentence of the paragraph (see above). It also self-consciously stages the type of wordplay that characterizes much of Jelinek's writing (Konzett 2000 97-98). This joke is built from an associative chain that moves from "Quelle" to "Strahl" (jet) and then to "strahlen" (to smile), consisting of words in both their figurative and literal meanings. The author/narrator suggests that she has no control of this sequence of associations: "da steht es schon, da steht es immer schon," a claim which is of course undermined by the sheer existence of the text as artifact, that is, as a constructed document. This passage can also be read as a wry rejoinder to critics like Ahnlund, who imply that Jelinek exercises little control over her literary output, merely "feeding" off and rechanneling the media.

Furthermore, the term "Botenberichte" alludes to a convention of classical drama: the messenger who arrives bringing news to the court. In Jelinek's staging of this

theatrical convention, it is the "parasite" (normally an uninvited guest) who stands in the place of the host (who would normally receive the messenger). This reference suggests that Jelinek's narrator is aware of the classical basis for the metaphor of the parasite.

The passage above continues, switching from the metaphor of drinking to that of baking:

> Es muß alles hinein, und natürlich ist der Teig ungenießbar. Doch bei mir muß man halt im Ungenießbaren nach irgendwas stöbern, wie ein Schwein, und es ist mehr als genug da, was man beiseiteschieben kann, weil vielleicht darunter was ist, das man noch essen kann, und manchmal ist das Eigentliche drunter, das bei mir immer recht eigenartig aussieht, wahrscheinlich gehts nicht anders (96).

This passage gently mocks theatergoers who expect something easily consumable (literally, "edible"). The German term "ungenießbar," meaning "inedible," literally means "unenjoyable." The association of art with eating in this context calls to mind the Frankfurt School of critical theory, which condemned products of the "culture industry" as "vorverdaut" or "predigested."[148] Jelinek, whose early work was clearly marked by this tradition, seems to be claiming it here once again, with an added layer of complexity.[149] In the famous "Culture Industry" essay by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, culture is conceived of as a more-or-less "top down" process by which consumers are fed predigested propaganda by the media. Jelinek's "parasitic" procedure, on the other hand, recognizes a similarly complex relationship between media producer and media consumer as the one that Serres' model implies. The text suggests, through the metaphor of a "parasite" producing "inedible dough," that Jelinek, a literary producer herself, and thus in a very real sense a part of the "culture industry," nevertheless "feeds" on the culture industry's products, rendering

[148] For the explicit use of the term "Vorverdautes" see Adorno 2003, "Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie" 42.
[149] See Konzett 2000, for the influence of Frankfurt School thought on Jelinek (111-112).

them unenjoyable/inedible in the process. This is related to Serres' notion of the parasite insofar as it suggests that parasitic relations permeate all levels of cultural interaction in a recursive, fractal pattern. There is no producer, in Serres' model, that is not also a parasite in some sense – as his reading of "City Mouse and Country Mouse" indicates (see above).

The image of Jelinek's textual procedure rendering the dough formed by the media "ungenießbar" resonates with the other dimension of Serres' study: that of the parasite as "noise" in the cybernetic sense. This passage highlights the textual procedure by which Jelinek inserts "noise" into the formerly digestible message of the media, obscuring the "signal":

> Doch bei mir muß man halt im Ungenießbaren nach irgendwas stöbern, wie ein Schwein, und es ist mehr als genug da, was man beiseiteschieben kann, weil vielleicht darunter was ist, das man noch essen kann [...] (96)

Here, the consumer is cast as a pig (and therefore, insofar as it lives off scraps, a "parasitic" animal in Serres' sense), who must root around for pieces of the medial "signal" amidst the "noise" that comprises Jelinek's discourse. But when the reader/consumer/pig finds the "signal" they sometimes discover: „[...] das Eigentliche drunter, das bei mir immer recht eigenartig aussieht [...] (ibid.)." Jelinek's discourse, it seems, transforms the noise itself into the signal, rendering the "actual" signal ("das Eigentliche") strange ("eigenartig"). This is of course in keeping with a long tradition of political theater which employs what Bertolt Brecht called the "Verfremdungseffekt" to render the apparently natural unfamiliar. But its framing in terms of edibility and consumption brings this dramatic procedure within the metaphoric regime of the parasite. The next section returns to the theater more explicitly. This second section begins:

> Das Parasitärdrama ist tatsächlich nicht ohne seinen Wirt, das Ereignis, den Zustand, die Katastrophe, egal, es ist nicht ohne zu verstehen, es ist nicht ohne, es zu verstehen, aber was soll man denn verstehen? Ich will ja gar nicht, daß man versteht (ibid.).

This seems to be a recapitulation of the previous section on inedible dough. The "host" of the parasitic drama is an incident, catastrophe or condition. If we follow the reading I suggested above, we can read the claim of the author/narrator "[i]ch will ja gar nicht, daß man versteht" not to mean that Jelinek's texts are simply meant to be gibberish, but that the audience must work through the "noise" of the text in order to find the "signal," in the process discovering that Jelinek's aesthetic procedure has effectively reversed these two categories.

