

Comedy and Trauma in Germany and Austria after 1945

The Inner Side of Mourning

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For my father

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the AHRC for its generous funding of the collaborative research project ‘Reverberations of War in Germany and Europe since 1945’ of which this book was a part.

I am in various ways indebted to the following friends and colleagues and would like to thank them all for their insights, support and contributions: Mary Fulbrook, Julia Wagner, Christiane Wienand, Alexandra Hills, Gaëlle Fisher, Richard Sheppard, Mererid Puw Davies, Erica Carter, Tsila Ratner, Katherine Ibbett. Thanks too to Isaac, Simeon and John, and to Miriam Bathsheba, who proved to me the importance of comedy in the thick of it.

ABBREVIATIONS

The Following abbreviations are used throughout for references to the primary works:

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| <i>Fi</i> | Imre Kertész, <i>Fiasco</i> , trans. by Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2011) |
| <i>F</i> | Imre Kertész, <i>Fateless</i> , trans. by Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2006) |
| <i>DK</i> | Imre Kertész, <i>Dossier K.</i> , trans. by Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2013) |
| <i>M</i> | Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Malina</i> . 'Todesarten'-Projekt, ed. by Monika Albrecht and Dirk Göttsche, 4 vols (Munich: Piper, 1995), III.1 |
| <i>BS</i> | Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Besichtigung einer alten Stadt', in 'Todesarten'-Projekt, ed. by Albrecht and Göttsche (Munich: Piper, 1995), III.2 |
| <i>DBF</i> | Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Das Buch Franza</i> . 'Todesarten'-Projekt, ed. by Albrecht and Göttsche (Munich: Piper, 1995), II |
| <i>GR</i> | Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Goldmann/Rottwitz-Roman</i> . 'Todesarten'-Projekt, ed. by Albrecht and Göttsche (Munich: Piper, 1995), I |
| <i>S</i> | Ingeborg Bachmann, <i>Simultan</i> . 'Todesarten'-Projekt, ed. by Albrecht and Göttsche (Munich: Piper, 1995), IV |
| <i>A</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i> (Munich: Süddeutsche Zeitung/Bibliothek, 2008) |
| <i>DA</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Die Ausgewanderten</i> (Frankfurt, a.M.: Fischer, 2008) |
| <i>RS</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Die Ringe des Saturn</i> (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2007) |
| <i>SG</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Schwindel. Gefühle</i> . (Frankfurt, a.M.: Fischer, 2009) |
| <i>AusE</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Austerlitz</i> (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001) |
| <i>TE</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>The Emigrants</i> (London: Harvill, 1997) |
| <i>Rings</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>The Rings of Saturn</i> (London: Harvill, 1998) |
| <i>V</i> | W. G. Sebald, <i>Vertigo</i> (London: Vintage, 2002) |
| <i>B-S</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Berlin – Stettin</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>HZuFZ</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>U</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Uckermark</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>DJiC</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Dieses Jahr in Czernowitz</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>P</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Pommerland</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>Me</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Memelland</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |

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| <i>H</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Holunderblüte</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2008) |
| <i>KN</i> | Volker Koepp, <i>Kurische Nehrung</i> (Berlin: Edition Salzgeber, 2010) |
| <i>Fla</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>Frauen lessen anders</i> (Munich: dtv, 1997) |
| <i>GW</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>Gelesene Wirklichkeit: Fakten und Fiktionen in der Literatur</i> (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006) |
| <i>K</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>Katastrophen: Über deutsche Literatur</i> (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009) |
| <i>LoM</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>Landscapes of Memory: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered</i> (London: Bloomsbury, 2004) |
| <i>uv</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>unterwegs verloren: Erinnerungen</i> (Munich: dtv, 2008) |
| <i>wl</i> | Ruth Klüger, <i>weiter Leben. Eine Jugend</i> (Munich: dtv, 1999) |
| <i>DNuDF</i> | Edgar Hilsenrath, <i>Der Nazi und der Friseur</i> (Munich: dtv, 2010) |
| <i>TKO</i> | Jonathan Littell, <i>The Kindly Ones</i> , trans. by Charlotte Mandell (London: Vintage, 2010) |

INTRODUCTION

Comedy, Trauma and the Ethics of Representation‘sheer impudence’

‘We consider that your way of giving artistic expression to the material of your experiences does not come off, whereas the subject itself is horrific and shocking’.¹ These are the criticisms with which a publisher rejects the novel manuscript that the old boy, the protagonist of Imre Kertész’s novel *Fiasco*, has submitted for consideration. The old boy’s novel depicts his experience as a fourteen-year old Hungarian Jewish boy of being deported to Auschwitz. The publisher’s disquiet over the old boy’s unusual representation of a horrific and shocking subject stems from the fact that the ‘protagonist’s, to put it mildly, odd reactions’ (*Fi*, 56) fail to transform the concentration camp experience into a shattering experience for the reader. The protagonist’s ‘gauche comments’ and ‘lack of compassion’ function to ‘repel and offend the reader’ (*Fi*, 57). Prime examples of what is offensive are the protagonist’s first impression of the shaven prisoners as ‘suspect’, and that he feels their ‘jug ears, prominent noses, sunken, beady eyes with a crafty gleam’ make them seem ‘Quite like Jews in every respect’. And, shockingly, the crematoria elicits in him a feeling of ““a sense of a certain joke, a kind of student jape”” (*Fi*, 56). As though this is not enough, the style of the novel is ‘clumsy’ and ‘tortuous’ (*Fi*, 57).

On the penultimate page of the novel we learn that the old boy’s novel was, after its initial rejection, published after all. This is actually no surprise, since the reader suspects all along that the novel is, in a complex interweaving of fact and fiction, Kertész’s own first novel, *Fateless*. Indeed the reader can cross-reference the publisher’s quotation from the old boy’s novel with the point in Kertész’s *Fateless* where the protagonist, György Köves, does refer to his ‘sense of certain jokes, a kind of student prank’.² György’s sense of a joke is provoked by the incompatibility of murder and civility that he observes upon arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the way in which everyone is ‘swaddling them with solicitude and loving-kindness’ (*F*, 110), and the fact that the place where they are gassed is surrounded by lawns, trees and flower beds. Despite feeling increasingly queasy, for he is aware of the outcome of the procedure, György nevertheless has the impression of a stunt: gentlemen in imposing suits, smoking cigars who must have come up with a string of ideas, first of the gas,

then of the bathhouse, next the soap, the flower beds, ‘and so on’ (*F*, 111), jumping up and slapping palms when they conjured up a good one.

The publisher’s response in *Fiasco*, as well as the letter’s ambiguous status between fact and fiction, both articulates and raises a range of concerns that remain central to debates around representations of atrocity and the Holocaust. The publisher’s dismissal of György’s responses as ‘odd’ complements his assumption that a horrific subject should produce a shattering experience for the reader. Thus he not only prescribes how someone ought to react to a horrific situation, but anticipates that the representation of horror should be translated into the reader’s ability to feel that horror through emotional identification. György’s lack of compassion (as the publisher sees it) for other victims, and his unsympathetic description of them, disqualifies him from making moral judgements, again implying that emotional identification with victims is the necessary centre of a moral response. It follows from the publisher’s expectations that he should be offended that the extermination process could be figured as a joke. In *Dossier K.*, Kertész ascribes the rejection of *Fateless* to the artistic challenge it represented to the authority of the Hungarian dictatorship, which controlled the publishing house. He cites its ‘sheer impudence [...], its style, its independence; a sarcasm inherent in its language that strains permitted bounds and dismisses the craven submissiveness that all dictatorships ordain for recognition and art’.³ Yet the offence of coupling Auschwitz and a joke extends beyond the desire of a dictatorship for submissiveness. It also strains the expectation that Holocaust representation should remain uncoupled from the joke, and, more widely, from the comic.

It is such an expectation that this study seeks to challenge by drawing critical attention to the comic aesthetic at play in the work of key authors and directors. The book analyses the intersection of comedy and suffering in selected German language novels and films that respond to the legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust. It focuses on the work of Ingeborg Bachmann, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, W. G. Sebald, Volker Koepp, Reinhard Jirgl and Ruth Klüger. Furthermore, it offers a comparison of Edgar Hilsenrath’s and Jonathan Littell’s treatment of perpetrator suffering. The texts and films have been selected for their explicit concern with suffering, and their engagement with the question of how suffering and trauma can be represented, but where their comic dimension has not been explored or centrally analysed as part of interpretations of the work as a whole. My understanding of

comedy is intentionally broad and is designed to encompass those aspects of the texts that challenge what Michael Mulkey refers to as ‘serious discourse’ by ignoring its demand for congruity. These aspects range from irony, through what is amusing or funny, to what in some cases is ludicrous, all of which open a space in which the celebration of ‘interpretative duality’ is key.⁴

Interpretative duality is central to the provocation of *Fateless*, for it undermines unambiguous moral distinctions. Primo Levi too invokes the notion of a joke in relation to Auschwitz. The prisoners, who have had nothing to drink for four days, are put into a room with a tap and a card that forbids drinking the water because it is dirty: ‘Nonsense. It seems obvious that the card is a joke, “they” know that we are dying of thirst and they put us in a room, and there is a tap, and *Wassertrinken Verboten*’.⁵ For both Kertész and Levi the joke arises from the incongruities of camp life, the absurdity of warning prisoners of the dangers of lice, or of the need to wash their hands, an absurdity intensified by its being expressed in kitsch rhyme: ‘*Nach dem Abort, vor dem Essen/Hände waschen, nicht vergessen*’.⁶ In Levi’s example the relationship of mocked and mocker is clear, but Kertész’s text disturbs this moral polarity chiefly, as he himself identifies, by the narrative tone.

György consistently maintains a distanced gaze on his experiences, his observations not only sarcastic but also peculiarly detached and understated even when he describes his torment. At the end of his first day in Auschwitz he is ‘tired out by the host of new events, experiences, and impressions, and moreover drowsy’ (*F*, 116), as though he has been sightseeing. He admits: ‘the meal system in Auschwitz, I have to say, was most peculiar’ (*F*, 119), and his own associations too add to the sense of peculiarity. The tightly and ruthlessly controlled column of marching prisoners at Buchenwald, of which he is part, reminds him ‘of those caterpillars in a matchbox that as a child I had guided with the aid of slips of paper and prods, all of which somehow slightly intoxicated, even utterly fascinated, me’ (*F*, 122). The physical and mental degradation of the prisoners and the collapse of friendships are registered by György when he nearly fails to recognize one of the boys he was deported with. The once dapper Fancyman is now a ‘strange creature [...] his face all sunken, pinched, and peaky’ (*F*, 154), who shuffles past unable even to respond to György’s greeting: ‘and I thought to myself: Can you beat that! Who’d have thought it!’ (*F*, 155).

In *Fateless*, the absurdity of the camps is never absent from the combination of the narrator's distance with his scrupulous search for accuracy. The sense of a joke is not limited to muddying the clear moral distinction between perpetrator and victim, but manifests itself too in György's startling, even funny, observations and remarks. In their 'impudence', these at times seem to intimate a joke, played on any reader who, like the publisher, and like the journalist who questions György upon his return to Budapest, anticipates reading about 'the hell of the camps' (*F*, 248). But, as he says, 'I had nothing at all to say about that as I was not acquainted with hell and couldn't even imagine what that was like' (*F*, 248). For him the experience of Auschwitz is not exactly described by 'ghastly' (*F*, 117) but by 'boredom, together with that strange anticipation' of waiting for 'nothing to happen' (*F*, 119). Hell, in contrast, would be a 'place where it is impossible to become bored' (*F*, 249). Expectations of Holocaust representation are strained to the limit when György's account culminates in a moment of 'sharp, painful, futile longing' for the camp: he feels 'nostalgia, homesickness' for, 'in a certain sense, life there had been clearer and simpler' (*F*, 261). In the face of those who ask only about the 'atrocities', the most memorable experience for him is that 'even there, next to the chimneys, in the intervals between the torments, there was something that resembled happiness' (*F*, 262).

