The Displaced Self: The interplay of the fictional and the autobiographical in the prose of Elias Canetti, Thomas Bernhard and Peter Weiss

Michael Jopling

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This thesis examines the issue of self-representation in recent German language literature. In order to trace the ways in which the cultural and linguistic displacement that are inescapable features of twentieth century European history are reflected and paralleled in literary constructions of identity, it focuses on the interplay between the autobiographical and the fictional, examining a range of texts within each writer's oeuvre. Thus a writer's autobiographical texts are read in the context of their fiction in an attempt to identify the problems of translating lived experience into literary discourse.

The introduction offers a brief survey of the theory of autobiography in order to suggest the problems involved in classifying this notoriously hybrid genre, particularly in its modern literary forms. Then the writing of Elias Canetti, whose "Lebensgeschichte" appears to be so traditional at first sight, is examined and his emblematic "Verwandlung" metaphor is related to his plural notion of identity and his experience of displacement and exile. In the second chapter, Thomas Bernhard's central autobiographical narratives are examined in the light of his more fictional countertexts. In addition, the suggestion is made that the dialectic of assertion and withdrawal, represented by his recurrent notion of "Gleichgültigkeit", occupies a central place in his highly idiosyncratic prose. Then the recurrent theme of "Leere" is followed through the prose of Peter Weiss. This is related to his autobiographical narratives' quest for "Selbstfindung", which dominates even the ideologically-motivated revisions of Die Ästhetik des Widerstands. Finally, the conclusion uses Christa Wolf's Kindheitsmuster and Was bleibt as paradigmatic autobiographical fictions with which to illuminate the other texts and compares the overlapping metaphors the writers examined have created to represent the displacement of the subject.
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Primary sources and any abbreviations that I have used are listed at the beginning of the notes for each chapter. All sources are listed in the bibliography which is divided into chapter sections for ease of reference.
INTRODUCTION

Joseph Brodsky once commented that "Displacement and misplacement are this century’s commonplace". This statement, with its suggestions of dislocation, accident and loss, goes to the heart of the problems of modern literature. The writers whom I wish to examine in this thesis all experienced in different ways the cultural and linguistic displacement which has been an inescapable feature of Central European history in this century. I wish to trace the ways in which a common sense of disorientation is reflected in their constructions and literary representations of identity. It is in relation to the displaced self that Wolfgang Paulsen has written of the closeness of "Identitätssuche" and "Identitätskrise" in modern German literature. In addition, the notion of the displacement of the subject, first posited in the writings of Nietzsche and Freud, has been regarded as an emblematic condition of modernity by many subsequent critics. In his introduction to a collection of essays on the subject, Mark Krupnick distinguishes a post-structuralist notion of displacement from an earlier, more restorative conception: "Instead, displacement now refers to a violent intervention intended to shake and demoralize that old order". One of the prime sites in which such displacement is effected and reflected is the autobiographical narrative, where self-representation results from an interplay of the fictional and the autobiographical, the past and the present. As Frederic Jameson has noted: "If narrative theory today has accomplished anything substantial, it is to have powerfully displaced the old category of the fictive". This is nowhere more apparent than in recent autobiographical fiction.

Numerous commentators have recognised the affinities between psychoanalysis and autobiography. Both processes are concerned with the investigation of identity and experience; Paul Jay’s recognition that they both "treat" the past captures this succinctly. The impact of psychoanalysis on autobiographical literature is undeniable, most notably perhaps in the writing of Michel Leiris, which is explicitly represented as a form of self-analysis. Lionel Trilling’s tracing of the shift from sincerity to authenticity demonstrates that autobiography represents a secularisation of its roots in the confessional. This is also reflected in the legitimating rhetoric of autobiography. When Odo Marquand speaks of "Rechtfertigung" and "Prozeß" in this context, his choice of terms recalls both analysis and Kafka’s transformation of experience into nightmare, while also looking back to
autobiography's origins in legal, as well as ecclesiastical, self-defence. However, it is only really in the Romantic period, as Christianity begins to lose its hold, that the self becomes a subject worthy of examination, in what has come to be seen as the classical period of autobiography. Indeed many of the early taxonomies of autobiography depict its history as that of a decline from the highpoint of the early nineteenth century. As the self's cohesiveness has come increasingly to be questioned, so too has the possibility of self-representation. Few would subscribe today to the grandiose claims of Wilhelm Dilthey, one of autobiography's earliest theorists: "Die Selbstbiographie ist die höchste und am meisten instinktive Form, in welcher uns das Verstehen des Lebens entgegentritt". This fundamentally nineteenth century attitude echoes that period's utopian faith in totality and unity. The development away from such assumptions is the movement from Rousseau's *Confessions* to Heißenbüttel's "Literatur der Selbstentblößer".

However, even in its classical form, autobiographical narrative is a hybrid genre, dependent on an interplay of past and present, introspection and retrospection, memory and imagination. Roy Pascal's observation, in one of the earliest studies to include (if not entirely approve) modern autobiography, that "Remembering is itself a creative act, and the recording and ordering of memories even more so" is much closer to the ideas of later theorists than they might admit. As both Nietzsche and Kundera have shown so forcefully, history and autobiography are as dependent on omission as inclusion, recollection is re-creation: "To remember is also to dismember". Philippe Lejeune, one of the most systematic of autobiography theorists, has demonstrated that autobiographical narrative is always dependent on distance: "The first person, then, always conceals a hidden third person, and in this sense every autobiography is by definition indirect". (The terms are reversed in the increasingly common case of autobiographical narrative in the third person, for example in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster*, where the distancing function of its pronominal manipulation is integral to its form.) Autobiographical writing is a distorting mirror in which identities are constructed and re-constructed; the displaced self merges with the displayed self. Concealment coexists with revelation, presence with absence, giving autobiographical writing an unsettling atmosphere of risk, which Leiris's image of the autobiographer as torero pinpoints so flamboyantly.

What might be termed the autobiographical turn in recent literature has paralleled
the linguistic turn in literary theory. As a result, critical theory has increasingly viewed literary (and non-literary) autobiography "as a key to the understanding of the self". Indeed, like criticism, autobiography involves interpretation (and re-interpretation), the retroactive re-presentation of prior experience. As Jean Starobinski has written: "Every autobiography - even when it limits itself to pure narrative - is a self-interpretation." It is not surprising therefore that autobiography theory itself has developed a tendency towards the autobiographical, either by incorporating the critic's own experience or by offering surveys of already existing theory: "criticism is ultimately indissociable from autobiography and from reflection on autobiography". If, for the early theorists of the genre, "Autobiography becomes the site upon which subjectivity will be saved, and saved for literature", as Laura Marcus has claimed, this also explains some of its attraction for subsequent critics, for whom subjectivity is rather to be unravelled and pluralised. In particular, autobiographical narrative shares many characteristics with post-structuralist theory. Both examine and radically subvert subjectivity and both have (perhaps relatedly) been seen as parasitical. In much the same way that recent autobiographical writing has redefined the tenets of classical autobiography, post-structuralist theory has exposed the totalising claims of hermeneutics in general, and of structuralism in particular. Theory has thrived among the elusive illusions of autobiographical writing, which it has redefined in terms of "resemblance" rather than truth, disclosure rather than closure. One of the strengths of autobiographical writing is its resistance to definition. Its undecidability emerges out of a foundational dialectic of determinacy and indeterminacy, making it resemble a paradigm of (post)modern writing. Yet the autobiographical narrative's rootedness in experience enables the reader to maintain the illusion of a prior "reality", however fictionalised, thereby avoiding association with the self-indulgent play of signification that has resulted from some (mis)readings of post-structuralist theory.

The notion of undecidability goes to the heart of autobiographical writing. It has recently been noted that:

... despite pronouncements about the end of autobiography and postmodern challenges to traditional notions of the self, autobiographical narratives proliferate and scholarly studies of them abound.
This underlines autobiography's capacity to endure. The reference to "autobiographical narratives" hints at an important truth. No one writes literary autobiography as such any more. As genres are increasingly blurred, writers prefer to classify their texts as novels, if indeed they offer any classification at all. In this way the already "turbulent" genre of autobiography is rendered even more undecidable (and interesting) by the autobiographical novel. Wolfgang Türkis's statement that no autobiographical text in German between 1977 and 1981 designated itself as autobiography is revealing. Autobiographical novels render much of traditional autobiography theory's agonised musing over the fictional element of the autobiographical text irrelevant:

Literature is fiction not because it somehow refuses to acknowledge "reality" but because it is not a priori certain that language functions according to principles which are those, or which are like those, of the phenomenal world.

Yet it would be meaningless to conclude with Burton Pike that "all autobiography is fiction," for this, like autobiography itself, is a distortion of a truth. Like classical autobiography, the autobiographical novel lays claim to degrees of external verifiability, truthfulness and authenticity which are not applicable to other forms of fiction:

What we have come to call truth or what a culture determines to be truth in autobiography, among other discourses, is largely the effect of a long and complex process of authorization. Thus the canonizing question "What is truth?" cannot be separated from the process of verifying that truth.

Modern autobiographical writing represents the further fragmentation of an already fragmented form, one which, however, remains dependent on the claims and defining characteristics of its predecessors. Frank Kermode's recognition that "Schism is meaningless without reference to some prior condition" is relevant here, indeed it might even be applicable to the autobiographical subject in general. The dominance of the autobiographical novel has further pluralised what was already a remarkably open, even anarchic textual practice. As Laura Marcus has noted: "Clearly, the autobiographer, unlike the biographer, is unable to tell the end of the story." We might extend her
statement to include fiction, as well as biography. Unlike fiction, "autographical narrative (autobiography) ends with the writing of the narrative itself". In an important sense therefore, the autobiographical novel represents both the end of autobiography and a testament to its durability. If its conclusion is its beginning, autobiographical narrative becomes the means to an end which is merely part of an infinitely circular process. The way out of this "mise en abyme" is via the reader.