The next sentence connects this distancing effect to the type of acting that Jelinek's texts demand. Here, her foil is less the current political stage, and more the type of drama which employs a plot and characters, which the text designates as "normal" drama: "Im Normaldrama sprechen Personen, die der oder die oder sonstwer sind, als wären die sie selber [...]" (ibid.). This sentence at first, through the clause "als wären die sie selber" seems like it could have come from one of Bertolt Brecht's critiques of empathy in acting. It appears to inveigh against actors who embody the roles they play. If this were true, this would merely be the repetition of what has become a commonplace notion since at least the 1950s. But the subsequent passages put an unfamiliar twist on this Brechtian critique by emphasizing the "sprechen" in the above sentence, drawing a parallel between Jelinek's medial persona and her aesthetics:

> Da ich aber nicht weiß, wie Menschen miteinander sprechen, lasse ich, nein, nicht Blumen sprechen, lasse ich alles sprechen, wofür ich Platz finde und was mir selbst wieder Platz einräumt (ibid.).

In suggesting that she does not know how people speak, the narrator slyly offers Jelinek's much-discussed agoraphobia as an explanation for the supposed inability to write natural-sounding dialogue. The following passage strengthens this autobiographical reference, and at the same time returns the essay to the realm of the theater:

> Erinnert mich an die Kinderpsychiatrie, in der ich einst war, beim später berühmten Prof. Asperger. Der hat jedes Jahr ein Weihnachtsstück geschrieben, in dem seine beiden Töchter immer die Hauptrollen gespielt haben, und wir übrigen Patienten waren die Staffage, welche die Hauptpersonen, die beiden Asperger-Mädchen, erst richtig zur Geltung, zum Vorschein gebracht hat (ibid.).

Jelinek's childhood treatment at the hands of Dr. Asperger is often mentioned in connection with her writing style, especially as it pertains to perhaps her most well-known work *Die Klavierspielerin*.[150] The narrator stages the site of this treatment (and, by extension, the author's personal pathology) as the source of her later aesthetics:

> Das war nicht wenig, und so bin ich gleich ein Teil des Hintergrunds geblieben, der den Vordergrund zum Scheinen bringt und als Anschein enttarnt, wir waren die Tarnkapppen über uns selbst, während die Töchter des Professors sehr schön das Erscheinen dargestellt haben (ibid.).

The relationship described here, between the background and the foreground, is analogous to the dependence of the signal on noise in cybernetics as discussed by Serres.[151] More important for the overall rhetorical thrust of the essay, however, is the fact that the role of the parasite is staged as part of Jelinek's biography.

After this anecdote on the theater, the narrator expounds on the relationship between the media and her writing. This passage is notable for the reentry of biologistic imagery into the description of Jelinek's poetics:

> Ich tackere mich an der Wirklichkeit fest, so wie sie mir dargeboten wird, amalgamiert, gereinigt, durch fremde Meinungen gefiltert (und, im Gegensatz zu

[150] Rosellini succinctly describes Jelinek's much-discussed mental health history (41-42).
[151] The notion of foreground and background, and the female writer "disappearing" into the background, is the basis for critical readings of several Jelinek texts (Hannsen 106).

> einem anständigen Filter, der sie rausholen soll, mit Giftstoffen angereichert, denen ich noch ein paar hinzufüge, denn ich brauche was Saftiges fürs Schreiben [...]) danke, fremde Meinung, vielen Dank: das ist gut, daß sie mir zur Verfügung gestellt wird, denn ich habe keine eigene (98).

Two aspects of this passage are notable. First, the signal/noise dichotomy is recoded as a "toxin" which always adheres to the media message, but to which Jelinek adds her own part. This practice of fighting toxins with toxins recalls the mechanism of vaccination that characterizes the "homeopathic" approach to the Nazi past. It is not coincidental, therefore, that the first reference in the essay to the Holocaust appears just a few sentences later. After a short passage in which the narrator sardonically wonders why anyone would bother going to see her theater pieces when they read the same things in the media as she does and could write their own "parasitic" dramas if they wanted to, the essay returns to the metaphor of fore- and background that was first initiated with the anecdote about Dr. Asperger's Christmas play:

> Ich gehe nicht auf den Kern, den ich nicht kenne, ich weiche ihm großräumig aus, und deswegen muß ich immer soviel Text schreiben, weil ich ja von außen an diesen Kern, den ich wie gesagt nicht kenne (aber Sie, Publikum, vielleicht erkennen?) nicht rankomme (ibid.).

The metaphor of the background that makes the foreground recognizable, which was first illustrated in terms from Jelinek's biography, is revisited here in a different form. Through "avoiding" the subject at hand, the "core" or kernel of the matter, Jelinek's texts create a negative space rendering this core recognizable to the audience. It is through the notion of negative space that the narrator connects the aesthetics of the "parasitic drama" with representations of the Holocaust, the inability (and impossibility) to find a linguistic concept ("Begriff") for the event:

> [...] [D]urch mich können Sie gar nichts erkennen, das ist, da ich ja erfahrungslos und beinahe zur Gänze meinungslos bin, aber auch zur Beschreibung unfähig,

> also das ist, als ob man, ich, um diesen blinden Fleck herum mit meinem Bleistift oder dem Kuli -- oder was man halt zur Hand hat -- etwas ausmale, das ich mir selbst nicht ausmalen kann, denn ich habe keinen *Begriff* davon [italics mine] (98).