The narrator laconically observes the torment of the camps, at the same time remaining fascinated by their absurdity and building a sense of the absurd into his narrative style. This layering of the absurd is typical of Kertész's comic aesthetic more generally, which emerges from the way he holds together so many aspects: the complex emotional responses to his camp experiences, explicit concerns about how to represent those experiences aesthetically, and the position of writing for himself and for an audience. In *Fiasco*, the old boy's notes describe the ambiguous pleasure of remembering the camps, the 'strange ecstasy' and 'voluptuous feeling' bestowed by recalling his time there as if in the present. His metaphor of Auschwitz as an 'undigested dumpling, its spices belching up', encapsulates the mixture of pleasure and difficulty he feels, as well as illustrating the comic edge of his self-representation. The old boy does not know whether 'memory itself is attended by that delight, irrespective of its subject', since a concentration camp is not 'exactly a bowl of fun' (*Fi*, 73). But whereas recollecting the experiences has greater reality for him than living them did, these memories are not the same as what he writes, for in the writing

they become transformed so that his work is ‘nothing else than a systematic atrophy of my experiences in the interest of an artificial – or if you prefer, artistic – formula’ (*Fi*, 75).

Yet it is this very atrophy of the experiences that allows the novel to flourish as fiction. In *Dossier K*, Kertész insists on the distinction between fact and fiction, of autobiography and novel, by arguing that autobiography is a recollection whereas fiction is a creation of a world, however based on facts it is. Even if every detail is accurate, the ‘world of fiction is a sovereign world that [...] follows the rules of art, of literature’ and which is ‘Remorseless in its laws’ (*DK*, 10). Thus, he insists, ‘In the novel [*Fateless*] I did have to invent Auschwitz’ (*DK*, 9), and it is why he sees his ‘proper place [...] not in the story but at the writing desk’ (*DK*, 18). This same view is forcefully articulated by the old boy, whose experiences have been transformed into ‘an irrevocable aesthetic standpoint’ (*Fi*, 37): ‘I was taken to Auschwitz not by the train in the novel but by a real one’ (*Fi*, 75). So it is that words, over and above the concern with ‘accurate portrayal’ (*DK*, 129) take on their full significance from their place within the aesthetic whole. The shocking words ‘happiness’ and ‘homesickness’ change their ordinary meaning, just as bricks become part of a marvellous cathedral, because imagination is ‘also a kind of reality’ (*DK*, 130).

Kertész’s work raises testing questions, both through its subject matter and exploration of themes, and in the way those themes are interwoven with the narrative fabric of the text. Through his eye for the joke and his comic sensibility, he interrogates representations of the ‘greatest trauma of the twentieth century’ (*DK*, 106) that seek to evoke horror through emotional identification, and confronts commonplaces of Auschwitz descriptions. This is at times both shocking and very funny, encapsulated in György’s assertion that ‘In any case, [...] I didn’t notice any atrocities’ (*F*, 256). The reader is unsettled by the possibility of a sick joke, one that she is drawn into enjoying, a voluptuous delight in reading divorced from the subject that perhaps hints, shockingly, that ‘however sick a joke this may sound, Auschwitz proved a fruitful enterprise’.⁷ Yet conversely, to deny ‘aesthetic “pleasure”’, to comply with the ‘moral stink bomb’ that censures Celan and Radnóti as barbaric, is also ‘a sick joke’ (*DK*, 105-6), for ‘like it or not, art always regards life as a celebration’ (*DK*, 104). Finally, his work asks us to think about the inevitable aesthetic mediation of experience, and, by resisting the conflation of the terms facts,

accuracy and reality, Kertész insists that the imagination must remain a plaything to create the reality in which certain issues can be addressed.

The constellation of issues that Kertész's work explores is at the heart of this study. It considers how 'voluptuous feeling' in the form of a comic aesthetic intersects with material that is not 'a bowl of fun' to interrogate the expectations and ethics of representing suffering and trauma. It examines the ways in which comedy functions to sustain or complicate the narrative perspective and modes of identification set up by the narrative. Thus comic devices may be used to sustain or challenge structures of empathy and identification that themselves depend upon a particular ethical or political position. Here the question of whose suffering is privileged, and how, becomes key, particularly with reference to the controversial issue of how German or Austrian suffering is depicted. Central to the book's enquiry will therefore be the question of what comedy contributes to debates around the ethics of representing trauma, victimhood and suffering. It will also engage with the importance of comedy for interrogating and challenging our understanding of the notion of trauma and its prevalent use in cultural criticism: anxiety and moral disquiet around the pleasure we take in reading or watching suffering are especially acute in relation to suffering that has assumed significance as exemplary or as a cultural trauma. A final analytic thread will be a consideration of what comedy contributes to our understanding of melodrama and melancholy as two very differently evaluated articulations of suffering: melancholy as a privileged, masculine mode of perceiving and melodrama as a trivializing, feminine response.

'a sense of a certain joke'

The relationship between the pleasures of art, others' suffering, and morality is a vexed one. Spectatorship of extreme events points to our 'degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others'.⁸ This delight is, though, fraught, for it raises the question of what exactly it is we take pleasure in when we watch suffering from afar, whether this pleasure is the one of knowing oneself to be the survivor, of *Schadenfreude*, or the satisfaction of morbid curiosity. The transfiguration of the violent and traumatic event into an aesthetic object relieves the spectator of the accusation of being an actual bystander (for many spectators of atrocity are implicated in the event) and sanctions our pleasure in reading of or

looking at another's suffering. As Susan Sontag observes in relation to Christian art, the depiction of violence has not provoked moral concern and the paintings offer both the 'satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching' and 'the pleasure of flinching'.⁹ This is in contrast to the voyeurism of looking at a photograph of a real atrocity, unless the spectator is someone who can, like doctors, do something about the suffering.¹⁰

Sontag draws our attention to the transformation of reality by art, one that lessens the moral problems of voyeurism when it comes to fictionalized horror, however overwhelming it may be. But photography's indexical relationship to the reality it depicts means that it 'bears witness to the calamitous and the reprehensible' and as a result its inevitable aesthetic transformation of reality provokes moral judgement: 'Photographs that depict suffering shouldn't be beautiful'.¹¹ The anxiety caused by the pleasures elicited by representations of other people's pain is not, however, limited to photography, even if its indexical relation to reality is held to endow it with particular moral responsibility to its subjects. As is suggested by Sontag's juxtaposition of voyeurism with intervention or learning from, anxiety is commonly assuaged by the promise of moral improvement. Indeed, Martin Jay reminds us of Kant, for whom spectatorship is justified because 'by assuming the general viewpoint of the "world spectator" whose taste, imagination, and hope could transfigure events like shipwrecks or revolutions into ciphers of human improvement, one might transcend the despair aroused by a less elevated perspective'.¹² Thus the moral universe within which we may enjoy watching and reading of traumatic violence, or find ourselves fascinated by it, is normally carefully contained by a claim for a text's contribution to social, political and ethical transformation one way or another.

The moral anxiety attending representations of violence and suffering, the fear that we are benefiting from the pain of others, is also contained by the boundaries of genre and the notion of appropriate form. The elevating catharsis of tragedy gives meaning to suffering, and the pleasure it gives rise to is part of a wider, ethically edifying experience. Yet if our pleasure in other people's suffering becomes too manifest as precisely that, pleasure, the response is anxiety, moral disquiet and the devaluation of those modes of representation that clearly signal their association with pleasure, including comedy. It is precisely the unashamed association of comedy with pleasure that causes anxiety when representations of trauma and suffering include a

comic dimension in their aesthetic. For comedy has, understandably, been commonly held to be incompatible with the tragic experience of another's death or suffering, or indeed the awareness of one's own finitude. This incompatibility has also been extended to aesthetic representation, where comedy is seen to be a by-product of more serious matters. This is typified in Cixous's attitude: 'I go to the theatre because I need to understand or at least to contemplate the act of death, or at least admit it, meditate on it; and also because I need to cry. And to laugh: but laughter is merely the sigh of relief that bursts forth at the scythe's passing: it missed us by a hair!'¹³ Crying needs no excuse; laughter, however, is dismissed with a 'but' and a 'merely', typical of the generally lowlier status of comedy. Its association with the failings of the body, be this the reduction of the body to a mechanistic state or the ugly distortions of uncontrollable laughter,¹⁴ compares poorly with tragedy's emphasis on truth, and the usually male heroic gesture of reconciling individual will with necessity.

However, the nature of the pleasure that we derive from comedy is more complex and ambivalent than the temporary relief of avoiding the scythe. The pleasures it offers include the affirmation of shared humour and its ability to confirm values, the hilarity of fooling around, the satisfaction derived from someone else's misfortune, the enjoyment of incongruity, the excitement of the macabre and the thrill of provocation. However, these pleasures may be complicated by those aspects of comedy that are alienating, unsettling and uncanny, which find expression in the German term 'das Komische' with its dual reference to both comedy and strangeness or peculiarity. Some types of comedy are more obviously associated with a feeling of unease or alienation, particularly irony and absurd humour, for they thrive on interpretative multiplicity and systematically question coherent meaning. Indeed, it is this unsettling dimension of comedy, particularly evident in cynical, bizarre, macabre or naïve humour, which in its irritant effect may temper our pleasure, since it demands a critical response rather than one aimed solely at enjoyment.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to guard against any drift into schematization. Comedy's ability to cause pleasure, unease, reflection, or all of these – with unsettlement too so often offering a frisson of enjoyment – cannot be ascribed simply to type of comedy or content, but is inseparable from its function in a particular context.