The role of the reader is central. Lejeune's "pacte autobiographique" and Varner Gunn's "autobiographical response" indicate how much depends on the reader's willingness to believe, to be seduced by the text. The autobiographer's illusion of presence is crucial, returning to autobiographical narrative something of the effect of the "Erzählung"'s oral tradition, which Walter Benjamin claims was destroyed by the rise of the novel. Thus, despite its repeated disclaimers and denials of the very possibility of truthfulness, readers (even, or perhaps especially, critical readers) read Thomas Bernhard's Die Ursache as the truth, as the cause (the title's definite article contributing to this effect). Similarly, Roland Barthes's marginal disclaimer, "Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personage de roman" is a challenge to the reader, but one which is likely only to echo in the background of any reading, if it is not ignored entirely. It is much more common to read fiction as autobiography than to read autobiography as fiction, which says something very interesting about the reader's investment in narrative. In a different way to fiction, autobiographical writing is dependent on context, on intertextuality. Therefore, I do not intend to offer another survey of existing autobiography theory, but rather to refer to theoretical arguments in the course of the discussion of individual texts below and hope that different modes of autobiographical writing can provide insights into each other, as well as into more overtly fictional texts. Rather than comparing autobiography with fiction, I shall be investigating degrees of "autobiographicalness" in order to examine the effect that the adoption of the autobiographical form has on writers' other work. This invites questions about how we tell if one text is more autobiographical than another, questions which can only be addressed through detailed textual examination. As Elizabeth Bruss has written, "In many ways, autobiography is the best argument for autobiography" and, it might be added, for fiction in the autobiographical mode.

Surprisingly few critics or theorists have concerned themselves with the
autobiographical novel. Roy Pascal's conclusions now look rather old-fashioned in the context of the modern novel; Philippe Lejeune is rather more systematic, but comes to few conclusions. Only Michaela Holdenried seems to have looked in detail at the form. Interestingly, she comes to the same paradoxical conclusion as Lejeune: "daß der Wahrheitsgehalt des Romans höher anzusetzen sei als der der Autobiographie." Yet this is the kind of conclusion that novelists have been reaching for years. In *The Facts*, tellingly subtitled "A Novelist’s Autobiography", Philip Roth writes: "The truth is that the facts are much more refractory and unmanageable and inconclusive, and can actually kill the very sort of inquiry that imagination opens up." To adopt Bruss’s formulation, the autobiographical novel confronts the literal with the literary much more radically than was possible in classical autobiography. Truth and fiction are interdependent, rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, close examination demonstrates that even classical autobiography is more self-reflexive and fictive than much of its early criticism allowed. Paul Jay’s recognition of the "double displacement of identity in the processes of cognition and recollection" occurs in the course of a discussion of St Augustine, the founding text of autobiography’s pre-history. Like the Bildungsroman, with which it has frequently been compared, autobiography has always traced the becoming as well as the being of its subject. It is "an act of discovery and creation", as the title of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, another of the canonical representatives of the genre, has always indicated.

Its marginality has ensured that autobiography has become a particularly common form with which to represent the experience of the marginalised. Much autobiography theory in recent years has concerned itself with the adoption and adaption of forms of autobiography by women, workers or ethnic minorities, groups which were forced to redefine oppressive social and linguistic structures. In the process they also redefined the autobiographical narrative. Re-appropriation is certainly also a major factor in the autobiographical turn in post-1960s German literature. Although autobiographical narrative in German remained for a long time in Goethe’s shadow, it gained renewed power through its association with the "Neue Subjektivität" of the 1970s, which in turn became indissociable from "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" and the examination of the Nazi period. James M. Cox writes of American autobiography: "When politics and history become dominant realities for the imagination, then the traditional prose forms of the essay and the autobiography both gain and attract power." Thus we should see what has
been termed "Neue Subjektivität" not as a reversal but as a development from the political and documentary impulses of the 1960s, as a merging of the personal and the historical. After all, Helmut Heißenbüttel’s discovery and suspicion of a developing "Literatur des Selbstentblößers" came as early as 1966. In an essay which significantly appeared in 1968, Stephen A. Shapiro writes of responsibility, of autobiography’s capacity to "move us to change". Although this sounds rather utopian in retrospect, the rise of autobiography was certainly seen in Germany at that time to have developed out of the (thwarted) aspirations of the late 1960s. Richard Baumgart quotes Bernhard Vesper: "Jeder kann es, jeder! Es gibt keine Künstler mehr". This act of appropriation is paralleled by the contemporaneous diagnosis of literature’s death, which Sylvia Schwab rather melodramatically refers to as "die Exekution des Erzählers". In analysing the subsequent literary adoption of the form, Baumgart seems to suggest that autobiographical narrative is moving further from its foundations in experience. In doing so he echoes both Paul de Man’s "Autobiography as De-Facement" essay and Peter Handke’s fear of autobiographical writing becoming "ein Literatur-Ritual, in dem ein individuelles Leben nur noch als Anlaß funktioniert". However, it is precisely from the interplay between design and experience, authenticity and self-mythologisation, that autobiographical writing derives its fascination. This is especially true of the modern autobiographical novel.

The writers I have chosen to examine all use the autobiographical form to examine the construction of personal and cultural identity and its historical contexts. Their varied approaches demonstrate the richness of this hybrid genre. Elias Canetti takes much from the conventions of classical autobiography. The clash of this traditional form with the dislocations of the twentieth century makes his trilogy seem more problematic and more radical, indeed much closer to his 1935 novel, Die Blendung, than may appear at first sight. Peter Weiss produced a series of autobiographical texts: his re-writing of his identity and experience, particularly through the ideological contortions of Die Ästhetik des Widerstands, sheds much light on the process of self-representation. In addition, both writers endured the displacement and exile which Brodsky highlights, experiences which are central to the texts I examine. In contrast, Thomas Bernhard’s prose remains relentlessly Austrian, although his much-cited "Haßliebe" for his nation and Austria’s complex relation to the German cultural tradition make him an appropriate comparative figure. Bernhard’s texts approach H. Porter Abbott’s concept of "autography", his more
overtly autobiographical narratives have an important bridging function in an oeuvre enduringly concerned with the problems of self-representation. Finally, I use Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* and *Was bleibt* as paradigmatic autobiographical narratives which shed light on the work of the other writers and uncover the very peculiar difficulties involved in the writing of personal experience in the DDR. When Barbara Saunders characterises recent German literary autobiographical writing in relation to "a sense of uncertainty which is comparable with a current mood in the West as a whole"; I think we must regard this uncertainty not merely as a product of German (and Western) history in this century, but also as evidence of a more profound ontological instability, one which autobiographical fiction appears uniquely placed to examine, displace and display.
Elias Canetti is likely to be central to any discussion of recent autobiographical writing in German because his autobiographical narrative seems so anachronistic. He classifies his text as a "Lebensgeschichte", which is less definitive than "Auto-" or "Selbstbiographie" but which nevertheless avoids the generic ambivalence which is claimed by the other writers I examine. Only the ambiguous use of "Geschichte" suggests that his categorisation is less exclusive than it appears. In Das Geheimherz der Uhr, Canetti states: "In meiner Lebensgeschichte geht es gar nicht um mich. Aber wer wird das glauben?" (GU 104). The use of the accusative "um mich" reflects the passivity and neutrality which characterise his narrative. However, where at first sight the Lebensgeschichte seems to be founded on the unity of its "erzählende" and "erzählte" selves, careful examination reveals that this apparent self-sufficiency masks a much more complex and plural conception of identity, which is related to Canetti's conception of "Verwandlung". To find out how many selves are sufficient for authentic self-representation and whether "mich" is in fact the volumes' subject are two of the aims of this chapter.

The reception of Canetti’s Lebensgeschichte was mixed. Many commentators criticised its traditional form and its foundation upon what, in his autobiography, Manès Sperber calls the "Religion des guten Gedächtnisses": Canetti gives the impression of having almost total recall over seven decades. Two further factors lend Canetti's Lebensgeschichte its unsettling effect. The first of these is what Frederike Eigler, whose study of the Lebensgeschichte is unrivalled in the depth of its insight, has termed:

die Diskrepanz [...] zwischen dem diskontinuierlichen Lebensverlauf des jüdischen Schriftstellers Elias Canetti und der gestalterischen und inhaltlichen Geschlossenheit seiner Autobiographie.²

The second factor is related to this contrast between the social and historical instability which form the background to the autobiographical narrative and the apparent unity of Canetti's self-depiction. It emerges out of the inevitable comparisons of the
Lebensgeschichte with Canetti's only extended prose fiction, the 1935 novel *Die Blendung*. Unlike the other writers I examine, who produced a succession of variously autobiographical narratives, here we are faced with extremely (perhaps uniquely) distant texts. Furthermore, *Die Blendung* was largely ignored and unread on its initial publication. It was not until the novel was republished in 1963 that it received any kind of recognition. As is often the case in these matters, critics seized upon the lost masterpiece with all the zeal of the newly-converted and ranked it with the canonical modernist novels of Joyce, Musil and Broch. Where *Die Blendung* focuses on individuals in crisis, for whom language has lost its communicative possibilities, the Lebensgeschichte, in contrast, has been characterised in terms of its "remarkable sense of integrity",\(^3\) which gives the impression of serenity, even aloofness. It contains little of the sense of collision between "erzählte" and "erzählende" selves which is a feature of so many modern autobiographical texts, including those which I examine in later chapters. The kind of speculative, subversive disclaimer which, as the quotation above indicates, appears so frequently in the Aufzeichnungen is almost entirely absent from the formal Lebensgeschichte. This has caused many commentators to compare it unfavourably with *Die Blendung*. In particular, Claudio Magris has focused on the dialectic of closure and disclosure in Canetti's writing, which is especially central to the Lebensgeschichte:

Wer über sich selbst schreibt, enthüllt und verbirgt sich zugleich, er verwandelt sich in die Maske seines anderen, getreuen und doch abweichenden Ichs, das nach und nach auf den Seiten Gestalt annimmt.\(^4\)

He goes on to identify "eine Abwesenheit, eine Art schwarzes Loch, das die essentielle Wahrheit jenes Lebens zu verschlingen scheint", and claims that the Lebensgeschichte traces the external genesis of *Die Blendung*, rather than the inner events which formed its author. I would like to suggest that in fact both the creation of *Die Blendung* and the development of its author are central concerns of the Lebensgeschichte and that, furthermore, there are far more similarities between the text of the 1930s and the narrative of the 1970s than appear at first sight. Soon after its publication, Alban Berg detected the concealed humanity of *Die Blendung* in a letter which Canetti calls "von allen der teuerste" (A 222) of the responses to the novel: "da ich zwischen den Zeilen dieses
Epos des Hasses [...] immer wieder das liebende Herz des Autor verspürte". I would like to extend Youssef Ishaghpour's claim that "Canettis Originalität rührt daher, daß er der Versuchung der Jahrhunderts, dem Engagement, widerstanden hat" and suggest that Canetti's Lebensgeschichte consciously derives a large part of its fascination from its recognition that the conventions of the traditional autobiographical narrative are inadequate to convey the horrors of the twentieth century European history. The restraint of Canetti's narratorial self-conception brings the violence of history sharply into focus, which suggests that Eigler's discrepancy is the result of a deliberate strategy. If the texts are read against the grain, concentrating on those areas that reveal the artifice beneath their apparent unity, they demonstrate the illusory nature of their appearance of truth. It is this illusion which recent autobiography theory has shown to be one of the foundations of autobiographical narrative. As one of Canetti's Aufzeichnungen asks: "Was ist dann wahrer an einer Autobiographie als an einer anderen Erzählung?" (NH 170). This insight parallels the fictionalising "Täuschung" of memory which is highlighted in both his essay on Tolstoy (GW 217) and the autobiographical "Unsichtbarer Kristall". The latter essay's image of an "inneren Kristall", in which disparate impressions combine to form the core of a creative writer's work, is revealing. I regard Canetti's Aufzeichnungen as a kind of "unsichtbaren Kristall", which informs and augments the Lebensgeschichte. In particular, the Aufzeichnungen offer insights into the elusive conception of "Verwandlung", which is central to Canetti's writing. As Frederike Eigler was the first to emphasise, the Aufzeichnungen supply the metatextual self-reflection which is largely absent from the Lebensgeschichte and forms what Stefan H. Kaszynski has called Canetti's "kommentierte, innere Biographie des Dichters". In particular, Das Geheimherz der Uhr, which was composed contemporaneously to the Lebensgeschichte, represents its self-analytic "Geheimherz" and allows the autobiographical texts to maintain their anachronistic appearance. I do not want to follow previous commentators, who have tended to fall back on Masse und Macht in their search for a metatext for both the novel and the autobiographical narrative. With some reference to the Aufzeichnungen, I would like to examine the discursive strategies of both Die Blendung and the Lebensgeschichte in detail. My method will be to read Canetti against himself, to allow the texts to confront each other, in the hope that this might avoid what Canetti calls: "Der Größenwahn des Interpreten: er fühlt sich um seine Interpretation
Die Blendung: Self against world

In the third volume of his Lebensgeschichte, Das Augenspiel, Canetti gives an account of a discussion with Hermann Broch which follows a reading of Die Blendung (still at this stage called "Kant fängt Feuer"). When Broch questions him about the novel's negativity, Canetti confesses: "Alles um uns ist angsterregend. Es gibt keine gemeinsame Sprache mehr. Keiner versteht den anderen. Ich glaube keiner will den anderen verstehen" (A 40). This indicates the sense of communicative breakdown which dominates Die Blendung. (Indeed the conversation between Canetti and Broch is not entirely dissimilar.) Canetti goes on to explain his conception of character, which is founded on artificiality: "Es sind Figuren. Menschen und Figuren sind nicht dasselbe. Der Roman als literarische Gattung hat mit Figuren begonnen. Der erste Roman war der Don Quixote" (40). In terms that echo his essay "Das erste Buch: Die Blendung", Canetti also suggests a model for the modern novel:

Ich glaube auch, daß der Roman heute anders sein muß, aber nicht weil wir im Zeitalter von Freud und von Joyce leben. Die Substanz der Zeit ist eine andere, das läßt sich nur in neuen Figuren zeigen. Je mehr sie sich voneinander unterscheiden, je extremer sie angelegt sind, um so größer sind die Spannungen zwischen ihnen. (41)

The creation of "extreme Individuen" (GW 249) enables Canetti to depict the irrationality, hatred and violence of the 1930s, the period of the novel's composition and initial publication, without overt narratorial commentary. The reader's role in assessing the status of narrative utterance in a text which is largely constructed around free indirect discourse is crucial. Whereas Canetti's Lebensgeschichte and Aufzeichnungen are concerned with the potential purification of language, Die Blendung is paradigmatic of his pre-war writing in its concentration on language as the medium of solipsistic communicative failure. However, the novel does share the "Janus-Gesicht" (FP 105) of
the autobiographical narrative in that it appears to combine the reticence of the nineteenth
century realist narrator with the indeterminacy of the modernist and post-modernist novel.
It is upon these issues of linguistic failure and narratology that I wish to focus.

Despite claims to the contrary, *Die Blendung* contains little that can reliably be
termed interior monologue or Joycean stream of consciousness. There is practically no
direct narratorial intervention or overt self-consciousness. The predominant "erlebte
Rede" combines the novel's figures' interior discourse with unattributed external narrative
in order to create a feeling of undecidability in the reader which reflects the novel's
governing linguistic uncertainty. However, because the novel is poised between the
traditional and the experimental, the reader is constantly tempted into making
conventional hermeneutic assumptions, which are usually frustrated. Peter Russell
distinguishes Canetti from Kafka in that he "arouses the [interpretative] itch rather because
he gives us hints towards an interpretation himself". It is important to recognise that
only hints are given. A particularly good example of the interplay between narratorial
and attributed discourse comes at the beginning of "Der gute Vater", the first chapter of
the novel's third section, which sketches the history of the vicious Hausbesorger, and
former police officer, Benedikt Pfaff. It is a particularly chilling example of the subtlety
of Canetti's narration:

Die Wohnung des Hausbesorgers Benedikt Pfaff bestand aus einer mittelgroßen,
dunklen Küche und einem kleinen, weißen Kabinett, in das man vom Hausflur aus
zuerst gelangte. Ursprünglich schlief die Familie, die fünf Mitglieder zählte, im
größeren Raum, Frau, Tochter und dreimal er selbst, er, der Polizeibeamte, er,
der Ehemann, er, der Vater. (398)

The narratorial tone gradually merges with Pfaff's self-portrayal. The reference to the
"fünf Mitglieder" introduces Pfaff's own perspective, while largely maintaining the
narrator's neutrality. Although in this extract it is quite obvious that Pfaff's internal
perspective is being echoed, at other points in the narrative it is far more difficult to
attribute judgements. In this way Canetti's prose vividly mimes the characters' clashing
discourses. Pfaff's schizophrenic self-conception is also emblematic of the violent
instability upon which the novel is founded. Pfaff is unable to distinguish between his
professional and personal lives: "An der Tochter rieb er seine rothaarigen Fäuste mit wirklicher Liebe, von der Frau machte er weniger Gebrauch" (398). The virtual absence of narratorial intervention heightens both the novel's black humour and the reader's impression of being faced with a polyphony of voices in which no single figure is privileged. In an interview with Rudolf Hartung, Canetti identifies the character's self-delusions in the following terms:

... die Überzeugung, daß jeder Mensch einen Traum hat, der immer wiederkehrt, der am wichtigsten wird, von dem er getrieben ist, der ihn von anderen Menschen unterscheidet - man könnte es seinen Privatmythus nennen.⁹

Pfaff's restricted perspective is literally conveyed in the image of him constantly spying on and terrorising the inhabitants of his house through his "Guckloch": "Durch seine Erfindung lernte er die Welt neu zu sehen" (405). The self-imposed partiality of his perspective is shared by all the novel's characters; this reflects the contaminating monomania which gives rise to what Dieter Dissinger has termed the novel's "Sprachverwirrung".¹⁰ Accordingly, Canetti uses synecdoche to reduce characters to characteristics - Therese is represented by her blue skirt, Pfaff by his red fists, Kien by his books.¹¹ Names become polemical weapons and symbolic indications of character and function,¹² anticipating Der Ohrenzeuge. When Pfaff changes his daughter's name, he does so in order to denigrate her and thus legitimate to himself his abuse of her. When Anna reasserts her identity, he rejects the idea violently. He thereby reduces her (and himself) to pure functionality: "Von diesem Tag an waren sie sich nur noch Körper. Anna kochte und kaufte ein" (409). Until she is murdered, Anna has to be content, like Der Ohrenzeuge's "Die Versuchte", with empty dreams of rescue.