A logorrhea of sorts which traces the contours of the event in negative space compensates for the inability to form a concept about the "core":

> Also muß ich möglichst viele Begriffe verwenden, nur um das Blinde (beim Psychiater: seine hellen Töchter) in der Mitte zum Vorschein zu bringen, das dann im Theater viele sehen können, weil es dort zum Scheinen gebracht wird [...] (ibid.).

The narrator then reimagines this string of words as potter's clay, which allows the empty center of the pot to become visible. This positive use of material to allow a negative space to be visible is reminiscent both of Theodor Adorno's negative dialectics which tries to think beyond the concept, but also of Niklas Luhmann's account of the way that autonomous works of art are created through observations which take the form of differentiations (*Unterscheidungen*).

The passage reads as follows:

> Und doch muß ich irgendwie Fleisch an der Wirklichkeit festklopfen, nein, eigentlich ist es ja eher ein Töpfervorgang [...], in der Mitte ist es hohl, aber drum herum wird ein Naturprodukt auf eine Scheibe gelegt, die sich schnell dreht; [...]. Egal, etwas dreht sich, und die Wirklichkeit spritzt nach außen hin weg, und das ist genau das, was sein soll [...] (98-99).

The narrator once again stages the scene of writing through her commentary:

> nein, das stimmt überhaupt nicht, merke ich, leider wie immer erst beim Schreiben, denn in meinem Hinknallen des Tonpatzens (des Tonklopses) auf die Scheibe formt sich etwas um das Hohle in der Mitte herum, ohne das es aber das Produkt: das Gefäß nicht gäbe. Na, ich weiß nicht, ich sollte nicht Vergleiche mit etwas ziehen, das ich nicht kenne. Aber ich kenne ja nichts. Da dürfte ich ja nie was vergleichen (99)!

This passage accomplishes two things. First it reestablishes Jelinek's writing as a negative art, a kind of background, which allows something else to come into focus. The

analogy to the noise/signal dichotomy found in Serres is close at hand. The key difference, however, is that what comes into focus in the pottery metaphor is another empty space, one which could just as easily be considered "background." Like the example of the fly at the banquet which I excerpted from Serres' study above, the narrator locates Jelinek's theatrical writing at the pivot point between background and foreground, signal and noise, parasite and host.

The second important aspect of this passage is the way in which the sardonic narrator derives Jelinek's negative aesthetics from her supposed lack of experience in "real life," playing both on her reclusive reputation and on her position as a woman writer, whose sphere of experience is ostensibly only domestic. In other words, the essay predicates Jelinek's aesthetic production on a stylized idea of the author derived from the media, in effect "parasiting" the medial projection of Jelinek's personality.

The third section of the essay promises to finally "get to the point," once again in a decidedly autobiographical register:

> Soll ich versuchen, endlich etwas von diesem parasitären Schaffen zu erfassen? Es wird mir nicht gelingen. Ich versuche, mich als (nicht am!) Drumherum, das bei mir schon alles ist, abzuarbeiten, ich erkenne nicht, daß es Vorhandenes gibt, weil ich mich ja kaum je hineinbegebe, aber etwas in mir hat mir für etwas anderes, das mir (als diese Quellen, die ich mit dem Mund nicht erwische, als Fußspuren Verstorbener, die längst vermodert sind, als Fetzen der Geschichte, als Halden von Kleidungsstücken, deren Besitzer vernichtet worden sind, und nur ihre Kleidung, ihre Brillen, ihre Schuhe, ja, auch Kinderschuhe, denen keiner entwachsen wird, sind noch da) als Vorhandenes gezeigt worden ist, auch das Naturkatastrophe, als Unfall, als Unglück, als geschichtliche Tragödie, als Wasser und Erde, die Elemente, die kennt nun wirklich jeder! (ibid.).

This passage is the first allusion in the essay to the Holocaust as an influence on Jelinek's writing. The piles of clothes, glasses and shoes, whose owners have been "exterminated" (vernichtet) is an unmistakable reference to the death camps. These objects, due to their

status as human accouterments, index the absence of their owners. They are analogous to the pottery metaphor in the previous section of the essay, which posited the clay as the "positive" creation allowing the absent center to become visible. The idea of a presence that indexes an absence, or, conversely, of an absence which takes on the quality of presence, has become a commonplace in discussions of representations of the Holocaust.[152]

It is significant, therefore, that the image of the piles of shoes and glasses which Jelinek's narrator invokes here is one of the most familiar representations of the Holocaust. These images have become a kind of clichéd shorthand for the horror of the death camps, long since robbed of its shock value through medial iteration. The use of this well-worn image performs the narrator's claim that she is dependent on "Vorhandenes," that is, reified metaphors or narratives. The photographs of ownerless shoes and glasses, once an effective metonymy for the camp victims, have in the meantime become "Vorhandenes," stock images available to index large-scale suffering and loss.[153] Through its framing of this image in language, Jelinek's essay suggests that her art is concerned with fighting the processes of commodification that threaten to ossify the memory of the Shoah. But this image of empty clothing is itself caught up in a web of self-reflexive associations: as Fatima Naqvi has shown, Jelinek has employed metaphors borrowed from fashion and clothing in her two previous theater manifestos ("Post-