The ethical implications of comedy reflect its complex nature and its ambivalent pleasures. Consequently, comedy neither entirely warrants the moral anxiety it provokes, nor totally abates it. Moral disquiet around comedy relates most

obviously to the ‘superiority’ theory of comedy, which sees laughter being provoked in response to the inferiority of another, be that through ugliness of the body, character flaw, or behaviour. In this view, comedy is generated from the objectification or dehumanisation of others, and the pleasure we take in our superiority depends upon exploiting their faults. As Hazlitt remarks, ‘in general [...] we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers’.¹⁶ The superiority theory points to satire, to the comedy generated by ridicule and mockery, and it includes Freud’s tendentious joke that constructs a butt to be laughed at. It is this aspect of comedy that is also linked to its negative evaluation as aggressive and debasing, and as a form of release of those emotions and drives that have been socially repressed. Yet any self-evident moral censure attaching to this understanding of comedy is destabilized by a consideration of context. For satire that ridicules the pretensions, weaknesses and flaws of those in positions of power arguably has different moral effects from satire used in the service of sustaining a hegemonic ideology or particular social hierarchies. Kierkegaard recognizes the importance of different contexts in his consideration of the legitimate use of comedy, which varies even from individual to individual. Here, the polemical exposure of deficiency should not cause pain: ‘It is absolutely necessary that the person concerned be himself happy in his ridiculous delusion; as soon as he is himself unhappy in his ludicrous delusion, he is not to be laughed at.’¹⁷

The variation in the appraisal of tendentious comedy is typical of a wider response to comedy, a moral ambivalence that is particularly evident around two of its key characteristics: distance and play. Distance from the object and the notion of ‘laughing at’ is inherent to the superiority theory, but it is also fundamental to more nuanced views of comedy based on incongruity. Here it is the coming together of different perspectives that produces humour, often through a sudden rupture of expectation. Thus, for example, Kant emphasizes the element of surprise and unexpectedness of comedy, and Schopenhauer suggests that the origin of laughter lies in suddenly recognizing the incongruity between concept and reality.¹⁸ But incongruity may also involve the sustained holding together of mutually contradictory frames of reference or meaning. Hazlitt writes, for example, that the ‘essence of the laughable is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another’.¹⁹

It is precisely these alternative possibilities and jostling feelings that demonstrate the limitations of any one particular perspective, evidence of a distance that makes comedy a threat to beliefs or acts that are held to be sacred, absolute, or all-consuming. Distance necessarily introduces an alternative point of view or exterior gaze that renders beliefs finite or relative, and that introduces the potential for critical detachment. The threat posed by comedy to the sacred, as well as the attempt to contain its pleasures, is reflected in the strong negative response in Christian thought to laughter, exemplified in Basil of Caesarea's assertion that 'it is clear that it is *never* the right time (*kairos*) for laughter for a faithful person.'²⁰ This tradition of thought is reiterated by Reinhold Niebuhr when he contends that 'laughter must be heard in the outer courts of religion; [...] but there is no laughter in the holy of holies. There laughter is swallowed up in prayer and humour is fulfilled by faith'.²¹ In a very different holy of holies, that of sex in its 'ecstatic dimension', comedy renders ridiculous 'the moment of the utmost intimate engagement'.²² Thus comedy can be understood as containing a corrosive influence, challenging both the seriousness of people's convictions and the notion that their outlook and values are either sacrosanct or universal, or both.

Yet the distance of comedy remains morally ambivalent. For while it is deemed a threat to values that are revered, be those religious, ethical, political or social, the distance conferred by comedy is also held by some theorists to be a crucial virtue. This is largely because comedy facilitates a detachment from the immediacy of emotions and allows for the assumption of a sovereign position from which one can look down upon the human condition.²³ Schiller ascribes to such distance the greatest of value and describes comedy as the equivalent to the highest of man's goals: 'frey von Leidenschaft zu sein, immer klar, immer ruhig um sich und in sich zu schauen' ['to be free of passion, always clearly, always calmly to look around himself and into himself'].²⁴ Freud also draws on the notion of distance to valorize humour. He distinguishes between the comedy generated by the unconscious in pursuit of pleasure, and humour, which is based upon the mediation of the super-ego.²⁵ The pleasure of humour is more nuanced and more valuable, for in addition to causing pleasure it is also concerned to stave off suffering in a way that sustains spiritual health, unlike neurosis, ecstasy or madness.²⁶ The ability to be humorous is highly prized by Freud, for it is a rare gift that equips an individual to joke about the perceived danger of the world and thereby lessen its threat.²⁷

The ethical value of comedy is specifically addressed by Robert C. Roberts, who argues that a sense of humour reflects the ability to enjoy a range of incongruities and perspectives. Its virtue resides in the fact that it allows a person to transcend character and perceive their moral failings. In contrast, an individual lacking in humour is 'in a spiritual straitjacket constituted by his own character'.²⁸ Crucially, Roberts argues, such a person is lacking in freedom and play. His emphasis on the notion of play is, in addition to the difficulties posed by distance, vital for understanding the moral ambivalence around comedy. If a key characteristic of comedy is its playfulness, then it raises the question of comedy's relationship to reality and how that inflects comedy's moral status. Thus, when discussing jokes, Roberts suggests that to 'get' a joke, the malicious element of the joke must be shared. To suspend one's disbelief and adopt the perspective of a racist in order to laugh at a racist joke is not tantamount to adopting racist beliefs. Rather, in William James's terms, this temporary sharing of perspective can be thought of as a 'moral holiday' and is testament to the plasticity of the human mind, which enables it to adopt and experiment with various and contradictory attitudes. Thus, 'there *is* something like malice in the enjoyment of malicious humour. However, it need not be malice itself, but only "something like" malice'.²⁹ It is precisely this playful quality of humour that is a source of its moral importance according to Roberts, because it means that the individual is not 'locked in' to a particular point of view. Nevertheless, as he admits, there is no guarantee that the 'something like' cannot end up becoming the thing itself.

Roberts's argument is lent further credibility by Christie Davies's study of 'national' or 'ethnic' jokes. Davies too emphasizes the importance of play in understanding jokes' non-correspondence with reality, arguing that there is a 'widespread tendency to confuse serious and humorous statements and to confuse playing with aggression in jokes with real aggression. [...] [J]oke telling differs fundamentally from other forms of communication, such as bona fide communication or lying'.³⁰ Jokes are, precisely, not serious, and it is possible for people to enjoy in a joke what, if said seriously, would shock: 'Humor is about mock shocks, mock frights and mock aggression'.³¹ Like other creative forms, jokes 'are ambiguous, do not have clear meanings, break empirical and logical rules and have multiple uses. They are a form of play'.³²

Comedy's role as a form of play, and its ability to maintain mutually contradictory frames of interpretation,³³ are qualities that are inseparable from the complex perspectives and moral holidays that may be offered by fiction. The intricate systems of identification and response involved when we know something to be real or fictitious, comic or serious, influence the moral response of the reader or spectator. Are there fundamental ethical differences in laughing at somebody being humiliated, laughing at someone being humiliated in fiction, whatever the form, and laughing at someone being humiliated within a clear comic structure? Most fiction signals itself as fiction even if the events it depicts bear a strong resemblance to reality, and such signposting of its artificiality offers precisely the freedom to transcend character that Roberts adduces as a moral virtue. Yet the question remains whether the freedom conferred by the distinction of fiction and the play of comedy is unconditional. For the imaginary is inseparable from the social, be that understood phenomenologically, where 'there is no division between social and psychic identification, [...] or indeed between the film experience and everyday life',³⁴ psychoanalytically, where 'so many of the images that come to us in fantasies, daydreams, and dreams are already symbolically determined or structured', or dialectically.³⁵

As Laura Mulvey pithily remarks, 'history is, undoubtedly, constructed out of representations',³⁶ and patterns and structures of representation construct and reinforce dominant discourses. This is most succinctly illustrated in Franz Fanon's anecdote about the screening of a Tarzan film in the Antilles and in Europe: 'In the Antilles, the young Negro identifies himself *de facto* with Tarzan against the Negroes. This is much more difficult for him in a European theatre, for the rest of the audience, which is white, automatically identifies him with the savages on the screen.'³⁷ Fanon's example is not about comedy, and one of the claims for comedy is that its ability to hold together competing or contradictory perspectives strengthens its moral value. This suggests that the potential for comedy to resist being subsumed into a single purpose and to maintain a subversive quality is inherent in its distance and play. Yet it is also clear from Roberts's acknowledgement of humour's function as a bridge from virtue to vice and vice versa and from Freud's admission, with which Davies's study concurs, that the joke is always in service of an intention, that the effects of comedy as well as its ethical standing, relate to context.³⁸

'moral stinkbomb'

Despite the ethical complexity of comedy, the post-Holocaust context has undeniably intensified doubts about it whether it is an appropriate form of response to suffering and death. The suspicion of comedy sits within the wider distrust of pleasure that has a long philosophical tradition and that was particularly sharpened by modernism. In her analysis of pleasure and modernism, Laura Frost sets out the hierarchy explicit in the difference between *hedone* (pleasure), which was associated with the body and the senses, and *eudaimonia* (happiness), which was more highly valued as being measured, metaphysical and partaking of truth.³⁹ The distinction that Plato makes between the ‘true’ pleasures of reason and intellect and the ‘false’ pleasures of the body is typical of the pleasure hierarchy that persists into the modern period.⁴⁰ In modernity, this hierarchy manifests itself particularly in the ‘Great Divide’ between mass culture and high art.⁴¹ This divide sustained a polarity whereby mass culture was distrusted and disparaged compared to high art, with, for example, the commodified, feminized and distracting pleasures of popular cinema being deemed inferior to the critical, reflective and contemplative modes of viewing offered by art. Popular culture became quickly aligned with the easy, superficial and fake pleasure of *kitsch*, a term that emerged with the ability to mass-produce cultural products. Seen as morally unsavoury, as an ‘aesthetic form of lying’, *kitsch* offers enjoyment without any effort.⁴² In contrast, modernism emphasized the hard cognitive work needed for true pleasure, which is achieved through the process of deciphering complex writing. Quick and easy sensory pleasures are disavowed as modernism teaches readers to strive hard for their pleasure: ‘Difficulty becomes an inherent value and is a deliberate aesthetic ambition set against too pleasing, harmonious reading effects.’⁴³ Comedy is particularly suspect here, for it undermines the aspiration of high art as well as offending against topics considered serious or sublime: ‘Wenn Komik ihre Funktion besonders gut erfüllt, meldet sich gleich das Mißtrauen des gebildeten Ästheten, der die hehre Kultur gefährdet sieht.’ [‘When comedy fulfils its function particularly well, the educated aesthete immediately becomes suspicious and fears that sublime culture will be threatened’].⁴⁴

It is against this background of philosophical and aesthetic distaste for pleasure that the conviction that there is something inappropriate about it is radically intensified by debates around Holocaust representation. The impact of Adorno’s ‘moral stinkbomb’, as Kertész puts it, that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is

barbaric', reflects a profound crisis concerning representation.⁴⁵ This crisis relates fundamentally to the problem of ethical representation, including the incongruity between the aesthetic pleasures of art and the extreme violence and suffering of the genocide. As Adorno went on to say, his assertion about poetry does not apply absolutely, 'but it is certain that after Auschwitz, because Auschwitz was possible and remains possible for the foreseeable future, light-hearted art is no longer conceivable.'⁴⁶ The seriousness of art thus becomes further aligned with the seriousness of its ethical response to the events it depicts and the validity of its truth claim, a conflation that is compounded by the other key ethical worry: the extent to which the Holocaust can be represented at all, let alone with 'false' pleasures in mind. The result is 'Holocaust piety'.⁴⁷

The unspeakability of the Holocaust has as a foundational reference point Primo Levi's statement that 'we, the survivors, are not the true witnesses. [...] those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute'.⁴⁸ Yet while fundamentally problematizing the ability to witness, Levi links the attempt to do so with an ethical responsibility: 'My religious friend had told me that I survived so that I could bear witness. I have done so, as best I could'.⁴⁹ Memory and Holocaust Studies have in various ways engaged with this double bind, the question of how a central traumatizing event can be articulated when the witnesses are dead or cannot speak, with the concurrent ethical insistence on witnessing. A prevailing tendency has developed which insists upon the impossibility of representing the Holocaust, evinced in George Steiner's claim that 'the world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason'.⁵⁰ The Holocaust's unrepresentability is combined with an avowal of its absolute uniqueness and results in its elevation to the level of the sacred. Thus Elie Wiesel argues that to represent the Holocaust is to violate the absolute separate universe that it inhabits: 'A novel about Majdanek is about blasphemy. *Is* blasphemy', it is 'an act that strikes all that is sacred'.⁵¹ Claude Lanzmann too assumes guardianship of the sacred flame when he speaks of the Holocaust as 'unique in that it created a circle of flames around itself, [...] a protected, safe zone that is not to be entered. Here, to transgress or to trivialize are alike'.⁵²