The novel's central image of "Blendung" demonstrates that linguistic incapacity is also reflected in a more general inability to respond adequately to sensory impression. It is this incapacity that the governing metaphors of the Lebensgeschichte are designed to counter. As Beatrix Bachmann has noted, the novel's radical vision derives from regarding madness and self-delusion "nicht als Individualstörung oder Krankheitssymptom, sondern als kollektives Phänomen".¹³ In Die Blendung, all the major characters suffer from the blindness of (self) obsession. An incident in the novel's first chapter is
exemplary. A stranger attempts to ask the novel’s central character, the reclusive sinologist Peter Kien, for assistance. Kien only realises he is being addressed when the person asking for directions becomes irritated at being ignored. Kien’s self-absorption is such that, not only does he not recognise that he is the object of the inquiry, he also immediately assumes that another person is being questioned: "Der zweite, der Schweiger und Charakter, der seinen Mund auch im Zorn beherrschte, war Kien selbst" (15). The confusion caused by this intrusion into Kien’s private world is heightened by the minimalist, pluralist narratorial stance I have already identified. So exclusively does Kien live in the world of the written word that, confronted with the spoken language of attempted communication (an appeal for direction), he denies the possibility of his participation in such a dialogue and imagines that another person is being questioned. Soon afterwards, Kien describes the incident in his "Dummheiten" notebook, where, intriguingly, he enters "Allés, was er vergessen wollte" (19). His account conflicts with the earlier narrative:

Auf der Mutstraße begegnete mir ein Mensch und fragte mich nach der Mutstraße.
Um ihn nicht zu beschämen, schwiegen ich [...] Hätte ich ihn nicht geschont, so wäre mir die peinliche Szene erspart geblieben. Wer war der Dümmere?

(19-20)

The first description of the incident is so evidently based on Kien’s interior monologue that the reader is likely to see his second account as a fiction; Kien is clearly unaware of his surroundings when on the street. Instead of admitting culpability, he acts as all the characters do throughout the novel and reverts to his pre-ordained position. The discrepancy between the two versions demonstrates how prepared Kien is to distort fact in the service of fiction. The self-deception of this process is underlined by Kien’s peculiar and obsessive habit of recording events in order to be able to forget them.

In Die Blendung self-deception indicates profound divisions in the self. Misinterpretations, misreadings and misinformation abound. The novel’s plot largely centres on the incompatibility of the "discrepant experiences" of its characters, who are entirely unable to overcome their self-delusions. This is demonstrated by their inability to recognise the potential ambiguity of linguistic utterance. When Therese, Kien’s
housekeeper, asks about a book from his library, he is won over by her choice of words: "Ich bitt' Sie, was so ein Buch für einen Wert hat!" (45). Kien is impressed that she is interested in the book's value, rather than its cost: "Sie meinte den innern Wert, nicht den Preis". This reinforces the misjudgement he makes earlier in the novel: "[er] spürte bald eine Art erstauntes Interesse für ihre Worte. Diese ungebildete Person legte so viel Wert aufs Lernen" (35). For Kien, (and for Canetti as the Lebensgeschichte demonstrates) value is "Lernen" - in his eyes "Werte" and "Worte" are closely associated. The irony of Kien's error is revealed when we realise that the only text in which Therese is actually interested is Kien's "Testament". In effect, the entire novel circulates around the notion of "innern Wert": each character has a different conception of the value of any object, fiction or perspective. Similar misinterpretations cluster around other words - for example, Therese's notion of "Anstandigkeit" which is increasingly overcome by her rapacity or Kien's brother Georges's tragically literal definition of blindness.

Kien closes his eyes to the world beyond his books: "Blindheit ist eine Waffe, gegen Zeit und Raum; [...] Das herrschende Prinzip im Kosmos ist die Blindheit" (72). His refusal to look at himself while washing or dressing makes it difficult for him to come to terms with his appearance on several occasions later in the novel. As the numerous commentators who have drawn parallels between his decline and the Schreber test case which concludes Masse und Macht have demonstrated, Kien becomes increasingly susceptible to paranoia. His attitude is succinctly outlined in the following much-quoted mix of reported inner monologue and narratorial comment:

Diese bedruckte Seite, so klar und gegliedert wie nur irgendeine, ist in Wirklichkeit ein höllischer Haufe rasender Elektronen. Wäre er sich dessen immer bewußt, so müßten die Buchstaben vor seinen Augen tanzen. [...] Die Möbel existieren für ihn so wenig, wie das Heer von Atomen in ihm und um ihn. "Esse percipi", Sein ist Wahrgenommenwerden, was ich nicht wahrnehme, existiert nicht. (72)

This image of dancing signifiers, which recurs in Therese's sexual fantasies later in the novel, indicates the self-delusion of Kien's faith in the objectivity of his perception. As the novel progresses, his senses are repeatedly assaulted and undermined until he is unable
to distinguish between reality and hallucination. The "rasende Elektronen" form an image of narrative "noise". They signify the unassimilable aspects of the novel, those elements which increase the indeterminacy that arises from its conflicting perspectives and discourses. In this way all the attempts of the characters, the narrator and the reader to impose narrative closure upon the text are resisted.

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The titles of the three sections into which the novel is divided chart Kien's decline. The first section, set almost entirely within Kien's library-dominated home, is entitled "Ein Kopf ohne Welt", which identifies both Kien's isolation from external reality and the willed blindness of all the novel's figures. The second section, "Kopflose Welt" examines Kien's exposure to the outside world. External reality is headless in many ways, it lacks a governing authority, its protagonists interact without recognition or planning. The final section, "Welt im Kopf", centres on his brother Georges's attempts to save him from himself. I want to examine one chapter from each section in order to trace the novel's investigation of linguistic and mental breakdown.

The first section of the novel focuses on Kien's marriage to Therese, which is founded on the miscomprehension that she values his books. This is a man who regards the act of eating books to be a grotesque act of cannibalism (262). Therese is, in fact, much more concerned with his wealth, which she seriously overvalues. Like Canetti's first play, Hochzeit, the marriage forms part of the novel's satirical thrust, which has been overvalued by some of Die Blendung's Marxist critics. I want to look at the chapter, "Die Muschel", in which the marriage and the farcical wedding night are depicted.

The chapter focuses on the aftermath of the marriage, rather than the event itself. Kien's musings on Therese's blue skirt are prompted by a conversation he overhears on the tram on the way back from the ceremony. He begins to speculate: "Der Rock gehörte zu ihr, wie die Schale zur Muschel" (53). This modulates into a relatively rare example of a childhood memory:

Ein Riesenmuschel, so groß wie dieser Rock. Man muß sie zertreten, zu Schleim und Splittern, wie damals als Junge am Meeresstrand. Die Muschel gab keine
Ritze nach. Er hatte noch nie eine nackt gesehen. [...] Da lachte er mitten in seiner Wut, zog sich blitzschnell die Schuhe an, schleuderte die Muschel mit aller Kraft zu Boden und führte einen gordischen Freudentanz auf. Jetzt war ihre ganze Schale umsonst. Seine Schuhe zerdrückten sie. Bald lag sie splitternackt vor ihm da, ein Häuflein Elend, Schleim und Schwindel und überhaupt kein Tier. (54)

The laughter which accompanies the act of destruction, like the act itself, anticipates the novel's conclusion. Kien's abhorrence of nakedness suggests his fear of (female) sexuality. He is unable to entertain the thought that Therese's defences can be overcome at all: "Therese ohne Schale - ohne Rock existierte nicht" (54). Thus, in order to prevent what he dreads, Kien characteristically turns to his library and covers the "Diwan" with books. Once again, their diametrically opposed expectations clash. The combination of Therese's removal of her skirt and violent removal of the books fills Kien with horror. He flees and, in an anticipation of his later incarceration in Pfaff's tiny flat, spends the wedding night in his "Klosett", the only room in his home which is free of books. There he "zieht sich an diesem Ort mechanisch die Hosen herunter, setzt sich aufs Brett und weint wie ein kleines Kind". (59) Kien's refusal to face his responsibilities and his reversion to infantile despair, which are underlined by the adoption of the present tense, indicate further his incapacity for adult life.

Kien's fear only increases Therese's frustration; her financial greed is matched by her sexual appetite and the self-deluding fiction of her attractiveness,16 which is most clearly and grotesquely demonstrated by her flirtation with Herr "Puda" in the "Mobilmachung" chapter. Therese's physicality both contrasts with and increases Kien's abhorrence of the physical. This modulates later into Kien's first fantasy of Therese's death, when he mistakes her for an "Einbrecherin". The episode anticipates the "Privateigentum" chapter, where Kien's fictions prove much more durable. He is momentarily overtaken by the delusion that he can attack, before his fantasies of violence, perhaps even rape, are overcome by confrontation with the reality of Therese's presence: "Nach drei Worten wußte er, daß Mörderin und Leiche in einer Haut stecken. Schuldbewußt schwieg er und ließ sich grausam verprügeln" (160). Therese proves more resistant than the "Muschel" she resembles and eventually forces Kien out of his own home.
The image of the "Muschel" is illuminating because, like so much in the novel, it can also be interpreted in narrative terms. Like Kien's library, the mussel is sealed from the world. Furthermore, the violent attempt to penetrate its structure results in its destruction. In much the same way, the novel itself invites and then resists interpretation. This indeterminacy, which is largely the result of the narrator's refusal to privilege any single perspective, prevents the reader from constructing a meta-narrative. Later, in the chapter, "Junge Liebe", a package is thrown in front of Kien by a maid to her lover: "ein Schlüssel kam zum Vorschein, auf dem zerdrückten Papier standen einige Worte" (128). Both the words and the key remain inaccessible to Kien, just as narrative resolution is repeatedly held out to the reader, who is then denied the hermeneutic "Schlüssel".

In "Kopflose Welt", the second section of the novel, Kien is exposed to the mendacity of the outside world, which is represented in miniature by the confidence tricks of the hunchbacked dwarf, Fischerle. In this part of the book betrayal of the senses is mirrored by the betrayal of confidence. I want to concentrate on "Privateigentum", the chapter in which the conflict between the characters' differing conceptions of reality is demonstrated most clearly. In this chapter, three of the novel's major characters meet at the crossroads of their own misreadings of events. The process reflects both the unreliability of their linguistic assertions and the instability of their identities. Following the farcical events at the Theresianum, the "Pfandleihanstalt" where Fischerle, Therese and Pfaff all benefit from the financial value of Kien's library, the chapter focuses on the police's interrogation of Kien. As David Darby has demonstrated, the chapter is constructed as a detective novel in reverse. Investigation leads further and further from resolution. In this respect it parallels the later appearance of Kien's psychiatrist brother, Georges, whose attempts at therapy only precipitate disaster.