[152] For a single example of this trope, see the title of Thomas Elsaesser's article "Absence as Presence, Presence as Parapraxis." Sigrid Berka discusses how Jelinek connects the trope of "present absence" not only to antisemitism but also to female desire and homosexuality in her article on *Krankheit, oder moderne Frauen*: "Masochism and vampirism make a perfect fit in the representation of woman's desire, a desire that is to be traced only through the paradoxical routes of a present absence or through the ghostly in-between of undead life. And since, in Jelinek's view, thinking about woman will bring to the foreground the particular battle between the sexes backing fascism, her female vampire will join the company of the homosexual and the Jew" (373).

[153] At the same time, it is a reference to Heidegger's notion of the "ready-to-hand" objects that make up the human world.

Dramatic Stress Disorder" 81-82).[154] One example of this can be found in "ich möchte seicht sein," in which Jelinek suggests the fashion show as a possible model for her theater:

> Modeschau deswegen, weil man die Kleider auch allein vorschicken könnte. Weg mit den Menschen, die eine systematische Beziehung zu einer ersonnenen Figur herstellen könnten! Wie die Kleidung, hören Sie, die besitzt ja auch keine eigene Form, sie muß um den Menschen gegossen werden, der ihre Form IST. Schlaff und vernachlässigt hängen die Hüllen, doch dann fährt einer in sie, der spricht wie mein Lieblings Heiliger, den es nur gibt, weils auch mich gibt: Ich und der, der ich sein soll, wir werden nicht mehr auftreten (Jelinek 1983).

The reference here and in "Das Parasitärdrama" gestures towards the fact that Jelinek, as a cultural critic, is nevertheless still implicated in the culture that she criticizes. Like Adorno's analysis of the cultural critic in his essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," Jelinek acknowledges that her critique must of necessity be part of Austrian culture and society, that is, it always contains a trace of the commodity aesthetics it seeks to negate.

The following passage further strengthens the essay's concern with commodities: "[...] dieses Etwas hat mir also die Augen geöffnet (die meist zu sind oder an einen Krimi oder eine DVD geheftet, schläfrig, wie in einem Aerosol-Nebel existierend) [...] (ibid.)." Here, two narrative cultural products are invoked, a detective novel and a DVD. The narrator's ostensible state is a deadened, foggy half-sleep. The description of this fog as "aerosol" is a further suggestion that this lethargy is due to consumption of commodities. But the solution to this fascination with cultural commodities is not simple. The "eye-opening" process that has drawn the narrator out of her foggy state (that is, the "Vorhandenes" as image of the piles of victims' belongings) is itself a commodity. This

[154] Naqvi also discusses the use of the metaphor of the empty shoe in connection with the Holocaust in Jelinek's novel *Die Kinder der Toten* ("After Life" 5-6).

is made clear by the following sentence, which extends the metaphor of commodification by introducing the notion of *Verpackung*, a package or packaging:

> ... ja, das ist es vielleicht, ein Augenöffnungsvorgang, durch Nebel und Verpuffungen hindurch, so daß ich dieses Vorhandene, an das ich mich klammere, es ist eh so wenig, je schon, seit immer schon, entdeckt habe, weil ich irgendwann einmal eine Verpackung aufgerissen habe, und darunter war es dann, ich habe selbst gestaunt. Einen schwierigeren Vorgang, als den Abreißfaden zur Wirklichkeit zu betätigen, die Fäden an den vielen Paketen Wirklichkeit, die der Parasitärdramatikerin ins Haus geliefert werden, weil sie sie von außen ja nicht anschauen gehen kann, nur von innen, aber auch als Innen kann sie es nicht erkennen, hätte ich gar nicht geschafft (99).

This paragraph recapitulates the connection between Jelinek's alleged agoraphobia and her "parasitic" use of the media. She is only able to stay at home and "open" the "packages" of preformed reality that are delivered to her: "Packungen aufreißen – mehr kann ich nicht (ibid.)." The image of the package suggests both the reified message of the media and at the same time returns the essay to the metaphor of eating, in that the "package" could also contain food. To illustrate the relationship between "entdecken" and "Vorhandenes" (both terms with Heideggerian valences), the narrator inserts a direct quote from Heidegger, without citing any passage from his work in particular:

> Bei Heidegger lese ich, natürlich zufällig, denn alles, was ich lese, ist zufällig und bedeutet erst was, wenn ich es mir aneigne: "Auch das Dasein, das während der ganzen Dauer seiner Existenz nie eine sogenannte 'Entdeckung' macht, ist ent-deckend, sofern es sich bei Vorhandenem aufhält" (ibid.).