Whether Kertész would consider Lanzmann's statement a 'moral stinkbomb' we do not know, but LaCapra certainly is critical of Lanzmann and generally wary of ways in which the Holocaust is constructed in an aesthetic of the sublime. He speculates that the sublime may be a secular manifestation of the sacred, assuming the

form of ‘a radically transcendent, inaccessible, unrepresentable other (including the alterity of radical evil)’.⁵³ To be a witness is, within this dominant tendency, itself to be confronted with the sublime. Thus Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, although pointing to the self-evident fact that the Holocaust has been represented, consider it unclear whether those representations actually offer knowledge or whether they rather provide ‘something akin to a flash of horror that precedes and disturbs our ability to know’.⁵⁴ Such a flash of horror, by disrupting knowledge, may prevent replicating the rationality of the Shoah. Furthermore, this flash of something that exceeds comprehension offers a glimpse of the sublime that by rupturing harmony, be that the coherence of knowledge or of aesthetic pleasure, offers a type of redemption.⁵⁵ It is ‘precisely the production of this sublime excess, which troubles testimony and narrative and forces the reader to confront the horror of the limit’ that is redemptive: redemptive not ‘as positive or transcendent’ but in the glimpse of what is beyond the human.⁵⁶

LaCapra expresses reservations about the invocation of the sublime, arguing that it resonates with a general trend away from accessible narratives to a celebration of aesthetic approaches that privilege rupture in various guises. The aporia has come to figure the purported ineffability of trauma and is part of a widespread tendency ‘to transfigure trauma (including at times violence) into the sacred or the sublime’.⁵⁷ I would add, furthermore, that a crucial part of this transfiguring process is also the explicit bestowing of ethical value onto trauma *per se*, even if it is not explicitly figured as the sublime. The re-evaluation of trauma as an emotionally charged state that holds ethical value has arisen from developments in philosophy, psychoanalysis and psychiatry.

The ethical privileging of trauma has been profoundly influenced by an increasing philosophical emphasis on the encounter with the other as ethical. A key figure in articulating this view is Emmanuel Levinas. For him the encounter with death is the confrontation with absolute alterity: death is ungraspable, for it cannot be experienced, and as such remains always utterly alien. It cannot therefore be assumed as in any way mine, but remains an obstacle, ‘a menace that approaches me as a mystery’.⁵⁸ Far from being an ‘event of freedom’, from constituting the ‘supreme lucidity and [...] supreme virility’ of Heidegger’s being-towards-death, for Levinas death is the cause of suffering which renders the subject passive.⁵⁹ The absolute alterity of death means that the relation to death is beyond the subject’s possibilities, it

is a relation that cannot be reduced to self-presence.⁶⁰ This is the crucial point that marks the subject as ethical, as constituted in relation with alterity: 'dying structures the self as Being-for-the-other'.⁶¹ In Levinas, the encounter with alterity is figured as shattering, traumatic and ethical. The traumatic, ethical encounter is, furthermore, located outside of reason, a realm in which the 'foreign being, instead of maintaining [...] its singularity, [...] becomes a theme and an object'.⁶²

The universalizing of ethics as a shattering, or traumatic, encounter with the other, that exceeds reason and language, has strong parallels in psychoanalytic thought. In Freud's work on trauma, it is always conceived of as an interaction between an external event, a situation of danger that threatens the ego, and an individual's affective predisposition. Social and cultural context is also key, so as Clara Mucci summarizes,

the impact of trauma even in quantitative terms is mediated by several factors: the quality of the attachment, the resilience and integrated level of the self, the cultural and personal meaning attached socially and individually to the event, the presence of support to the victims within society and in the family, the reiteration of the event and duration in time.⁶³

Thus some people experience an event as traumatic when others do not, as Freud already observed in relation to shell shock, and as is indicated by the fact that on average only twenty percent of those who experience traumatic events develop PTSD.⁶⁴ The complex understanding of trauma as an interaction between an external event, psychic predisposition and social context has, however, as Ruth Leys demonstrates, frequently been undermined by a polarization of external and internal. What she calls 'mimetic theory' emphasizes the traumatic experience as unavailable to normal memory, fating the victim to act out and identify with the original trauma unconsciously. In contrast, 'antimimetic theory' depicts violence as purely and simply an assault from without'.⁶⁵

Psychoanalysis has been crucial for universalizing trauma into an ethics through its focus on 'mimetic' theories on internal psychic trauma as common to everyone. Necessary developmental experiences such as birth, separation from the mother, loss of the primary love object, alienation from the primary wholeness, have all been figured as fundamentally traumatic events. As LaCapra points out, no differentiation is made here between absence and loss, as a result of which we are all

victims of fundamental trauma. Yet there is an important difference between the two terms. He defines absence as a foundational absence of an absolute that was never there, but that is often perceived as a real loss, such as the *Volksgemeinschaft*, or harmonious pre-modern society. Loss, however, is the historical consequence of particular events.⁶⁶ Psychoanalysis commonly elides absence with loss to posit trauma as a structural universal, meaning that it can then become a foundational experience for identification with others. Such a move is evident in Cathy Caruth suggestion that we all bear an ethical responsibility to speak and listen ‘from the site of trauma’ that relates not only to ‘what we simply know of each other, but to what we do not yet know of our own traumatic pasts.’ Hence ‘trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures’.⁶⁷ By positing the radical link between ethics and trauma, psychoanalysis further severs the connection of ethics with reason. This rupture is particularly evident in Lacanian thought, where the ethics of psychoanalysis is not a question of what constitutes the Good, but of whether one is ‘guilty [...] of having given ground relative to one’s desire’.⁶⁸ This formulation links ethical action not with the ego and its subservience to the moral(istic) precepts of the super-ego, but with the subject’s constitutive and traumatic relationship to her desire.

Thus influential strands of philosophy and psychoanalysis have contributed to trauma being understood structurally as a basis of our common humanity, and, furthermore, as being central to our status as ethical beings. American Psychiatry, exemplifying Leys’s ‘antimimetic’ approach to trauma, has in a very different way also been key in strengthening the status of trauma as ethically valuable. This is both surprising and paradoxical, because through its strong focus on defining the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), it divorces the event from its moral context. In 1980 the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders-III* (DSM-III) adopted the term PTSD for the first time, and the term ‘neurosis’ to describe traumatic reactions was abandoned. This was significant because it marked a shift away from seeking the cause of trauma in the unconscious, to locating it solely with an unbearable event. The definition of trauma based only on adverse symptoms following an extreme event had another crucial consequence: the diagnosis of trauma became independent from perceived moral culpability. Perpetrators could suffer trauma as well as victims, suffering which showed that ‘even if they expressed no remorse [...] they still shared in the humanity that their cruelty would seem to have destroyed.’⁶⁹ The DSM-III definition arose out of the specific US context of Vietnam

war veterans showing symptoms of combat shock while also implicated in atrocities, but Fassin and Rechtman point to its global importance: it

removed the moral dimension from clinical practice (since it refused to draw any distinction between the criminal and his victim) and articulated an ethical truth that lay beyond individual judgement (since it claimed to recognize the locus of the intolerable). From the moral to the ethical: this was clearly a profound change in the outlook on violence.⁷⁰

Thus ‘trauma’ has become an ethically privileged category, yet it is one that through its increasingly generalized usage has worrying ethical consequences. There are three key areas where concepts are problematically blurred or where the term trauma is generalized. First, structural trauma, founded in absence, and historical trauma, based on particular loss, are blurred. This justifies claims that trauma is universal and conversely facilitates a movement whereby a historical event that caused trauma assumes foundational status akin to a myth.⁷¹ Yet whereas structural trauma is significant for analysing and understanding constructions of identity and national identity, historical trauma is specific to context and experience and cannot be claimed by all.⁷² In his advocacy of the term ‘cultural trauma’ Jeffrey Alexander draws a similar distinction between events and their transformation into a collective narrative. He points out that an event can be hugely disruptive without being traumatic. For an event to become a cultural trauma it must first be actively constructed as one through its transformation into a narrative and disseminated through institutions and social hierarchies.⁷³ Alexander argues that cultural traumas are symbolic construction and as such they are not descriptions of individual experience or events, but arguments conducted in the social realm about the interpretation and function of those events for a collective.⁷⁴

The elision of structural and historical trauma may facilitate the translation of the term trauma to a social and cultural level in such a way that suggests that all individuals, often of one nation or society, inhabit the same position in relation to an event. Although Alexander insists on the constructed nature of cultural trauma, the employment of collective terms often reinforces and naturalizes the original event as a ‘real’ trauma for all, disguising the ways in which the event has been mediated or constructed as a trauma for social or ideological reasons, or for reasons of commodification.⁷⁵ The generalization of individual to collective trauma is further aided by the second conceptual blurring, that of the event and the traumatic response.

A crucial consequence of DSM-III's emphasis on the external event in causing trauma has been a shift in terminology so that events themselves are described as traumatic, with those who experience it constructed as victims without reference to their affective response. The clinical and historical evidence that points to the importance of resilience is overlooked in favour of constructing victim status through tautological reference to a traumatic event. The specific analysis of how individual symptoms relate to a collective, why certain events do not result in 'collective trauma' and who exactly is traumatized become secondary.

The third blurring of categories is the conflation of the person who experiences trauma with victimhood. Fassin and Rechtman are tentatively optimistic that the increasingly broad application of trauma is a way of moving beyond the category of victim that was so central to the Holocaust model: 'By applying the same psychological classification to the person who suffers violence, the person who commits it, and the person who witnesses it, the concept of trauma profoundly transforms the moral framework of what constitutes humanity'.⁷⁶ Yet as their study goes on to demonstrate, the ever-expanding empire of trauma does not necessarily lead to the category of victim being productively questioned, but colludes in constructing more victims, including victims who are not the real victims.⁷⁷ The entrenched association of trauma with victimhood is why the term 'perpetrator trauma' is provocative. LaCapra refuses the alliance of trauma with victimhood, insisting that symptoms of trauma in those who commit atrocities, even if they can be understood as evidence of humanity, do not make someone a victim: "'Victim" is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category. [...] Not everyone traumatized by events is a victim.'⁷⁸ This is a vital point, for it insists on the importance of a specific context for the term to be meaningful.