The Kommandant, the chapter's representative of (narrative) authority, shares the reader's potential frustration at being confronted with conflicting evidence. His command of the situation is undermined by his extravagant vanity: his repeated glances into his "Taschenspiegel" suggest a constant need to verify his own identity. During the interrogation, he is frequently distracted by thoughts about his appearance; his own self-obsession becomes as responsible as Kien's self-contradictions for the resulting confusion of perspectives. The Kommandant's failure (like Georges's) stems from a vain attempt to assimilate into an authoritative discourse the array of deluded and accurate perspectives.
which Kien, Therese and Pfaff provide. The Kommandant proceeds by having Kien’s
clothes removed and examined. Reflecting his horror of physicality, this also reveals the
inadequate corporeal foundation of Kien’s intellect: "Da war wirklich nichts" (324). The
deterioration of Kien’s reason is paralleled by the reduction of his body to a "hilflose
Skelett" (323). Both factors contribute to the police’s uncertainty about his identity.
His documents, the bearer of identity in the modern age, are judged to be false.
Moreover, the police are so sure of their ground that, in one of the many elements in the
novel which anticipate the effects of totalitarianism, their faith in their presumption
overcomes even the possibility of stronger evidence: "Hätte ein Dokument mit
Photographie vorgelegen, sie wäre gefälscht gewesen" (326). The prejudicial nature of
the investigation parallels the delusions of those they are questioning. Distortion and truth
merge and exchange positions. Kien persists in believing himself the cause of Therese’s
death, Therese believes him to be referring to his murder of a fictitious first wife, while
Pfaff imagines Kien to be insinuating Pfaff’s responsibility for his daughter’s death.

Just as he denies Therese’s existence when Fischerle first asks him if he is
married, Kien’s response to the sight of Therese, whom he believes to be dead, is typical
- he closes his eyes and refuses to believe the evidence of his senses. The irony is that
this willed (double) blindness derives purely from hearsay - ironically the testimony of
Knopfhans, the simulated "Blinde". It is part of the novel’s satirical undermining of
scholarship that Kien persists in a delusion which originated in rumour, in the face of
empirical evidence to the contrary: "Sie glauben wohl, daß ich an Halluzinationen leide.
Im allgemeinen nicht. Meine Wissenschaft gebietet Klarheit" (327). He confuses reality
and hallucination in anticipation of the novel’s final chapter, in which his hallucinations
modulate into actual destruction. It is little wonder that, faced with these multiple
realities, Kien persists in his self-delusion:

Ich lebe für die Wahrheit. Ich weiß, diese Wahrheit lügt, helfen Sie mir, ich weiß,
sie soll weg. Helfen Sie mir, dieser Rock stört mich. Ich hab’ ihn gehaßt, schon
vor dem Fleischerhund, soll ich ihn nachher sehen? (330)

He is unable to recognise the inflexibility of his conception of "Wahrheit": "Die
Wahrheit, die sich zu nichts verwandelt, ist Schrecken und Vernichtung" (FP 119). Later
in the novel, Kien cuts off his own finger to test his powers of perception: "Soll man am eigenen Blut zweifeln?" (427). For Kien, indeed for everyone in the novel, fantasy and truth become indistinguishable. He believes in the reality of the "Fleischerhund", a product of his imagination, rather than the evidence of his senses. His confession of responsibility for Therese's death is effected via a series of speeches of unprecedented length for him. His incoherence stems in part from his incapacity for oral narrative: "Kien drückte sich lieber schriftlich als mündlich aus" (16). He undermines his veracity by repeatedly attempting to retell his account. (We are reminded of the contradictory narratives of the incident on the street.) Desperate to prove the truth of his fantasy and unused to dialogue, Kien is forced to deny that the clothes he has removed are his, assuming that everything is the room is an aspect of the overwhelming "Trugbild" (337) represented by Therese. Finally, the Kommandant thrusts his mirror in front of Kien's face. We have already seen how Kien avoids self-confrontation. His response to the sight: "Ich - selbst" seems reluctant and only prompts another reiteration of his story. Unable to supply a "Tat" for Kien's "Tatort" and slowly sensing inconsistencies in his "Mordmärchen", the Kommandant is unable (or unwilling) to pay attention to his account. His only recourse is to invite Kien to incriminate himself further: "Erzählen Sie die Geschichte lieber noch einmal!" (349) Just as it seems there is no way out of this circularity, Pfaff resolves the situation with his own mendacious analysis of events. Ironically, Pfaff is believed purely because he is a former police officer. The entire chapter indicates the inadequacy of police procedure. The fact that Pfaff is also the only actual murderer in the room emphasises that the police's pursuit of truth is merely another self-deluding "Privatmythus".

The Kommandant's inability to untangle the mess of (self-) contradicting narratives reflects both the narrator's refusal to differentiate between them and the reader's frustrated attempts to control the novel's multiplicity of parallel texts. In the following chapter, "Das Kleine", it seems for a long time that Fischerle's success in evading the police will lead to a corresponding escape from the novel's radical openness. Fischerle demonstrates most clearly the "Selbsthaß" which David Roberts regards as all the characters' fundamental motivation. He longs to obliterate his defining characteristics, his Jewishness and his disability. Yet, as he is about to escape the city (and the novel) for a new life in America, with a new identity and in a suit which disguises the "Buckel", he
finds it necessary to return to his former home to recover his diary. On returning, he finds his wife in bed with Knopfhans, the blind Hausierer. Fischerle is unable to detach himself from his "Privatmythus" and recognise his former accomplice. The self-deception is based on the belief that he has changed: "'Krüppel und Dreck ist dasselbe!' sagt der Mann auf dem Bett. Fischerle lacht, weil er keiner mehr ist" (396). Fischerle is undone because his internal perspective is overcome by the Other’s recognition of the truth. Knopfhans’s motivation is revenge for Fischerle’s earlier deception when he gave him a button instead of a coin. This thematically charged incident echoes an identical incident at the beginning of the book and, in a sense, the novel endlessly repeats this early event, the attempt of one deluded perspective to overcome all others. Ultimately, deception undoes deception: Knopfhans revenges himself by slashing off Fischerle’s hump, thus ironically realising the latter’s dream of its removal. Nicola Riedner sees the portrayal of Fischerle as a "Warnung vor einer die Herkunft vergessenden Assimilation". In denying his past, he is left with no identity.

In the third section of the novel, "Welt im Kopf", the text continues to disintegrate. I want to concentrate on the chapter "Ein Irrenhaus" because, like "Das Kleine", it functions as a Novelle—within the larger structure of the novel, "opened" by its dependence on the larger context of the novel as a whole. In a conventional novel, the late appearance of a brother who is a famous psychiatrist would suggest an imminent resolution to the novel’s disorder. However, forewarned by the contortions of "Privateigentum" and the preceding chapters, the reader’s expectations of resolution are likely to be muted at least. "Ein Irrenhaus" has been criticised as an intrusion into the novel’s narrative. However, if Die Blendung is regarded as being constructed from a series of "Privatmythen" which overlap and interpenetrate almost entirely without their authors’ recognition of their contradiction, then these internal digressions become emblematic of the novel as a whole. In Die Provinz des Menschen, Canetti describes the "Irrenhaus" as "das Kloster der Moderne" (PM 251), and what is the larger world of Die Blendung if not "Ein Irrenhaus" writ large?

Georges Kien has been regarded as both a representative of external, scientific sanity and as a charlatan by critics. In a novel that is founded on multiplicity, both views contain elements of truth. The conventional tone of the beginning of the chapter presents Georges as a representative of objectivity. However, ultimately this is only
another perspective. Hints of irrationality and immorality soon intrude. We learn of Georges's attraction and attractiveness to women and of his ruthless incarceration of his first two wives in his own institution, condemned "als unheilbar egoistisch" (429). Unlike his brother, Georges is opportunistic and flexible: "Mit der Zeit entwickelte er sich zu einem großen Schauspieler. Seine Gesichtsmuskeln, von seltener Beweglichkeit, passten sich im Laufe eines Tages den verschiedensten Situationen an" (430-431). The opposition is made explicitly in Georges's characterisation of his brother's immutability: "Er war das Gegenteil eines Schauspielers, immer er selbst, nur er selbst" (451). In contrast to every other figure in the novel, Georges readily adapts himself to the perspectives of others. His identity is so dependent upon his capacity for "Verwandlung" that the suspicion grows that, like Bernhard's "Stimmenimitator", the Schauspieler's façade masks emptiness. Accordingly, his success in treating schizophrenia seems to derive from his recognition of the instability of his own character:

In seinem eigenen Bewußtsein näherte er die getrennten Teile des Kranken, wie er sie verkörperte, und fügte sie langsam aneinander. Er fühlte, an welchen Punkten sie sich vertrügen, und lenkte die Aufmerksamkeit beider Teile durch starke, eindringliche Bilder immer wieder auf diese Punkte, bis sie hier haften blieb und selbsttätig weiterkittete. (431)

An enduring suspicion of psychoanalysis is one of the unifying aspects of Canetti's writing. No distinction is made between doctor and patient: "So lebte er in einer Unzahl von Welten zugleich. An den Irrsinningen wuchs er zu einem der umfassendsten Geister seiner Zeit heran. Er lernte von ihnen mehr, als er ihnen gab" (431). The implication is clearly that Georges’s success depends largely on the fact that he himself is schizophrenic.