Heidegger is one of Jelinek's favorite sources for "raw material" in her plays, if not her single most-favored source. Besides in the play *Wolken.Heim* (discussed above), quotes from Heidegger also occur in *Stecken, Stab und Stangl*; *In den Alpen; Totenauberg* and other works.[155] The citation of this passage to authorize Jelinek's aesthetic program is humorous, but it is also yet another performance of her "parasitic" practice within the

[155] See for example, Konzett 2000 105-109.

essay itself. The narrator's commentary highlights how the author's citational practice functions through recontextualization: "Ja, das ist gut. So hätte ich es natürlich nicht sagen können. Aber anders, indem ich es genauso gesagt hätte" (ibid.).[156]

At this point the essay mentions a media event explicitly for the first time: the assassination of Osama bin Laden by a Navy Seal team, as viewed by Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton and others in what the narrator refers to as the "Schockraum" of the White House (100). The term "Schockraum," which in German refers to an emergency room area used for resuscitation has been jarringly misapplied. But the term "Schock" carries both media and medical connotations, and thus links the two discursive strands of the essay. It implies a trauma that is delivered medially.

The narrator meditates on the missing 20 minutes of video that show Osama bin Laden's execution, remarking that this gap in the footage is not useful to her because it is unknown:

> Ich kann mich als Parasit also derzeit nicht an etwas heften, das die andren [sic] ebenfalls nicht kennen. Ich warte. Ich kann ja nur an dem schmarotzen, das alle schon kennen, und zwar, weil ich die Einzige bin, die aus der eigenen Anschauung nichts kennt. Da bleibt mir leider nichts andres [sic] übrig als Parasit zu sein (100).

The metaphor of *Anschauung*, which has connotations of sight, intuition or perception (especially when used philosophically) leads the narrator into an aside about another medial experience, that is, listening to the radio broadcast of morning devotions (Morgenandacht):

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[156] This observation, which concerns the nature of citation, or, in a more basic sense, repetition, parallels one made by Fredric Jameson about modernism in his 1979 essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture." Intriguingly, he argues that modernism deals with the repetition inherent in popular forms in a homeopathic manner, incorporating it into itself in order to overcome it: "the kinds of repetition which, from Gertrude Stein to Robbe-Grillet, the modernist project has appropriated and made its own, can be seen as a kind of homeopathic strategy whereby the scandalous and intolerable external irritant is drawn into the aesthetic process itself and thereby systematically worked over, 'acted out' and symbolically neutralized" (136).

> Wie heißt es in den Seligpreisungen? Selig sind die, die ein reines Herz haben, denn sie werden Gott schauen. Wenn sie sich trauen. Und an diese Seligpreisung bin ich nur erinnert worden (und stopfe sie mir sofort ins Maul und spucke sie hier hin) weil in der Morgenandacht im Radio zufällig [...] davon gesprochen worden ist [...] (ibid.).

The combination of the religious with the medial ushers in a series of reflections on parasitism, religion, and exchange, which strongly suggest that Jelinek has used Serres' book as source material.[157] Picking up on the "presence of absence" theme started in her allusions to the victims of the Holocaust, the narrator now applies similar language to God. Her language, which seems at first to be an avowal of atheism, is more properly a sort of semiotics read through negative theology (i.e. God as an "empty signifier" or placeholder for an indescribable concept):

> [...] ja, Gott ist natürlich der größte blinde Fleck, weil es ihn nicht gibt. Das ist sehr praktisch, denn dadurch kann man ihn für wirklich alles verwenden, ein Joker, und er kann durch alles Beliebige und Beliebte ersetzt werden, Cola durch Pepsi, Filterkaffee durch Espresso. Es ist auch eine Menge Gefälschtes im Umlauf (100).

The connection between this passage and Serres' work is striking. As I discussed briefly above, Serres' book examines not only the literary and cybernetic senses of the parasite, but how these notions bleed into the realms of theology, finance, consumption and semiotics, all of which Jelinek alludes to here.[158]

The final portion of the essay returns to the original meaning of the parasite, the guest at the table of a host. Here, the narrator puns on the German "Wirt" which means both "host" in a biological sense and the owner of a restaurant:

> Der Wirt wird sagen, wo ein Tisch freigeworden ist, ich warte geduldig, daß mir etwas zugewiesen wird, aber das kleckere und sabbere ich dann total voll, bis kein freies Fleckchen mehr übrig ist. Der Wirt bedauert schon, daß er mich überhaupt reingelassen hat. Dann fresse ich wie das Schwein von vorhin, und sogar das, was

[157] See Serres' discussion of Pentecost (41-47).
[158] Thematic overlap with Jelinek's essay can be found in Serres 41, 168, 216 among other places.

> mir aus dem Mund fällt, wird doch aufgehoben und weiter gefressen, so machen Parasiten das. Sie nehmen, was sie kriegen können [...] aber sie hatten schon vorher den Vorsatz, es zu mißbrauchen und zu mißdeuten (101).