'similar feelings'

The emergence of trauma and victimhood as ethically privileged states assumes a further twist in the context of Germany and Austria. By focusing on victims, questions of responsibility and culpability for the cause of suffering can too easily be marginalized. So how a text solicits empathy or identification and to what purpose becomes crucial to how victimhood is depicted. The politics of empathy with victims is particularly significant within a context where victimhood has been central

to Austrian and German post-War narratives, both personal and national. The notion of victimhood was central to the construction of post-war Austrian national identity despite strong support by Austrians for the *Anschluss* in March 1938 and their far-reaching participation in the Third Reich and genocide. Indeed, Austrians were disproportionately involved in the Holocaust, providing half the concentration camp guards despite having only one-tenth of Germany's population before the war.⁷⁹ But in the Moscow Declaration of 30 October 1943 the foundation for the Austrian victim myth was laid when the allies declared that Austria was 'the first victim of Hitlerite aggression'. Austria's acknowledged status as victim was further confirmed as key to its self-definition when in the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 the allies omitted the clause referring to 'Austrian responsibility for her participation in World War II'. As Hella Pick remarks, the 'outside world was more interested in Austria's post-war achievements than in its Nazi record, its anti-Semitism or its reluctance to face up to its past; the four wartime allies still had no qualms about endorsing Austria's status as Nazi Germany's first victim.'⁸⁰

The Austrian self-definition as victim rested on profound denial, as Jean Améry clearly states: 'Österreich jedoch, von seinen Politikern der Welt als ein Opfer Hitlers vorgestellt, steht vor der unerträglichen Nötigung, sich selbst ganz und gar zu verleugnen.' ['Yet Austria, presented to the world as a victim of Hitler by its politicians, suffers from the terrible compulsion to deny itself utterly.']⁸¹ This denial was not only an attempt at moral exculpation, but was also financially beneficial in that it led to the allies reducing Austria's reparation payments and also allowed Austria to divest itself of any responsibility for compensation to victims. Austria delayed payments to Israel and Jewish survivors, made the claim process very difficult and only recognized Roma and Sinti as victims from 1981. In contrast, injuries sustained from being active in the Nazi party or the Wehrmacht were fully compensated.⁸² Austria's status as victim was publicly challenged when the Waldheim affair of the 1980s forced discussion and acknowledgement of Austrian support for the Nazi regime and anti-Semitism. In July 1991 the Social Democrat Chancellor, Franz Vranitzky, offered the first public revision of the 'victim' narrative, admitting that Austria could no longer avoid its moral responsibility for deeds perpetrated by its citizens.⁸³

Although from the 1990s Austria's position as the first victim of National Socialism was no longer officially condoned, the case of Germany demonstrates that

public and private discourses of victimhood do not necessarily match, and that widespread suffering can be cast as a type of victimhood. In Germany, a 'rhetoric of victimization'⁸⁴ has played a significant role in responses to the Second World War. The mass migration of up to fifteen million ethnic Germans at the end of the war, the mass rape of women and the bombing of German towns have been fundamental to narratives of victimhood in West Germany.⁸⁵ Discourses of victimhood were present in the domestic sphere from 1945 onwards, but also played a vital role in forging an identity for the united Germany.⁸⁶ If in the FRG narratives of suffering had offered collective legitimacy against East European communism and eased integration into the West,⁸⁷ in the united Germany they offered a means for establishing cohesion. Thus, for example, forced expulsion was viewed by the government as common to the history of East and West Germans and therefore as useful for a post-unification understanding of the past.⁸⁸

To acknowledge German suffering does not necessarily mean avoiding issues of responsibility and guilt. As Rainer Schulze remarks, 'the moral obligation to remember the victims of National Socialism does not mean that it is not possible to remember the victims of the consequences of National Socialism'.⁸⁹ Yet his formulation is crucial, for German suffering is often decontextualized, becoming all too quickly equated with victimhood. Victimhood has been instrumental in diminishing or deflecting from questions of culpability for policies that led to war and genocide, a process that has occurred in three main ways. First, through uncritical or uncontextualized comparison which helps promote the 'indivisibility of *humanitas*'.⁹⁰ Thus, for example, the German experience of forced expulsion could be compared to other expulsions in order to highlight human suffering as such. This was the aim of the 'Erzwungene Wege' exhibition organized by the *Bund der Vertriebenen* in Berlin in 2006, in which the Germans were featured alongside the Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Jews the Finnish Karelians and the populations of the former Yugoslavia. Underplaying differences and eschewing analysis, this exhibition was controversial and does not represent an accepted norm. Indeed, critics praised the exhibition 'Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration' running concurrently in Bonn for its 'sober' approach.⁹¹ But 'Erzwungene Wege' highlights the problem around implicit comparisons that establish equivalence or universality rather than using comparison critically to analyse and differentiate.⁹² In this respect the exhibition was a further example of what was already explicit in the *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980s, when right-wing historians

pointed to the suffering of ethnic Germans as on a par with that of holocaust victims. The exhibition was also a manifestation of what Bill Niven terms the ‘implicit equation’, which informs the belief that such comparisons are legitimate and which are articulated in the view that Czechs and Poles have not yet faced up to their past in the way that Germans have.⁹³

The second way in which narratives of German suffering have distracted from questions of responsibility is through a process whereby history, be that historical events or the representation and reception of the past, has become increasingly subjective. As Daniel Fulda describes, this process encompasses human interest, self-reflection, historical reconstruction and personal identification.⁹⁴ It is worth pointing out that such subjectification complements a further trend to emphasize vicarious experience rather than contemplation in approaching the past, a tendency that is also reflected in museum displays: ‘Disinterested, contemplative spectatorship, drawing moral lessons from the disasters suffered by others, is less in fashion than a desire to experience the wreckage firsthand’.⁹⁵ The increased focus on the subject and subjectivity in history extends from the object of study through to questions of historical methodology, cultural representations and public discourse. The academic interest in ego documents and memory studies has contributed to the shift from recounting experiences of suffering in private, which has always been a vital aspect of how the war is remembered, to narratives of personal experience moving into public discourse. The widespread focus on memory as a favoured term, one that has been generalized to incorporate all forms of accessing, recounting and representing the past, has helped validate emotional responses to the past, most often through processes of identification. And complementing the role of the academy’s interest in subjective accounts has been the huge impact of cultural representations of the German experience of the expulsions and bombings since 1989.⁹⁶

The third reason for the uncoupling of German suffering from analysis of culpability is closely related to the subjectification of historical discourse and the accompanying emotional investment in the past: it is the wider concurrent shift towards the globalization of Holocaust memory and the universalization of trauma. As Niven argues, the globalization of the Holocaust and the duty to remember its victims has made Germany one of many nations involved in the process of remembrance, and no longer a pariah nation.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the critical emphasis on trauma has lent credibility to the German discourse of victimhood. This has occurred

at the level of the event, since extreme events are accepted as *de facto* traumatic. But it has also occurred morally, for, as outlined in the discussion of trauma above, a traumatic event becomes a signifier of humanity regardless of the moral context in which it happened. It is particularly ironic in view of this shift to universalization of victimhood and the concern with the suffering of humanity in general that reference to German suffering and victimhood as a collective ‘excludes once again the suffering of German Jews and other persecuted groups, such as Sinti and Roma’ who are effectively posited as non-German.⁹⁸

‘an artificial – or if you prefer, artistic – formula’

Debates around Holocaust representation are weighed down by multiple ethical concerns, which have a far-reaching impact on how modes of representation and types of pleasure associated with them are evaluated. The cathartic pleasure of tragedy has always been affirmed and privileged because, as Simon Critchley suggests, the tragic paradigm provides a heroic response to the problem of finitude. Tragedy is the ‘aesthetic form that would reconcile the freedom of the subject and the necessity of nature’.⁹⁹ It is through his struggle with suffering and death that the tragic hero finds redemption, or, as Karl Jaspers suggests, a burst of transcendence that brings with it a seed of hope.¹⁰⁰ Yet Kertész points to a fundamental problem with the tragic paradigm in relation to the Holocaust. If, following Jaspers, in tragedy man acts, and through his own actions enters tragic involvement in his fate, this cannot apply to the victims of Nazi atrocities whose fate had nothing to do with their actions but with genocidal policies of a State. Tragedy does not lend itself to the functioning of a bureaucratized State and to mass murder in which individual finitude plays no role. As the narrator of Kertész’s *Kaddish for an Unborn Child* furiously argues, a ‘dominating power’ is ‘simply a matter of decisions, decisions that are made or not made in individual lives, neither satanic nor unfathomably and spellbindingly intricate, [...] just vulgar, mean, murderous, stupid, hypocritical, and even at the moments of its greatest achievements at best merely well organized’.¹⁰¹ This is also Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s point when he writes that Hitler and Stalin cannot be made into Wallensteins, because their power has become too cruel and mechanical and often just pointless. The State itself has become ‘unüberschaubar, anonym,

bürokratisch' ['immense, anonymous, bureaucratic'] and thus without real representatives.¹⁰²

The redemptive dimension of tragedy is also problematic in that it confers positive meaning on murders that have nothing ethical or transcendental about them. The emplotment of the Holocaust as tragedy explicitly or implicitly hints at ennoblement or grandeur. In relation to the victims it too easily figures the Holocaust as a 'necessity of nature' and casts them as heroically reconciled to their fate. The Holocaust thus ends by serving a higher ethical purpose and acquires a redemptive dimension. In relation to the perpetrators, tragedy affirms individual responsibility, but effectively invites moral consent for mass murders as well as conferring heroic stature onto the individual perpetrator. Nevertheless, as is evident from the discussions around the unrepresentability of the Holocaust and of trauma, critical reservations about tragedy have not obviated the desire for some type of redemption. The moral investment in victimhood and trauma, the tendency towards sacralization and the textual invocation of the sublime in order to achieve redemption, have resulted in a privileging of aesthetic modes that emphasize rupture, aporia and loss.

Melancholy has assumed particular significance as the emotional and subjective state that seems to bear witness to the immeasurable loss and suffering of the Holocaust. At the individual level the subject, by internalizing the lost object, ensures that 'the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged'.¹⁰³ Hence loss is not simply forgotten with time and the pain of suffering remains actual. Figuratively, melancholy can be understood as supporting the ethical injunction to remember and as ensuring that the lost other remains constitutive of how the past is approached and represented. Melancholy's affective intensity also serves as testament to the desolation of the human condition, serving, in its relationship to trauma, as a metonymy for being. Crucial to the privileging of melancholy as a representational mode that is adequate to human suffering is its association with the masculine genius and the melancholy man's 'keener eye for the truth'.¹⁰⁴ Thus historically melancholy has been seen as a particularly apt form of representation for male creativity as the artist uses his insight to transform suffering into a culturally valorized work of art.¹⁰⁵ As an 'exceptional individual', the melancholy man is a suitable heir to tragedy, for he embodies the suspicion that 'truth itself [might] be gloomy'.¹⁰⁶

The 'true' and gloomy masculine pleasure of melancholy is in marked contrast to the 'false' feminine pleasures offered by melodrama. Despite being a mode of

representation that places suffering and victimhood at its core, melodrama has traditionally been treated with suspicion as a debased form of tragedy. Its historical genesis in pantomime and music hall brings with it the taint of common entertainment, as does its tendency towards sensationalism. Its traditional emphasis on action and spectacle promote an ‘aesthetics of astonishment’ that ‘proposes the total enjoyment of excruciating situations in their unadulterated [...] state.’¹⁰⁷ Melodrama’s fascination with overwrought feelings and pathos seem to confirm its superficiality, fuelling the view that its pleasures provide no more than a shallow emotional frisson which has no social or ethical worth.¹⁰⁸ Its promise of wish fulfilment makes it vulnerable to accusations that it trivializes suffering and relapses into *kitsch*.¹⁰⁹ Melodrama’s low status is further compounded by its designation as ‘woman’s weepie’. The pleasures it offers are closely tied to the woman’s body, both in terms of the suffering woman of the diegesis and the emoting reader or spectator. As Linda Williams argues, the woman’s body functions as both the moved and moving. The bodily excess of melodrama, its lack of aesthetic distance and self-reflection, makes it, like pornography and horror, both inseparable from the feminine and highly manipulative. Together these genres employ the ‘rhetoric of violence of the jerk’: ‘tear jerker’, ‘fear jerker’, ‘jerk off’.¹¹⁰

Comedy too can easily smack of the accessible but trivial amusements of mass culture. The effortless fun of much comedy makes it seem incompatible with the horror of atrocity and suffering, a view that is reinforced by comedy’s unabashed relationship to joy or delight as ends in themselves. This opinion informs Gert Sautermeister’s reading of Hilsenrath’s *Der Nazi und der Friseur* as a voyeuristic product of the entertainment industry that displays a post-modern disregard for morality.¹¹¹ Comedy’s association with the pleasures of the senses and of the debased body marks it as superficial and offensive, for comedy provokes the suspicion that someone is the object of amusement and that victims are being objectified for the laughter or smiles of others, even if it is through the medium of fiction. Instead of encouraging the empathy for another’s suffering that is central to an ethical encounter, comedy can facilitate our pleasure in the other’s reduced state.