Significantly, Georges's interest in psychology and his abandonment of a career as "Frauenarzt" are motivated by his recognition of the emptiness of his existence. The hedonistic nature of his former career is exemplified when, in his former rapacity, Georges is compared to Gautama before his transformation into the Buddha: "Abgeschlossen war er doch, aber durch die Bücher, die er las, die Sätze, die er sprach, die Frauen, die sich als gierige, geschlossene Mauer um ihn stellten" (433). The "Mauer"
image, which recalls Pfaff’s literal walling up of his kitchen to obliterate the memory of his murder of his daughter, indicates that, before his move into psychiatry, Georges shared the delusive (blind) world-view we have seen elsewhere. He prefers the "Heimatlosigkeit" of his new career. Deliverance from this hollow indulgence comes in the unlikely figure of the Gorilla-man. The Gorilla-man’s response to the hollowness of conventional language is to replace it with his own active form of discourse, in which value is constantly shifting:

Each word is intimately related to gesture, rendering it almost entirely subjective (like Wittgenstein’s private language), and thus as dynamically dependent on the perception of the listener (or reader) as the speaker.

Formerly unconcerned with language, Georges begins to measure himself by the Gorilla-man’s standards:

In its questioning of the very structure of identity, this passage forms part of the satirical thrust of the novel. "Anders-Sein" is portrayed as the paradigmatic human condition. Internal difference is a condition of extreme alienation, which contrasts with the active self-expression of the Gorilla-man. His language attains purity, but at the expense of intelligibility. It is tempting to regard the Gorilla-man as exemplary of authenticity and the refusal of power: "Demgegenüber ist die Schizophrenie als Rückzug in das Selbst ein
Akt der Wahrung der eigenen Integrität und Autonomie." However the absence of any kind of restraint on the Gorilla-man's relentless linguistic creativity means that, rather than representing an authentic self, he resembles an extreme version of the isolating self-delusions characteristic of all the other characters in the novel. We should rather regard his secretary, the intermediary who retains a link with external reality, as coming much closer to a model for reformed humanity. She has been granted a capacity for change: "unter dem mächtigen Willen des Gorillas zu einem eigenartigen Wesen geworden: stärker, erregter, hingebender" (436). This flexibility is combined with the (constantly shifting) stability of a governing self. In contrast, Georges, like the Gorilla-man, lacks the (narratorial) authority to contextualise his "Verwandlungen".

The encounter with the Gorilla-man, who becomes the subject of the study with which Georges makes his name as a psychiatrist, transforms Georges's life. Increasingly, he grants the insane a kind of privileged status, so much so that he longs unsuccessfully for the patients he has cured to articulate their disappointment, to wish to return to their unstable state:

Ihre Sprache unterschied sich in nichts von der des nächstbesten Passanten. [...] Ihre Rätsel waren verlöscht, früher lebten sie für Rätsel, jetzt für alles, was längst gelöst ist. Georges schämte sich, ohne daß man ihm dazu aufgefordert hätte. Die Angehörigen der Kranken vergötterten ihn, sie rechneten auf Wunder. (439)

Georges seems to incorporate many of the symptoms of his patients in a sinister process which goes beyond acting: "Zahllose Rollen waren ihm in Fleisch und Blut übergegangen. Sein Geist hungerte nach den Verwandlungen des Augenblicks" (440). Faced with his brother's self-delusions, Georges retains his pre-conceived notion that Kien is suffering from a fear of blindness, despite evidence to the contrary. In their heated conversation, Georges merely replicates Kien's vicious catalogue of learned misogyny. In the decisive "Listenreicher Odysseus" chapter, psychoanalysis is revealed to be as ill-equipped to resolve the polyphony of perspectives as the police investigation of "Privateigentum" (which also concludes with a collective outbreak of misogyny). Both approaches fail, in David Darby's view, because they "attempt to impose a hermeneutic reading of the complex fictional world with which they are confronted by means of the exclusion of
problematic elements of that world." Georges is his brother's mirror image. Alone of the major characters in the novel, he is able to identify with others, but in doing so he loses his own sense of self. He becomes a "Verwandlungskünstler", limited only by the absence of limitation. Frederike Eigler has identified the dangers of the absence of a stabilising (narratorial) authority: "Die instabile Ich-Identität führt zu einem ideologisch besetzbaren Vakuum". Georges subordinates himself to Kien's perspective too readily. He identifies with and augments his brother's misogynistic litany until he plants in Kien's mind the seeds of his own destruction. In leaving his brother, he condemns him to death. Georges attempts to pacify his brother with the image of the frenzied sexuality of the "Termitenstock", a form of "Massenwahn" in which all become "blinde Zellen eines fanatischen Ganzen" (470). This does not bring the resolution for which Georges hopes: in his brother's mind it modulates into a combination of misogyny, fire and destruction. While Georges is able to use his skills of dissimulation to remove Therese and Pfaff from his brother's life and the novel, he is less successful in countering his brother's "gefräßige Phantasielosigkeit" (490). Georges comes to a strange conclusion about their relationship:

Beides zusammen, Gefühlsgedächtnis und Verstandesgedächtnis, denn das ist das deine, ermöglichen erst den universalen Menschen. Ich habe dich vielleicht überschätzt. Wenn wir zu einem Menschen verschmelzen könnten, du und ich, so entstünde ein geistig vollkommenes Wesen aus uns. (475)

The combination of the brothers' identities would unite Georges's capacity for change with Kien's obsessiveness in a constantly shifting opposition. However, Georges is unable to accommodate himself to the inflexibility of his brother's position. David Roberts comments that: "Die ideale Synthese kann nur die negative Dialektik der beiden Brüder bestätigen". (Kien plus Kien equals nothing.) *Masse und Macht* demonstrates the incompatibility of Kien's "Erstarrung" and Georges's "Verwandlung". Georges's observation: "Seit er zu Hause war, hatte er sich in einen sicheren und beinahe heiteren Menschen verwandelt" (498) is flawed precisely because Peter Kien is unable to transform himself.

Left alone in the final chapter of the novel, "Der rote Hahn", the hallucinations return in force. Snippets of dialogue from earlier sections of the novel
collide in a polyphony of voices, which destabilise Kien as if in fulfilment of his anguished early cry: "Ich bin in einer Irrenanstalt" (156). Relocated inside the individual, the self-contradicting perspectives destroy his monomania and cohere in the single, threatening word "Brand". As the voices inside his head increase, the obsessive fears and dreams of fire which have haunted him throughout the novel dominate as he becomes the instrument of his and his library's destruction. Completed in 1931, *Die Blendung* offers Kien's destruction of his library as the intellectual's pre-emptive strike, prefiguring the violence and book-burning later in the decade. The much-discussed final sentence of the novel confirms the indeterminacy and irrationality which pervade the novel: "Als ihn die Flammen endlich erreichen, lacht er so laut, wie er in seinem ganzen Leben nie gelacht hat" (507). In an interview with Rudolph Hartung, Canetti refers to the novel's conclusion as Kien's "Urteil und gleichzeitig ist es auch die Erfüllung seines Traumes, denn was er während seines ganzen Lebens wollte, war die Einheit mit seinen Büchern". Salvation, (narrative) resolution and destruction turn out to be part of the same process. This highlights a paradox at the heart of the *Die Blendung*. The novel itself is the product of the kind of learned intellectuality it satirises. It is constructed itself out of the very language it criticises. In this recognition that language must inevitably be the means of describing its own failure, the novel comes closest to Viennese "Sprachskepsis". In the chapter "Erstarrung" Kien explicitly addresses this issue:

Wer fühlt sich in der Gegenwart glücklich? Ja, wenn wir keine Sinne hätten, da wäre auch die Gegenwart erträglich. Wir würden dann durch die Erinnerung - also doch in der Vergangenheit - leben. Im Anfang war das Wort, aber es war, also war die Vergangenheit vor dem Wort. Er beugt sich vor dem Primat der Vergangenheit. (168-69)

In his attempt to limit language's potential autonomy, Kien demonstrates his antipathy to the spontaneity he associates with sensory response. His world is one of past, recorded events; it is precisely the confrontation with the living world outside his scholarship which precipitates his downfall. Claudio Magris offers a gloss on Kien's concentration on the past: "Diese Inexistenz der Gegenwart ist ein Hauptthema der europäischen und besonders der mitteleuropäischen Literatur, ein Thema, das auf den Nihilismus des modernen Lebens
Kien proceeds to anticipate his increasing instability later in the novel: "Aber letzten Endes sei die Sprache für den Menschen und nicht der Mensch für die Sprache da. Drum bitte er den Vergangenheit, diese Änderung zu genehmigen" (169-170). Kien is keen to express his control and primacy over language. However, his refusal to acknowledge the potential ambiguity of language is another reflection of his inability to cope with the uncertainty of the world outside his library. By denying "die Vergangenheit" its feminine article, Kien denies language its form, reflects his growing misogyny and asserts his supremacy over the past, which he attempts to master through memory. This is the kind of attitude which a careful reading of Canetti’s Lebensgeschichte reveals to be a delusion. Kien closes his eyes to the present, just as all the characters in the novel blind themselves to the potential of communication. Many readers of Canetti’s autobiographical narrative have either taken Canetti’s apparent reliance on the endurance of his memory at face value or lamented its difference from Die Blendung’s depiction of instability. Yet, the autobiographical texts are founded on the linguistic response to sensory input. This suggests that, rather than merely regarding the Lebensgeschichte as the novel’s metatext, we should be at least as open to the possibility of reading Die Blendung as a (negative) metatext to the Lebensgeschichte.