The imagery in this passage of continuous eating also resonates with the imagery found throughout Serres' work.[159] In the final sentences of the study, the narrator appeals directly to the reader:

> Machen Sie was dagegen! Es gibt sicher was gegen Parasiten, es gibt gegen alles etwas, aber das wird nichts ändern, weil Sie mich nicht mehr ändern können. Und wenn Sie es hätten können, wäre ich Ihnen sehr dankbar gewesen (ibid.).

This final passage conveys a sense of drivenness or helplessness behind Jelinek's prolific output. It seems to correspond to a remark Jelinek made in an interview with Brenda L. Bethman: "it's impossible to say something about Auschwitz, but it's also impossible not to speak about Auschwitz. Or, to put it in an exaggerated fashion, one can do nothing but continually 'speak Auschwitz'"(63).

The essay's final line, which claims that if we, the readers, would have stopped her, the narrator would have been very thankful, is a sly spin on the conventions of the award acceptance speech, which would require an expression of gratitude as a closing word.[160] Instead, we have a phrase which grammatically forecloses the future through its use of the simple past conditional. The implication is that the narrator is finished developing and set in her ways. This final grammatical stasis contrasts sharply with the more dynamic image of the very hungry parasite which fills the rest of the essay. On Jelinek's homepage a picture of mistletoe in the branches of a tree ends the text of "Das

[159] The use of the term "mißbrauchen" also evokes Serres' notion of "abuse value," which he expounds on in his study (168). Furthermore, the recursive notion of eating hinted at in this passage ("sogar das, was mir aus dem Mund fällt, wird doch aufgehoben und weiter gefressen, so machen Parasiten das") seems to conform not only to Serres' cybernetic schema but also the notion of systematic reentry of difference discussed by Cary Wolfe in his study *What is Posthumanism?* (15-16).

[160] See also Serres 45: the "thank you" is posited as the end of an exchange. Jelinek may be alluding to this passage as well.

Parasitärdrama." In *Theater Heute*, the essay is accompanied by a photo of the author herself.[161] These two photos, when read together, form yet another performance of the author as parasite, highlighting Jelinek's ambivalent role in injecting her "poisons" into the media message. Mistletoe is both a parasitic plant (evoking Herder's above-mentioned metaphor describing the Jewish people) and a plant used homeopathically in alternative medicine (see the conclusion of Chapter 2, where I describe Schlingensief's treatment in the ayurveda center as portrayed in *Mea Culpa*, where he is given mistletoe as a remedy).

IV. Conclusion

As my account has shown, Jelinek's essay is at once autobiographical and literary, playfully obscure and concretely referential. Through its appropriation of and allusion to texts by Heidegger, the author herself, and Serres (at least arguably), as well as through

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[161] Jelinek's essay on her late collaborator Christoph Schlingensief on her home page strongly recalls the metaphorics of the parasite in its notion of her own text as "white noise":

> Ich frage mich also, was ist es, das meine Texte, die das nicht mehr sind, sobald sie in die Hand des Künstlers Schlingensief gekommen sind, zu Lärm, zu weißem Rauschen machen, daß sie das nicht mehr sind, was sie, von mir gewollt, ursprünglich sein sollten. Was soll der Lärm? Ich sehe doch längst, daß es kein Lärm mehr ist, sondern etwas Gestaltetes, das aber mit der ursprünglichen Lärmquelle, meinem Text, so wie er gedacht war, nichts mehr zu tun hat! Indem dieser Künstler das in die Hand nimmt, was ich geschrieben habe, ist es etwas anderes geworden. Und am Ende braucht er es gar nicht mehr, und hätte ich ein ganzes Stück für ihn geschrieben, es muß nicht mehr da sein, weil es auf andre Weise DA und definiert ist, aber so, daß man nicht mehr fragen kann: Ist das ein Lärm. Der Lärm war schon, jetzt ist es eine Projektion auf den Animatographen, auf den man allerdings alles projizieren kann, und man selbst, ist man dabei, verschwindet darin spurlos.

And finally, at the end of the essay:

> Aber selbst, wenn ich ganz verschwunden wäre, wäre das ein wunderbares Gefühl, das ich gar nicht beschreiben kann. Und vielleicht liegt in diesem Nicht-Beschreibenkönnen die Lehre des Künstlers, der alles Beschriebene und Beschreibende ablehnen muß, um sich in Stellung zu bringen, das Gewehr im Anschlag. War das ein Lärm? Nein, das kann man dann nicht mehr sagen, wenn man den Schuß hört. Möglicherweise wäre das ein Vorhandensein: ein sehr lauter sehr kurzer Augenblick, der dann aber definiert werden könnte, doch nicht von mir, mich gibt es ja nicht mehr. Denn von außen geht schon einmal gar nichts in dieser Kunst, in der alles nach außen drängt und nach außen hin zu sehen ist. Die Permutationen, zahllose, könnten auch mich enthalten, wenigstens die eine oder andre davon, aber sie enthalten mich nicht. Sie sind ich, weil ein andrer Ich gesagt hat (Jelinek 2010).

its references to television, theater and radio, it performs a media montage of the sort that Bianca Theisen has argued is characteristic of postwar Austrian literature. In choosing the figure of the "parasite" as her mouthpiece, Jelinek has hit upon what is in many respects an ingenious figure which encapsulates an ambivalent complex of artistic, social and historical meanings. Cynthia Damon's description of the parasite in ancient Rome holds true here as well: "The parasite is in fact a conveniently compact personified form of something quite abstract, of a complicated nexus of social irritants including flattery, favoritism and dependency" (7).