Furthermore, the ethical value of comedy that derives from its characteristics of distance and play present a fundamental challenge to the orthodoxy of both Holocaust representation and the representation of trauma more generally. Distance from the passion of suffering can represent a betrayal of that suffering, a rejection of

those who were murdered, or a rejection of those elements of one's identity that are inseparable from the experience of persecution and trauma.¹¹² As Jean Améry so forcefully articulates, even though the passing of time inevitably leads to the healing of wounds, such healing has something '*widermoralisch*' ['*antimoral*'] about it, a sentiment that can make any form of distancing highly ambivalent.¹¹³ Thus comedy can be an affront to individual memory. It may also disrupt the attempt to keep trauma alive for moral and political legitimacy, and can challenge those who have an interest in representing trauma as collective and indelible.¹¹⁴ The ability of comedy to generate and hold together incompatible perspectives, as well as its playful tenor, offends against the unspeakability of the Holocaust, and the tendency to ascribe to it a sacred or unique status. This is Rüdiger Steinlein's reservation: he worries that by detracting from the sacred Holocaust comedy may undermine the scale of the Nazi crimes and the fundamental way in which they transgressed against humanity.¹¹⁵ The intrinsic ambiguity and multi-dimensionality of comedy suggests that there are different views on suffering and on victimhood and this itself can be perceived as diluting the understanding of genocidal crimes as evil, or as undermining the moral integrity of the victim or traumatized individual.¹¹⁶

However, despite anxiety around comedy in Holocaust representations, it is both the case that comedy in post-Holocaust literature is as old as post-Holocaust literature and that such comedy has from the outset been recognized as significant and ethically valuable. Thus Tadeusz Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1947) has exerted significant, and largely positive, influence on discussion of the comic in Holocaust narratives, as has Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* (1969). And canonical postwar writers such as Günter Grass, Thomas Bernhard and Elfriede Jelinek are known for their use of biting comedy in their attempts to find an ethical response to atrocity. Not only has comedy been part of the canon of Holocaust representation, the reception of such comedy has frequently been positive, as the popular and critical success of Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* demonstrates.

The embeddedness of different types of comedy in the canon of post-Holocaust literature has elicited surprisingly little scholarly interest. There are, however, notable and insightful exceptions. In 1982 Peter Stenberg suggested that the passing of time had led to enough distance and opened up a space for black comedy. Yet he remained concerned about the legitimacy of such comedy, arguing that only a member of the

victimized culture, who has gained distance from the events, should break the taboo against comedy.¹¹⁷ In contrast to Stenberg's qualifications, Terence des Pres argued forcefully in 1988 for comedy and laughter in Holocaust representation, which he judged to be restricted by expectations of what was appropriate. He was concerned by the limitations resulting from 'a seriousness admitting no response that might obscure [the Holocaust's] enormity or dishonor its dead.'¹¹⁸ In his analysis of Borowski's *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, Leslie Epstein's *King of the Jews* (1979) and Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), he presents the value of a comic approach as one which, by creating distance, permits 'a tougher, more active response' and which can 'foster resilience' and be 'life-reclaiming'.¹¹⁹

Des Pres does not address the question of authorship and legitimacy raised by Stenberg: his chosen authors anyway are survivors or belong to the victimized culture. But certainly any necessary relationship between the identity of an author or director and the ethics of comedy was increasingly questioned. In 2000, Sander Gilman historicized the relationship, maintaining in his analysis of Holocaust films that the need to justify comedy by evoking Jewish identity was characteristic of the 1970s. By the time of Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* in 1997, this was no longer the case, a shift that reflects the way in which the Shoah has become generalized as a human, rather than just Jewish, experience.¹²⁰ At the same time, Anne Fuchs problematized the relationship, commenting in response to Stenberg that being a survivor does not in itself 'justify employing the wrong register in portraying the Holocaust'. She also insisted on linking the ethical implications of comedy to a specific context and readership, arguing first, that the effect of comedy on a German readership should be considered. Secondly, she points out that the sense of guilt that is typical of the German post-war cultural climate, and that was reinforced by the 'negative but sacred boundary around Auschwitz', has contributed to 'collective repression'.¹²¹ Her points reflect precisely the vacillation that characterizes the moral response to comedy generally: on the one hand fears about its tendentious impact, in this case the worry that it would reinforce anti-Semitic stereotypes and the attempt to normalize the Holocaust; on the other hand comedy's liberating challenge to norms, which here include stipulating the rules of Holocaust and trauma representation as well as condoning a culture of unselfcritical guilt.

It would be misleading to insist on a strict polarity between the two responses to comedy, for the sacralization of the Holocaust need not itself be devoid of

tendentiousness. As Slavoj Žižek remarks, the ‘depoliticization of the holocaust, its elevation into the properly sublime Evil [...], can also be a political act of utter cynical manipulation, a political intervention aiming at legitimizing a certain kind of hierarchical political relation.’¹²² Ofer Ashkenazi makes a similar point in relation to the specific German context in his discussion of contemporary comic representations of the Nazi past. Concentrating on visual representations, he distinguishes between pre-unification comedy that tends to depict Nazis returning into the post-war reality and post-unification images that emphasize the incongruity of Nazi ideology and appearance in contemporary mainstream society.¹²³ The humorous gap between the past and the present could be read as a form of escapism from responsibility, but, he insists, the humour is also a response to issues of representation: ‘humor enables one to represent Nazism *beyond* the trauma and its mechanism of suppression. The humoristic references [...] are a reaction to, and a result of, the perceived obstructions of representation – not an escapist indifference to it.’¹²⁴

Jill Twark situates the comic responses to the Nazi past within the general growth in humour culture in post-unification Germany, which is a result of greater openness among Germans, particularly younger Germans towards their history: ‘Germans now possess enough self-confidence to be able to laugh at just about anything, including themselves and their turbulent history.’¹²⁵ Yet her assertion is perhaps rather too hasty. Although it is true that the question of whether Germans, and others, should or should not mock Hitler and the Nazis is no longer relevant because they do, comic depictions still cause controversy. Discussion around Mel Brooks’s musical *The Producers*, Walter Moers’s comic strip *Adolf, die Nazi-Sau* (1998-2006) and Dani Levy’s film *Mein Führer – Die wirklich wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* (2007) are testament to ongoing anxiety about Holocaust comedy, indeed around Holocaust ‘impiety’ more generally.¹²⁶ The heated responses to comic depictions indicate that German comedy and ridicule about the Nazi past can still be contentious, not least because some comic representations fuel concern that they are no more than ‘*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* “lite”’ and a profitable commodity.¹²⁷

It is significant that these examples focus on ridiculing or satirizing the Nazi perpetrators and their ideology and are therefore perhaps less likely to raise the complex ethical issues that comedy directed specifically at Holocaust victims does. Thus in his discussion of four comic films that are directly concerned with victims of the holocaust, Žižek raises the question of the limits of comedy and its relation to the

tragic. He suggests that the figure of the *Muselmann* is this limit: on the one hand his extreme destitution rules him out from being ‘tragic’, on the other this very destitution also prevents us from perceiving him as a comic character despite the fact that his relentless pursuit of food and automatic gestures are normally the stuff of comedy. Any attempt to treat the *Muselmann* as tragic results in him becoming a ‘mocking parody of tragic dignity’, yet treating him as comic will generate sympathy for his tragic predicament. ‘The Muslim is thus the zero-point at which the very opposition between tragedy and comedy, sublime and ridiculous, dignity and derision, is suspended; the point at which one pole passes directly into its opposite’.¹²⁸

Žižek’s view of the *Muselmann* as potentially comic might seem extreme and even scandalous. But it brings us back to György’s observations of the prisoners in Kertész’s *Fateless* and with it to the question of how suffering is depicted. The aim of this book is not to analyse Holocaust comedies or indeed comic texts, but specifically to explore German language texts which are centrally concerned with the legacy of suffering caused by the Second World War and the Holocaust but which incorporate comedy into their aesthetic. The study thus addresses the dominant critical neglect of comedy over the last two decades and seeks to rebalance the approach to Holocaust representation that has focussed intently and earnestly on themes of negative sacralization, trauma and suffering.¹²⁹ It brings to the fore what has been an important, though marginalized, ethical tradition in Holocaust representation and scholarship, one which was already inherent to Adorno’s understanding of post-Auschwitz poetics. For in his reading of Beckett’s *Endgame*, Adorno insists upon the importance of the absurd, not because the absurd has no meaning, but because it requires a negotiation of meaning: ‘The logical figure of the absurd [...] negates all the meaningfulness logic seems to provide in order to convict logic of its own absurdity’.¹³⁰

As Stefan Krankenhagen points out, the importance for Adorno of the absurd is that it integrates self-reflexivity and the refusal to construct meaning (itself a secular *Bilderverbot*) into the formal fabric of representation. Through its formal refusal to affirm or confirm meaning, the artwork is made into a representation of Auschwitz and the society that allowed it to happen.¹³¹ The absurd is only one dimension of comedy, one in which elements of weirdness and alienation are most distilled. But comedy’s refusal of congruity is to various degrees one of its key characteristics, and it is the different ways in which comedy’s interpretative duality

contributes to and extends our understanding of suffering and trauma that is central to this analysis. With the exception of Hilsenrath's novel, the texts included in this study are not comedies, but combine a comic aesthetic with other representational strategies. They are texts that embody Benjamin's conjoining of comedy with mourning: 'Die Komik – richtiger: der reine Spaß – ist die obligate Innenseite der Trauer, die ab und zu wie das Futter eines Kleides im Saum oder Revers zur Geltung kommt' ['Comedy – or more precisely: the pure joke – is the essential inner side of mourning which from time to time, like the lining of a dress at the hem or lapel, makes its presence felt'].¹³² The inclusion of comedy crystallizes the question of how we may enjoy portrayals of suffering, for by integrating comedy into texts that are predominantly concerned with the legacy of suffering, anxiety arising over the pleasure at others' pain is not contained by conventions of genre or form.

Furthermore, I consider the ways in which comic devices are deployed and with what aims: how they contribute to or challenge processes of empathy and identification that sustain particular identities and moral positions; and the extent to which they help perpetuate or question expectations of how suffering is both appropriately represented and responded to. I analyse what the incorporation of a comic aesthetic reveals about the values that attend particular artistic forms and representational modes, not least melancholy and melodrama. These values are of course neither rigid nor uncontested. Thus melancholy also brings with it a long history of criticism that it manifests a pathological 'complaisance towards sadness'.¹³³ The pathological dimension of melancholy, so important for privileging it as a form of negative sacralization, has been fuelled largely by psychoanalytic interpretations. However, as Mary Cosgrove demonstrates, melancholy also has a performative tradition, one that can offer space for comedy and for questioning the link between ethics and trauma.¹³⁴ Furthermore, melancholy, with its tendency towards emotional excess, especially in the tradition of sentimentality and *Empfindsamkeit*, can drift into melodrama. Melodrama too has garnered the interest of critics as being more than trivial women's weepies and for offering critical potential, not least in relation to feminist ethics. Thus the book aims to consider the obstructions and expectations that come with representation as well as the impact of comedy for interrogating the prevalent use and ethical privileging of trauma, traumatic subjectivity and victimhood.