2 Die Stimmen von Marrakesch: Self in world

Before considering the Lebensgeschichte itself, it will be useful to look briefly at Die Stimmen von Marrakesch, which I regard as a model for the later text. When, in the second volume of the Lebensgeschichte, Die Fackel im Ohr, Canetti comments: "Denn ein Weg zur Wirklichkeit geht über Bilder" (F 130), he refers quite literally to the paintings which have influenced his development. However, we can also interpret this claim in another sense. I wish to demonstrate that the three volumes of the Lebensgeschichte are founded on the dialectic of presiding self and semi-autonomous imagery or "Bilder". The volumes’ titles supply the interrelated metaphors which unify the autobiographical narrative. Thus I take "Bilder" to mean, in the widest sense, the "Figuren" with which Canetti peoples his life and fiction, the metaphors which govern the Lebensgeschichte and the literal "Bilder" to which he refers in the quotation above.
Central to his conception is the notion that these "Bilder" are both stable and constantly shifting, a form of the "Verwandlung" that is one of the founding precepts of his writing. In his *Speak Memory. An Autobiography Revisited*, which both embodies and playfully subverts "traditional" autobiography, Vladimir Nabokov speaks of his aspiration to write an autobiographical text which formalises into pure imagery the recurrent events of a life: "The following of such thematic designs through one's life should be, I think, the true purpose of autobiography". In their use of imagery to fuse self and world, experience and fiction, Canetti's autobiographical texts go some way towards fulfilling this aim. It is in *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch* that "Bilder" first perform this mediating function.

Axel Gunther Steussloff characterises the text in terms which echo Canetti's conception of "Verwandlung" in their combination of flexibility and freedom. For Steussloff, *Die Stimmen von Marrakesch* represents "eine Neubegründung von Autorschaft, welche dem Autor erlaubt, seine Ich-Grenzen zu überschreiten, ohne sein Ich 'fahren' zu lassen". The text's subtitle is "Aufzeichnungen nach einer Reise", which locates it generically as a combination of retrospective narrative (Geschichte) and notebook (Aufzeichnungen). Like the Lebensgeschichte, the book is "eine symbolische Textgestalt", divided into a series of short chapters. These are distinct episodes, seeming at first only loosely connected to each other by a wandering narrative that has been compared to a Victorian travel book. Canetti narrates unobtrusively, masking the careful selectivity of the narrative. The use of "Stimmen" in the title seems misleading, until the reader recognises that as in the Lebensgeschichte, Canetti is not asserting the priority of hearing over other sensory apparatus. He uses "Stimmen" as a metaphor for all kinds of sensory and communicative stimulation: the text is dominated by Canetti's sensory response to his new environment. Göpfert's characterisation of the text's episodes in terms of "Epiphanie" goes some way towards identifying the sense of revelation with which Canetti infuses them.

The episodes can be separated into two (overlapping) groups: those in which Canetti features as a non-participating or subsidiary observer and those which concentrate on the narrator's reckonings with his Jewishness. The distance between narrator and events enables him to speculate on the very process of linguistic representation. The beginning of the chapter "Die Rufe der Blinden" is illuminating in this respect:

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Ich versuche, etwas zu berichten, und sobald ich verstumme, merke ich, daß ich
noch gar nichts gesagt habe. Eine wunderbar leuchtende, schwerflüssige Substanz
bleibt in mir zurück und spottet die Worte. Ist es die Sprache, die ich dort nicht
verstand, und die sich nun allmählich in mir übersetzen muß? Da waren
Ereignisse, Bilder, Laute, deren Sinn erst in einem entsteht; die durch Worte
weder aufgenommen noch beschnitten wurden; die jenseits von Worten, tiefer und
mehrdeutiger sind als diese. (SM 23)

Here language is granted a mystical quality, which elevates it above the mundaneness of
everyday signification. The recognition of the comparative inadequacy of written
discourse expands into the professed admiration of the blind beggars as "die Heiligen der
Wiederholung" (26). Canetti declines to learn Arabic in order to remain "von den Lauten
so betroffen" (23). This parallels the frequent concern in the Aufzeichnungen with the
potential purity of language. "Sprachskepsis" is overcome by language as pure sound:
"Kürzer, kürzer, bis eine Silbe übrigbleibt, mit der alles gesagt ist" (GU 61). Something
of this aspiration is reflected in the chapter, "Erzähler und Schreiber", where the magical
qualities of the oral narrative are emphasised despite "die stille Würde des Papiers" (92).
In Die gerettete Zunge, Canetti explicitly links his experience of the oral storytellers with
the inspirational narrative powers of his grandfather (G 104). The implicit contrast with
his own career is obvious: "Hier fand ich mich plötzlich unter Dichtern, zu denen ich
aufsehen konnte, weil es nie ein Wort von ihnen zu lesen gab" (SM 91). These "Stimmen"
have such an impact because they have the flexibility and creativity of myth, which has
always fascinated Canetti: "Die Mythen bedeuten mir mehr als die Worte und das ist es,
was mich am tiefsten von Joyce unterscheidet" (PM 104). In contrast, written narratives
lose the power to transform themselves.

Earlier in the narrative, Canetti is drawn towards a Jewish school by the sound of
a particularly enthusiastic pupil: "aus seinem Munde tönten die Laute des hebräischen
Alphabets wie ein werdender Dekalog" (SM 52). Recalling the uncomprehending rote
learning of Hebrew in his own childhood (G 101), his response to the recitation
emphasises Canetti’s attraction to language as pure sound. This enables him to feel part
of the community. In one of the Aufzeichnungen, he speaks of his early exposure to the
language of the Jewish faith: "Es gibt etwas wie eine private Etymologie, sie hängt von
den Sprachen ab, die ein Kind früh kennt. [...] Es ist möglich, daß die hebräischen Gebete, die ich früh sprach, aber nicht verstand, darauf von Einfluß waren" (GU 44).

These chapters which describe his experiences in the Mellah contain his most overt reckoning with his Jewish origin. The strength of his identification with the square in this area is astonishing in one generally so self-effacing: "Ich fand jene Dichte und Wärme des Lebens ausgestellt, die ich in mir selber fühle. Ich war dieser Platz, als ich dort stand. Ich glaube, ich bin immer dieser Platz" (51). This identification concisely reveals Canetti’s self-transformative conception of identity, which is so frequently the subject of the Lebensgeschichte. This sense of self, of rediscovering a lost heritage, is compounded when he is invited to visit the Dahan family. His relief, when he is asked if he is Jewish, at being able to articulate this part of his identity, at belonging, is palpable: "Ich sagte begeistert ja. Es war so angenehm, endlich etwas bejahen zu können" (66). This contrasts sharply with the series of uneasy and uncommitted responses when he is asked elsewhere in the text about his home. It is emblematic of Canetti’s plural notions of belonging that his sense of identity should be strengthened by the experience of travelling, rather than by any fixed notion of "Heimat". Admission of his Jewish origin, like the articulation of his name to his guide’s father, is one of the epiphanic moments in which "Verwandlung" and identity combine. Frederike Eigler comments:

In der Autobiographie sind Realitätsbegriff und Selbstverständnis als Ergebnis von Verwandlungsvorgängen dargestellt [...] Die Stimmen von Marrakesch führen dagegen Verwandlung als ein Modus der Wahrnehmung, d.h. als Prozeß, vor.38

In contrast, I would argue that the dominant sensory metaphors of the autobiographical narrative are an integral element of Canetti’s transformative and reconstructive conception of identity and that, in this sense, Die Stimmen von Marrakesch anticipates and rehearses the method of the later texts.

The final chapter of the book, "Die Unsichtbare", returns us to the earlier concerns with language. Once more, the narrator is detached. The chapter describes a strange creature who is pure sound. Unable to distinguish any features in the rags, only the sound "ä-ä-ä" is audible to the spectator. Canetti is reminded of the beggar earlier in the text, who had tested coins with his tongue: "Vielleicht besaß er keine Zunge, um
das "1" in "Allah" zu formen, und der Name Gottes verkürzte sich ihm zu "ä-ä-ä-ä" (122). This is language denied meaning, but not value:

Aber es lebte, und mit einem Fleiß und einer Beharrlichkeit ohnegleichen sagte es seinen einzigen Laut, sagte ihn Stunden und Stunden, bis es auf dem ganzen weiten Platz der einzige Laut geworden war, der Laut, der alle anderen Laute überlebte.

It is characteristic that Canetti should end on a note of "Überleben". Language as sound has been overcome by sound as (pure) language. The book ends with a transcendent "Stimme", which, infused with meaning, echoes back through the text. "Laut" triumphs over "Leute". The fact that it is the product of an absent, perhaps "geschnittete", Zunge adds irony to Die Stimmen von Marrakesch's function as stylistic model for the Lebensgeschichte.

3 Lebensgeschichte: Self as world

Dagmar Bamouw begins her overview of Canetti's oeuvre with the following observation: "Alle Texte Canettis sind auf gleichzeitig distanzierte und intime Weise autobiographisch". The looseness of her definition of the autobiographical is redeemed by her recognition of the dialectic of intimacy and depersonalisation in his work. In contrast, Michaela Holdenried dismisses Canetti's Lebensgeschichte, relegating it to the status of memoir. However, her claim that "Canetti läßt ein Figurtheater erscheinen, das von unzähligen Nebenfiguren bevölkert ist - nur der Hauptdarsteller fehlt" fails to recognise that the narrator's passivity does not prevent him from being central to the text. These "Nebenfiguren" are generally "Figuren" in the sense that Canetti uses the phrase in the context of Die Blendung (A 40), and subordinated to his passive, governing narratorial identity. This narratorial strategy resembles what Robert Young refers to in the context of Homi Bhabha's conception of "mimicry" as "agency without a subject". Similarly, criticism of Canetti's implicit claims for the reliability of his memory overlooks the many "Leerstellen" to which he draws the reader's attention.