At the same time, however, the closing gesture of Jelinek's essay betrays a sense of weariness and helplessness. "If you could have stopped me, I would have been very grateful to you," says her "parasite" narrator (101). This can be read as more than a tongue-in-cheek self-defense of an oft-maligned author. It can also be interpreted as an admission of the ultimate futility of the parasitic position, which relies on turning "Vorhandenes" (i.e. preformed material) against itself. This ending implies that continuous combat of the media with the weapons of the media, the use of "Giftstoffe" against "Giftstoffe" (as the narrator puts it early in the essay [98]) can only ultimately lead to an aesthetic dead-end. And not because the works and events that are "parasited" quickly fade from memory, but because the "cure" for the medial "poisons" is dependent on accentuating the most pernicious forms of those "poisons" themselves.[162] Even if

[162] It is possible that Jelinek is alluding in this passage to Victor Klemperer's *Lingua Tertii Imperii*: "Und wenn nun die gebildete Sprache aus giftigen Elementen gebildet oder zur Trägerin von Giftstoffen gemacht worden ist? Worte können sein wie winzige Arsendosen: sie werden unbemerkt verschluckt, sie scheinen keine Wirkung zu tun, und nach einiger Zeit ist die Giftwirkung doch da" (303).

"Das Parasitärdrama" is linguistically masterful, it ultimately performs the impotence of its own aesthetic.[163]

The essay's use of the term "Schmarotzer" and the iconic imagery of the ownerless personal items indicate that the Holocaust is still of central importance to Jelinek's work.[164] However, while Jelinek may have begun her career writing about Austrian involvement with the Holocaust when it was still a taboo subject in mainstream society, she now finds herself in a post-Waldheim Austria. Even if Austrian politicians still make headlines with outrageous remarks about or allusions to the Third Reich,[165] knowledge of Austrian complicity with the Holocaust is widespread, and the "Austrian culture war" is more or less over.[166]

For this reason, it is especially striking (and perhaps a bit puzzling) to see Jelinek turn in 2011 ever more strongly towards the past, appropriating one of the most disturbing tropes of Nazi antisemitic propaganda for her theater poetics. By seeking to turn this biopolitical figure against itself, Jelinek runs the risk of reinvigorating the very category which the notion of the racial "parasite" presumes: that of the Austrian "Volkskörper." The difference being, in her account, that this national body is not healthy

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[163] In this sense, one could say that "Das Parasitärdrama" is further evidence of Heidi Schlipphacke's notion of "performative self-enclosure": "For all its virtuosity, Jelinek's prose is always also reductive. It engages in a stylistic repetition compulsion that mirrors its historical fixation with the narrative of Nazism. A dialectic of stylistic excess and repetition frames Jelinek's articulated fixation with the narrative of Nazism, the performative entrapment of historical fixity" (79).

[164] S.a. Naqvi "After Life" 3.

[165] The most recent incident, at the time of this writing, is FPÖ politician Karlheinz Strache's remarks calling the atmosphere of the protest outside his party's ball a "Pogromstimmung" and later claiming that he and his party comrades were "die neuen Juden" (Der Standard).

[166] Jay Rosellini has discussed the vicissitudes of Austrian debates surrounding the legacy of National Socialism, using the projected public personae of Jörg Haider and Elfriede Jelinek as analytic anchors. He comes to the conclusion that Jelinek and her compatriots, though in many respects rightly critical of Haider and the Austrian right, are nevertheless unduly fixated on the violent past to the extent that any type of collective action or value system amounts to a revival of fascism in their eyes (195).

or in danger of being infected, but rather already in a necrotic state.[167] Jelinek's "parasitic" attack risks closing the historical wounds of the Holocaust, *precisely by holding them open* through an immunitary logic which inverts the Nazi biopolitical imaginary but does not challenge its underlying conceptual basis.[168] In amplifying putatively latent antisemitic or misogynistic discourse within the German language, Jelinek's work makes it seem as if these ideas were (paradoxically) as alive today as when they were clearly manifest in *political* (not linguistic) power structures. Jelinek's undoing of reified national identity with its own means threatens to ossify into a new kind of inverted nationalism that essentializes everything Austrian as fascist.

[167] S.a. Konzett 2000 109.
[168] S.a. my mention of Kapczynski's study in Chapter 1.

Conclusion: Immunity, immanence and aesthetics after Auschwitz

The penultimate sentence of Theodor Adorno's essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" has taken on the status of a mantra in discussions of aesthetics after the Holocaust. The three artists that I have discussed in this dissertation all take this claim seriously, and find ways of putting it into practice:

> Kulturkritik findet sich der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur und Barbarei gegenüber: nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch, und das frißt auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es heute unmöglich ward, Gedichte zu schreiben (Adorno 1955 30).