This study is not designed to be representative, but to be suggestive. I focus on authors and texts where the comic aesthetic has been marginalized in criticism or where it has been considered as a possible stylistic weakness or failure, as not sitting easily with the predominant tone of suffering. Thus I have not selected for analysis those authors where the comic aspects of their work have already been the focus of extensive study, as is the case, for example with Jurek Becker, Elfriede Jelinek and Thomas Bernhard.¹³⁵ By using comedy as a starting point the individual analyses will offer new interpretations of the authors' and directors' work. Each chapter offers a different context and raises different issues about the relationship of comedy to suffering. Chapter one explores how Ingeborg Bachmann combines comedy with melodrama as part of her focus on the suffering female victim. The interaction of melodrama and comedy continues to be key in chapter two, which analyses the funny side of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's films in order to challenge the critical privileging of male masochism. The question of how suffering is gendered continues to be a theme in chapter three. Here I focus on the tension between two comic strategies in W. G. Sebald's work, one which constructs the figure of the masculine melancholy narrator as a privileged moral figure, and the other which points to the comedy of melancholy excess and sublimation as the ethical centre of the prose. In chapter four I consider Reinhardt Jirgl's *Die Stille* in parallel with the post-reunification films of Volker Koepp in order to see how their treatment of the former Eastern territories interacts with discourses around German suffering and culpability for atrocities. The study of Ruth Klüger's essays and memoirs in chapter five raises questions about the role of comedy in relation to the boundary between fact and fiction and also considers how comedy might mediate between *ressentiment* and conciliation. Finally, in chapter six I analyse two novels that draw upon comic devices in their representation of SS perpetrators, Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones*. Here the authors take the provocation of comedy to an extreme by using the device of fictionalized autobiography to engage with questions of self-exculpation, justice and the limitations of tragedy.

¹ Imre Kertész, *Fiasco*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2011), p. 56. References will be given in parenthesis with the abbreviation *Fi*.

² Imre Kertész, *Fateless*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2006), p. 111. References will be given in parenthesis with the abbreviation *F*.

³ Imre Kertész, *Dossier K.*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville House, 2013), p. 183. References will be given in parenthesis with the abbreviation *DK*.

⁴ Michael Mulkay, *On Humor: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p. 37.

⁵ Primo Levi, *If this is a Man and The Truce*, trans. by Stuart Woolf (London: Abacus, 1993), p. 28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷ Imre Kertész, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, trans. by Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 41.

⁸ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (Basil: printed and sold by J. J. Tourneisen, 1792), p. 59.

⁹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.38

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.68

¹² Martin Jay, *Refractions of Violence* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 106.

¹³ Hélène Cixous, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. by Susan Sellers (London: Routledge, 1994), p.154.

¹⁴ Henri Bergson, *Le rire: essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: Quadrige, 1989).

¹⁵ See Wolfgang Preisendanz, 'Zum Vorrang des Komischen bei der Darstellung von Geschichtserfahrung in deutschen Romanen unserer Zeit', in *Das Komische*, ed. by Wolfgang Preisendanz and Rainer Warning (Munich: Fink, 1976), pp. 153-64 (pp. 160-61).

¹⁶ William Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 9 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), V, 6.

¹⁷ Søren Kierkegaard, quoted in John Lippitt, *Humour and Irony in Kierkegaard's Thought* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 130.

¹⁸ See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 273; Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung II* (Zurich: Haffmans Verlag, 1991), p. 108.

¹⁹ Hazlitt, p. 5. Jean Paul Richter offers a similar image when he describes how in humour the intellect dances back and forth with alternative possibilities. See Jean Paul, *Vorschule der Ästhetik*, in *Jean Paul: Werke*, ed. by Norbert Miller (Munich: Hanser, 1980), V, p. 122.

²⁰ Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae Fusius Tractatae*, quoted in Catherine Conybeare, *The Laughter of Sarah. Biblical Exegesis, Feminist Theory, and the Concept of Delight* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 25, f. 9.

²¹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr. Selected Essays and Addresses*, ed. by Robert McAfee Brown (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 49.

²² Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London, NY: verso, 1997), p. 176.

²³ Comedy's dislocation from feeling is encapsulated in Nietzsche's aphorism that the joke is 'das Epigramm auf den Tod eines Gefühls' ['the epigram on the death of a feeling'], in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches II*, 202, in *Friedrich Nietzsche Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I und II. Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Munich and Berlin/New York: dtv/de Gruyter, 1988), p. 466. It finds equally witty expression in Horace Walpole's letter to Anne, Countess of Ossory, 16 August 1776, where he claims that 'the world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel'. See

<http://archive.org/stream/lettersaddressed02walpuoft/lettersaddressed02walpuoft_djvu.txt> [accessed 1 September 2014].

²⁴ Friedrich Schiller, *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung, Werke*, Nationalausgabe, *Philosophische Schriften. Erster Teil*, ed. by Benno von Wiese (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1962), XX, 446; http://www.schillerinstitute.org/transl/Schiller_essays/naive_sentimental-1.html [accessed 3 September 2015].

²⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Der Humor*, in *Sigmund Freud. Studienausgabe. Band IV: Psychologische Schriften* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1989), p. 281.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

²⁸ Robert C. Roberts, 'Humor and the Virtues' in *Søren Kierkegaard. Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* ed. by Daniel W. Conway, 4 vols (London: Routledge, 2002), IV, 293-315 (p.307).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³⁰ Christie Davies, *The Mirth of Nations* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), p. 202.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 227.

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- ³³ Mulkay, p. 28.
- ³⁴ Jan Campbell, *Film and Cinema Spectatorship: Melodrama and Mimesis* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 17.
- ³⁵ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), p. 189 f. 5.
- ³⁶ Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: bfi, 1996), p. 39.
- ³⁷ Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), pp. 152-53, f. 15.
- ³⁸ Sigmund Freud, *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten*, in *Psychologische Schriften*, p. 86. So when Mikhail Bakhtin points to the positive role comedy can play in liberating an individual 'from the great interior censor', there are contexts where the interior censor plays a valuable part in quashing people's intentions, as Ruth Klüger points out (see chapter 5). Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 94.
- ³⁹ Laura Frost, *The Problem with Pleasure: Modernism and its Discontents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 7.
- ⁴⁰ Plato, *Philebus* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), p. 102.
- ⁴¹ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. viii.
- ⁴² Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 259.
- ⁴³ Frost, p. 20.
- ⁴⁴ Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, Johann Sonleitner, Klaus Zeyringer, eds, *Komik in der österreichischen Literatur* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1996), p. 10.
- ⁴⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1983), p. 34.
- ⁴⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Notes to Literature II*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 251.
- ⁴⁷ Gillian Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, ed. by Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp. 242-256 (p.243).
- ⁴⁸ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. by Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1993), p. 63-64.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.
- ⁵⁰ George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p. 123.
- ⁵¹ See Elie Wiesel, 'The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration', in Elie Wiesel, Lucy Dawidowicz et al, *Dimensions of the Holocaust* (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1977), pp. 4-19 (p. 7); Elie Wiesel, *From the Kingdom of Memory* (New York: Summit Books, 1990), p. 169.
- ⁵² Claude Lanzmann, 'From the Holocaust to "Holocaust"', in *Shoah. Key Essays*, ed. by Stuart Liebman (Oxford: OUP, 2007), pp. 27-36 (p. 30).
- ⁵³ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 93.
- ⁵⁴ Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, 'Introduction: Representations of the Holocaust and the End of Memory', in *Witnessing the Disaster. Essays on Representation and the Holocaust*, ed. by Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), pp. 3-22 (p. 3).
- ⁵⁵ Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer, *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* (New York: State University Press of New York, 2001), p. 4.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 11.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ⁵⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), pp. 234-35.
- ⁵⁹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987), pp. 70-71.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.
- ⁶¹ Simon Critchley, *Very Little... Almost Nothing. Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 75.
- ⁶² Emmanuel Levinas, 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity', in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), pp. 47-59 (p. 50).
- ⁶³ Clara Mucci, *Beyond Individual and Collective Trauma. Intergenerational Transmission, Psychoanalytic Treatment, and the Dynamics of Forgiveness* (London: Karnac, 2013), p. 68.

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- ⁶⁴ Cécile Rousseau and Toby Measham, 'Posttraumatic Suffering as a Source of Transformation: A Clinical Perspective', in *Understanding Trauma. Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson, Mark Barad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 275-93 (p.278). See also Arie Y. Shalev, 'PTSD: A Disorder of Recovery?', in Kirmayer, Lemelson, Barad, pp. 207-23.
- ⁶⁵ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2000), p. 299.
- ⁶⁶ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, pp. 43-64.
- ⁶⁷ Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), pp. 3-12 (p.11).
- ⁶⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*, trans. by Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 319.
- ⁶⁹ Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, trans. by Rachel Gomme (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), p. 94.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 95.
- ⁷¹ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 82.
- ⁷² Ibid., p. 78.
- ⁷³ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma. A Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 15.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 4.
- ⁷⁵ See Roger Luckhurst, 'Traumaculture', *New Formations*, 50 (2003), 28-47.
- ⁷⁶ Fassin and Rechtman, p. 21.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 152.
- ⁷⁸ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 79.
- ⁷⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), p. 808.
- ⁸⁰ Hella Pick, *Guilty Victims: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (London: IB Tauris, 2000), p. 3.
- ⁸¹ Jean Améry, *Geburt der Gegenwart. Gestalten und Gestaltungen der westlichen Zivilisation seit Kriegsende* in Gerhard Botz, *Gewalt in der Politik. Attentate, Zusammenstöße, Putschversuche, Unruhen in Österreich 1918-1938* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1983), pp. 201-2.
- ⁸² Botz, *Gewalt in der Politik*, p. 207.
- ⁸³ See Gerhard Botz, 'Historische Brüche und Kontinuitäten als Herausforderungen – Ingeborg Bachmann und post-katastrophische Geschichtsmentalitäten in Österreich', in *Ingeborg Bachmann. Neue Beiträge zu ihrem Werk*, ed. by Dirk Göttsche and Hubert Ohl (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1993), pp. 199-214 (p. 209f).
- ⁸⁴ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of Los Angeles Press, 2001), p. 48.
- ⁸⁵ Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion. West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p. 1. Ahonen's figure of fifteen million is high and the figure remains contested, often cited as being between twelve or fourteen million. Differences stem in part from the different definitions used (distinguishing for example between *Vertriebene* and *Heimatvertriebene*) and because figures were used in post-war Germany to substantiate different sorts of political claims.
- ⁸⁶ Helmut Schmitz and Annette Seidel-Arpaci, eds, *Narratives of Trauma. Discourses of German Wartime Suffering in National and International Perspective* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 4-6.
- ⁸⁷ Ahonen, p. 271.
- ⁸⁸ Rainer Schulze, 'Forced Migration of German Populations During and After the Second World War: History and Memory', in *The Disentanglement of Populations. Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944-9*, ed. by Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 51-70 (p. 61).
- ⁸⁹ Schulze, p. 64.
- ⁹⁰ Bill Niven, 'Implicit Equations in Constructions of German Suffering', in *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 105-24 (p. 113).
- ⁹¹ Schulze, p. 62.
- ⁹² For a detailed analysis of the exhibition, see Niven, 'Implicit Equations'. Niven points to the way in which the exhibition failed to make clear that the expulsions were a 'reactive policy (to a degree) as well as a proactive policy' on the part of the allies (p. 115). See also Ther's discussion of the strategically justifiable reasons for the population exchanges, which were designed to prevent renewed German expansion in East, achieve permanent peace in Europe and to stabilize the nation states of east and central Europe. How far these aims were realized is debateable (p. 347).
- ⁹³ Niven, 'Implicit Equations', p. 107.