The central contention of this much-discussed and often-truncated statement is that the criticism of culture is always also embedded in culture. There is no external position for the critic from which to mount a critique. Any poetry written in German after Auschwitz reflects and perpetuates the structures of reification and domination that led to the Holocaust in the first place, if only in some small measure. Cultural critique must accept and reflect on the fact that it is always immanent to culture (and hence also partakes in processes of reification), otherwise it is hopelessly deluded. Although Adorno refers in this essay specifically to the "beautiful" art of poetry, the scope of his dictum has been expanded in subsequent academic discourse to include all cultural products in the German language.

In accordance with this common understanding of Adorno's famous statement as a pronouncement, Bernhard, Schlingensief and Jelinek do not attempt to criticize from a position of disinterested authority, but rather turn "barbaric" cultural products, images and ways of speaking back against the culture itself, recoding them into exaggerated, hyperbolic aesthetic works. Bernhard's Jewish characters in *Heldenplatz* spew vitriol against Austrians and the Austrian state in way reminiscent of Nazi propaganda.

Schlingensief's hysterical films restage and exaggerate the New German Cinema's confrontation with the images created by National Socialism. Jelinek's writings recontextualize media messages, exposing their latent misanthropic, cynical and nationalistic content through linguistic play. Adorno's concluding admonition to critics who attempt to remain aloof from culture "in selbstgenügsamer Kontemplation" (ibid.) does not apply to these works.

Furthermore, my analysis has outlined the key framework governing the way that these attempts to confront the culture are constructed in their immanence to the same culture: the notion of a collective (national) body. That is to say, all of the works under discussion in this dissertation reproduce the biopolitical metaphorical framework of National Socialism even as they attack, expose and re-purpose it. This process can be thought of as a "re-metaphorization," in the sense that it takes a literal historical reality (Nazi racial policy and the Holocaust) that itself was the product of a series of "linguistic, conceptual and institutional mediations" (Esposito 2008 112) informed by metaphor, and restages it figuratively in new historical contexts.[169]

The works discussed in this dissertation, therefore, exhibit a tension that can be conceptualized as arising from a combination of Adorno's immanent cultural criticism and Esposito's concept of immunity. In criticizing the paradigm of immunity underlying

[169] According to Roberto Esposito in *Bíos*, National Socialism was characterized by the coincidence of the spheres of political action and biology (112). That is to say, in Esposito's view, the perpetrators of the Holocaust took seriously the metaphors underlying the contemporary discourses of biology, eugenics and nationalism. In this sense, the genocide perpetrated against the Jews, disabled Germans, the Roma, Sinti, homosexuals and others was the result of a literalized metaphor: the German nation as a racialized body engaged in a struggle with "outside" elements which were, paradoxically, simultaneously internal to it (117). The biopolitical imperative to preserve the life of the German nation by protecting it from the deleterious effects of racial mixing and degeneration was radicalized into a "thanatopolitics," an immunological or homeopathic procedure intended to save the nation from death through "regenerative" homicide (137-38). Ultimately, in Esposito's account, this procedure developed into an "autoimmune" reaction that resulted in the slaughter of Germans by other Germans in the final days of the war (117-18).

National Socialist biopolitics, these works do not escape this paradigm, but rather initiate a process of "immunization" of their own, in which the biopolitical immunity of the Nazi regime becomes the very thing which must be defended against homeopathically.[170] In Esposito's view, "immunity" always arises as a reaction to a "community" which has become unbearable. My reading suggests, therefore, that this unbearable community, as constructed by the aesthetic "counter-infections" described in this dissertation, is represented, in a paradoxical way, by the Nazi past itself (that is, especially as this past is portrayed in the myriad cultural productions about it during the past half century, roughly speaking).

Furthermore, if immunity, as theorized by Esposito, is characterized by the systematic incorporation of what is "outside" the system in order to protect the system, the aesthetic procedure of immunization I have outlined in this dissertation would suggest that, in provoking "immune" reactions to Nazi thought and imagery, Bernhard, Schlingensief and Jelinek (all to varying degrees) are in a sense pushing the Nazi past itself into an internalized – yet, paradoxically, by virtue of its negative content, simultaneously external – position. In these works, the immanent positioning of critique, conceived of or received within a biopolitical frame, becomes its own opposite. Esposito's analysis of immunity reveals the paradox at the heart of the type of immanent critique I have described here when he writes, "[i]mmunity, because it is secondary and derivative to the force it is intent on fighting, always remains subaltern to it" (92). For

[170] The readings of Jelinek and Schlingensief put forth in this dissertation suggest that the "immunity" which their works mobilize or reflect on has less to do with the real history of Nazi biopolitics (though it employs the metaphorical trappings of this discourse), and more to do with previous aesthetic confrontations with the Nazi past. The same is arguably not the case for Bernhard, whose generational position in Austria meant that his works, such as *Frost*, were part of the "first wave" of artistic confrontations with the past.

Adorno, critique that reflects on its own immanence through dialectical negation is the only valid form for political art after Auschwitz. My use of Esposito in this dissertation has shown that this negation – especially when conceived of within a biopolitical framework – is also caught up in the very process it attempts to fight, which itself functions according to a similar dialectical motion.

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