⁹⁴ Daniel Fulda, 'Abschied von der Zentralperspektive. Der nicht nur literarische Geschichtsdiskurs im Nachwende-Deutschland als Dispositiv für Jörg Friedrichs *Brand*', in *Bombs Away! Representing the Air War over Europe and Japan*, ed. by Wilfried Wilms and William Rasch (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 45-64 (p.58).

⁹⁵ Jay, pp. 114-15. Aleida Assmann makes a similar point when she refers to the 'Wiederbelebung dieser Vergangenheit im Modus des emotionalen Nacherlebens' ['bringing the past back to life by re-experiencing it emotionally']. See *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2006), p. 194.

⁹⁶ Key texts that fuelled debate include Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (1999), Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (2002), Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* (2002), Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003) and Guido Knopp's *Die große Flucht* (2001). There is an extensive bibliography on the discourse of German suffering and victimhood, including accounts of the *Historikerstreit*, the Walser-Bubis debate on 'normalization', the impact of cultural representations on that debate, and the importance of memory culture. In addition to the works cited here, see: Laurel Cohen-Pfister, 'The Suffering of the Perpetrators: Unleashing Collective Memory in German Literature of the Twenty-First Century', *Forum of Modern Language Studies*, 41, 2 (2005), 123-35; the Bibliography in the special edition on German suffering, *German Life and Letters*, 57, 4 (2004), 354-56; also, the select bibliography in Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims. Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 276-82.

⁹⁷ Bill Niven, 'The Globalisation of Memory and the Rediscovery of German Suffering', in *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004), pp. 229-46 (p. 237).

⁹⁸ Schmitz and Seidel-Arpaci, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Simon Critchley, *Ethics – Politics – Subjectivity. Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 218-19.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit* (Munich: Piper, 1958), pp. 925-26.

¹⁰¹ Kertész, *Kaddish*, p. 40.

¹⁰² Friedrich Dürrenmatt, 'Theaterprobleme', in *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Franz Josef Görtz (Zurich: Diogenes, 1988), VII, pp. 56-57.

¹⁰³ Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. by James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1917), pp. 237-58, (p. 245).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁰⁵ Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 36. See also Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity. Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 37-58.

¹⁰⁸ Simon Shepherd, 'Pauses of Mutual Agitation', in *Melodrama. Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. by Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill (London: bfi, 1994), pp. 25-37 (p. 25).

¹⁰⁹ Steve Neale discusses the way in which the fantasy structure of melodrama sustains the hope for wish fulfilment even if the narrative of a particular melodramatic narrative does not fulfil the wish. See his article, 'Melodrama and Tears', *Screen*, 27, 6 (1986), 6-23.

¹¹⁰ Linda Williams, 'Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess', *Film Quarterly*, 44, 4 (1991), 2-13 (p. 5).

¹¹¹ Gert Sautermeister, 'Aufgeklärte Modernität – Postmodernes Entertainment: Edgar Hilsenraths *Der Nazi und der Friseur*', in 'Wir tragen den Zettelkasten mit den Steckbriefen unserer Freunde: 'Ata-Band zum Symposium 'Beiträge jüdischer Autoren zur deutschen Literatur seit 1945' ed. by Jens Stüben and Winfried Woesler (Darmstadt: Häusser, 1994), pp. 227-42.

¹¹² Ricoeur, p. 76; LaCapra, *History and its Limits.*, p. 84.

¹¹³ Jean Améry, *Werke. Band 2: Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne. Unmeisterliche Wanderjahre. Örtlichkeiten*, ed. by Gerhard Scheit (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2002), p. 133; Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits. Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, trans. by Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 72.

¹¹⁴ See Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson, and Mark Barad, 'Trauma in Context: Integrating Biological, Clinical, and Cultural Perspectives', in Kirmayer, Lemelson, Barad, eds, pp. 451-74 (pp. 471-72); Neil J. Smelser, 'Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma', in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. by Jeffrey C. Alexander and others (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 31-59 (p. 42).

¹¹⁵ Rüdiger Steinlein, 'Das Furchtbarste lächerlich? Komik und Lachen in Texten der deutschen Holocaust-Literatur', in *Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz*, ed. by Manuel Köppen (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1993), pp. 97-106.

¹¹⁶ See Mulkay, pp. 22-38.

¹¹⁷ Peter Stenberg, 'Memories of the Holocaust: Edgar Hilsenrath and the Fiction of the Genocide', in *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 56 (1982), 277-89 (p. 278).

¹¹⁸ Terence Des Pres, 'Holocaust *Laughter?*', in *Writing the Holocaust*, ed. by Berel Lang (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1988), pp. 216-33 (p. 217).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹²⁰ Sander L. Gilman, 'Is Life Beautiful? Can the Shoah be Funny? Some Thoughts on Recent and Older Films', *Critical Inquiry*, vol 26, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), 279-308.

¹²¹ Anne Fuchs, 'Edgar Hilsenrath's Poetics of Insignificance and the Tradition of Humour in German-Jewish Ghetto Writing', in *Ghetto Writing. Traditional and Eastern Jewry in German-Jewish Literature from Heine to Hilsenrath*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and Florian Krobb (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1999), pp. 180-94 (pp.182-83).

¹²² Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say totalitarianism?: Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion* (London: Verso, 2011), p. 67.

¹²³ Ofer Ashkenazi, 'Ridiculous Trauma: Comic Representations of the Nazi Past in Contemporary German Visual Culture', *Cultural Critique*, 78, (2011), 88-118 (p. 98).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101. Ashkenazi is referring here to: Dani Levy's 2007 film *Mein Führer: Die Wirklich Wahrste Wahrheit über Adolf Hitler* as well as Levy's response to *Der Untergang* as a film which made him laugh because of the absurdity of 'this amiable, old grandpa and his funny ideas in the bunker' (quoted on p. 96); the July 2002 cover of the satirical magazine *Titanic* which depicted an image of Hitler with the 'schrecklicher Verdacht' that he might be anti-Semitic; a film clip made by Florian Wittmann in 2008 which super-imposes a voiceover by the comedian Gerhard Polt onto a clip of Hitler taken from Riefenstahl's *Triumph des Willens* and shows Hitler getting very worked up about his encounter with a car leasing company (<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gSrTilhMDn4>> [accessed 30 August 2014]).

¹²⁵ Jill E. Twark, 'Introduction: Recent Trends in Post-Unification German Humor', in *Strategies of Humor in Post-Unification German Literature, Film and Other Media*, ed. by Jill E. Twark (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 1-25 (p. 4).

¹²⁶ Matthew Boswell discusses different types of Holocaust 'impiety' and argues that 'authorial biography and vague notions of sanctity' continue to be reasons for rejecting examples of Holocaust impiety. He cites the example of European critics' threat to boycott Uwe Boll's film *Auschwitz* before it had even been released in 2010. See: Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impeity in Literature, Popular Music and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 6.

¹²⁷ Annika Orich and Florentine Strzelczyk, "'Steppende Nazis mit Bildungsauftrag': Marketing Hitler Humor in Post-Unification Germany", in Twark, pp. 292-329 (pp. 294-95).

¹²⁸ Žižek, *Did Somebody Say totalitarianism?*, pp. 85-86. In his chapter 'Hitler as Ironist' he discusses Roberto Benigni's *Life is Beautiful* (1997), Peter Kassovitz's *Jakob the Liar* (1999), Radu Mihăileanu's *Train of Life* (1998) and Lina Wertmüller's *Seven Beauties* (1975).

¹²⁹ Scholarly engagement with comedy and its potential for representing the Holocaust continues to be rare. Yosefa Loshitzky offers a brief analysis of *Life is Beautiful* and *Train de Vie*, which she sees as 'implicitly or explicitly [referring] to the taboo on imagining the Holocaust'. However, she does little to develop discussions around the ethics of comedy and representation. See 'Forbidden Laughter? The Politics and Ethics of the Holocaust Film Comedy', in *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the 21st Century*, ed. by Ronit Lentin (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2004), pp. 127-37 (p. 135). Discussion of comedy is typically absent from two other collected volumes dedicated to the representation of the Holocaust: *How the Holocaust Looks Now. International Perspectives*, ed. by Martin L. Davies and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *Representing Auschwitz at the Margins of Testimony*, ed. by Nicholas Chare and Dominic Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature I*, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 263.

¹³¹ Stefan Krankenhagen, *Auschwitz darstellen. Ästhetische Positionen zwischen Adorno, Spielberg und Walser* (Köln: Böhlau, 2001), p. 80.

¹³² Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, in *Walter Benjamin: Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1991) I.1, 304; *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 125-26.

¹³³ Ricoeur, p. 76.

¹³⁴ Mary Cosgrove, *Born Under Auschwitz. Melancholy Traditions in Postwar German Literature* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), pp. 1-24. For further discussions of melancholy's comic potential see: Dieter Borchmeyer (ed.), *Melancholie und Heiterkeit* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2006); Bettina Baur, *Melancholie und Karneval. Zur Dramatik Cecilie Løveids* (Tübingen and Basel: Francke, 2002); Peter Sillem, "der du gedeihen läßt und zerstört": Melancholie, Karneval und die zwei Gesichter des Saturn." *Zeitsprünge: Forschungen zur Frühen Neuzeit* 5, no. 1/2 (2001).

¹³⁵ Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler asserts that Thomas Bernhard's 'chief concern, to exaggerate somewhat, is a poetics of comedy', a view echoed by Stephen Dowden who writes that he is a 'satirist of Swiftian sensibilities': he offers 'a "comic" insight into the basic human plight' and in his work the 'unredeemed absurdity of the cosmos simply offers itself as the setting for his austere comedy of catastrophe, despair, and mockery'. Martin Huber too does not limit the comedy in Bernhard's work to satire but sees it serving many different function, and Caroline Markolin understands his concern with Austria as 'a comic and grotesque metaphor for the wretchedness of human existence.' Elfriede Jelinek's work too has long been understood in the tradition of Austrian satirists. Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger describes her as 'one of Austria's foremost political satirists', in the tradition of Nestroy, Kraus and Horváth. And Sigrid Löffler comments of *Die Klavierspielerin* that Jelinek treats her subject with 'a coolness equally humorous and scornful', a description which is applies to much of her prose. See: Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler 'Thomas Bernhard's Poetics of Comedy', in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Matthias Konzett (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), pp. 105-15 (p. 110); Stephen D. Dowden, *Understanding Thomas Bernhard* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), pp. xii, 4-5; Martin Huber, 'Rettich und Klavier. Zur Komik im Werk Thomas Bernhards', in Schmidt-Dengler, Sonleitner, Zeyringer, pp. 275-284 (p. 284); Caroline Markolin, 'Too late to seek, too early to find? Philosophical and Aesthetic Aspects of Contemporary Austrian Fiction', in *Shadows of the Past: Austrian Literature of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Hans H. Schulte and Gerard Schapple (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 125-138 (p. 127); Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, 'In the Eyes of the Press: Provocation – Production – Prominence. A Critical Documentation of Elfriede Jelinek's Reception', in *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*, ed. by Jorun B. Johns and Katherine Arens (Riverside: Ariadne Press, 1994), pp. 287-302 (p. 287). Sigrid Löffler, quoted in Lamb-Faffelberger, p. 291.