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Canetti’s recollective reach seems so extensive that, rather than convincing the reader of its veracity, it is as likely to prove unconvincing and thus draw attention to the proximity of memory and fiction. The loose systematicity of the Lebensgeschichte derives from its foundation on the process of "Verwandlung". Both the Lebensgeschichte and Die Blendung portray the "Zerfallenheit" (GW 249) of modernity without reflecting such chaos directly in their form. This suggests that, in its discursive and narratorial strategies, the Lebensgeschichte is much less distant from Die Blendung than many critics have allowed.

**Governing metaphors**

Initially I wish to examine the sensory metaphors around which the three volumes are constructed. These dominant metaphors (or "Bilder") reveal the fundamentally aesthetic nature of Canetti’s Lebensgeschichte. Their value lies in their transformative flexibility, their capacity for both discursive and sensuous application. *Die gerettete Zunge* opens with the tongue-threatening incident that gives the volume its title. This opening chapter of the section which portrays Canetti’s childhood in Rustschuk is entitled "Meine früheste Erinnerung". Autobiography traditionally opens with a return to origins; it is important to note that Canetti’s opening chapter concerns itself with the birth of his (self-) consciousness. It begins: "Meine früheste Erinnerung ist in Rot getaucht." The uneasy atmosphere increases when the nursemaid’s lover threatens to cut off the two-year old Canetti’s tongue, in order to prevent him from revealing their liaison to his mother. While there is no way of disputing that this was his earliest memory, the fact that the tongue and the capacity for language come to dominate the first volume suggests that the text is constructed around the principle of symbolic selection rather than historical truth.

Many critics have interpreted the incident in the light of Freud’s theory of infant castration anxiety. Although this may be a contributing factor to the young Canetti’s fears, it seems much more significant to me that it is his communicative capacity, rather than his sexuality, which is threatened. The threat keeps Canetti quiet for ten years, by which time the incident has derived special status from its repression, until he tells his mother and she is able to explain the incident. Indeed, it becomes part of the erotic subtext that underlies the account of his relationship with his mother. Thus the episode
enduringly associates language with power and the memory of his vulnerability grants the incident emblematic status in the rest of the narrative.

It is interesting to note that a very similar story occurs towards the end of *Die Blendung*:


Georges Kien’s recollection illuminates some of the differences between Canetti’s novel and his Lebensgeschichte. The passage from *Die Blendung* takes the childhood source and increases its resonance and indeterminacy. Canetti’s report in *Die gerettete Zunge* is straightforward and factual. In the novel, elements of darkness, blindness and fear of the unknown are added. The irrationality, around which the novel is constructed, is conspicuously present. The colour red is made more threatening by its transference from the surroundings to the boy himself (who has measles) and by its contrast with the whiteness of the sheets. Fear is heightened by its association with the unknown figure, here only a disembodied voice. Later, Georges is able to recognise the threat as both familiar, his brother, and strange: "doch Peter, ein anderer Peter". The novel adds the element of sibling rivalry, their competition for the mother’s attention, which indicates "Georges’ Wunsch nach Unersetzbarkeit, den er mit allen anderen Romanfiguren teilt". The linguistic aspect of the threat is made subordinate to the fear of blindness, as it is throughout the novel. This dual process of perception and sensory disruption is one of the methods used in the novel to convey the dominance of irrationality and to anticipate Kien’s eventual disintegration. In both fictional and autobiographical texts, the mother is saviour and governing authority - a force for reason. Later in the novel, the very absence of this kind of external authority, coupled with the general inability to reach a
consensus of opinion, precipitates its crisis. Thus, we can see how a central symbolic childhood event is translated into fiction. It is notable, however, that in Die gerettete Zunge, the "Rettung" does not come for another ten years, by which time the young Canetti has granted the incident the status of (founding) myth, with all the capacity for "Verwandlung" which that implies. The incident becomes a guiding principle in this first volume; threats, death and redness, allied to the governing metaphor of "Zunge", resonate through Die gerettete Zunge and beyond. The colour red recurs as the threatening wolves' tongues in the fairy tales of Canetti's childhood and the blood which accompanies his younger brother's circumcision. The red cheeks of a young English girl excites Canetti's precocious "oriental" sexuality with their resemblance to the apples of Rustschuk, before the colour metamorphoses into the "Fackel" image of the second volume. More significantly, however, the opening chapter introduces the issue of language, which dominates the Lebensgeschichte as a whole.

The representative status of these early years in Rustschuk is confirmed in the second chapter, where the following much-quoted observation occurs: "Alles was ich später erlebt habe, war in Rustschuk schon einmal geschehen" (9). Interestingly, these early years are not only emblematic of Canetti's personal life; life in Rustschuk seems to represent the declining Hapsburg Empire in microcosm. Although its former racial and cultural diversity has vanished, the grandiose architecture of present-day Ruse endures as a reminder of its earlier prosperity and of its place in Austro-Hungary, which "came closest to realising the dream of peace and harmony among nations - if only for a very brief moment in history". Plurality of race is reflected in plurality of language. One of the narrator's relatively rare metatextual comments illuminates the enduring significance of these childhood years:

Ich kann nur eines mit Sicherheit sagen: die Ereignisse jener Jahre sind mir in aller Kraft und Frische gegenwärtig [...] aber sie sind zum allergrößten Teil an Worte gebunden, die ich damals nicht kannte. (16)

The experience of these early years, with their exile and easy mastery of several tongues, is an important factor in the unconcerned attitude that Canetti adopts in later life towards the displacement caused by exile. Here the seeds of Canetti's humanistic conception of
linguistic purity, in which language becomes both an effective means of communication and a legitimate medium of artistic expression, are sown. Canetti structures his text carefully. Memory never seems to be allowed roam associatively, as it is in Koeppen's Jugend or Benjamin's much earlier Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert, for example. The authoritativeness of Canetti's narrator makes his text appear old-fashioned and over-formalised at first sight. The first Aufzeichnung in Das Geheimherz der Uhr dismisses linguistic experimentation and professes "ein Vertrauen in die Sprache": "Der Grund dafür ist, daß mich die Substanz des Lebens vollkommen in Anspruch nimmt" (GU 7). Canetti's governing sensory metaphors have an important restorative function and their apparent autonomy stands in opposition to the narrator's passive authority. These sensory images are an important unifying element, as Paul de Man states in an observation which suggests the essential fictionality of Canetti's texts: "Metaphors are much more tenacious than facts".45

At this early stage of his life, language is polyphonic, but has yet to acquire the destructive quality it has in Die Blendung. The young Elias develops an almost obsessive interest in the written word, attracted by its unknown authority. He imitates his father reading his newspaper. His father's explanation of the folly of such imitation awakens in him "eine unstillbare Sehnsucht nach Buchstaben" (36) which persists and modulates into a love of the (English) books his father begins to give him after their move to Manchester. Later, he comes revealingly to categorise his childhood in Rustschuk as "die Zeit [...] in der ich noch nicht lesen konnte" (F 100). The "Mordanschlag" chapter, in which Elias attempts to murder his cousin, jealous of her ability to write the "Buchstaben in blauer Tinte, die mich mehr faszinierten, als alles, was ich je gesehen hatte" (38), reinforces his fascination with writing as the primary form of language and as a (unifying) metaphor for learning. The erotic subtext to his relationship with Laurica is underlined in the later volumes, in which his relationships with both Anna Mahler and his future wife, Veza, are at least as dependent on letters as upon direct contact. When Veza, jealous of his friendship with another woman, hides her own letters to him in a tree, it is the letters towards which he directs his passion upon their recovery: "ich holte sie heraus, ich umarmte sie und küßte sie, die Briefe" (F 291).

In Rustschuk, knowledge of several languages was common and the use of Ladino, Canetti's first tongue, was not unusual among Jewish families. It is tempting to follow
Canetti's lead in his explanation of the "Mordanschlag" incident and posit a link between Canetti's preoccupation with the purity of language and the orthodox Jewish conception of the sacred word (see G 40). Racial (and religious) identity is always subservient to intellectual identity in Canetti's work. In the wartime Aufzeichnungen he speaks of "Die größte geistige Versuchung in meinem Leben, die einzige, gegen die ich sehr schwer anzukämpfen habe ist die: ganz Jude zu sein" (PM 61). He proceeds to ask, almost desperately: "Kann ich nicht weiterhin allen gehören, wie bisher, und doch Jude sein?" In Canetti, plurality is always celebrated. When, in perhaps the most-quoted of the Aufzeichnungen, he says: "Nicht alles wissen will ich, sondern das Zersplitterte vereinigen" (PM 42), it is a gesture of inclusion, of unification which is related to his conception of "Verwandlung" that is opposed to the specialisation he abhors elsewhere.

The concern with language becomes more pressing once his family moves to Manchester and Canetti begins to learn English. Canetti's parents speak to each other in German, which, even before their emigration, the young Elias comes to regard as a "Zaubersprache". He secretly imitates the sound of the words: "und sagte mir die Sätze, die ich von ihnen gehört hatte, her, im genauen Tonfall, wie Zauberformeln" (32). Thus, the devotion to the German language as "magische Laute" begins as the same kind of attraction to language as pure sound that Canetti experienced in Marrakech. (The experience is echoed at the end of Das Augenspiel during his visit to Prague, where his companion "spürte aber auch, wieviel es mir bedeutete, allein zu hören, Menschen, die verschiedensten Menschen, in einer Sprache reden zu hören, die ich nicht verstand, ohne daß mir gleich übersetzt würde, was sie sagten." (A 298-9).) As a child, this gave rise to alienating feelings of exclusion: "Wenn ich mich als Kind im Neid um diese fremden Worte verzehrte, merkte ich, wie überflüssig ich war." (A 216). After his father's sudden death, Elias's mother requires him to learn the "Sprache ihres Vertrauens" (86). Her method is dominating and entirely willed: "es war eine spät und unter wahrhaftigen Schmerzen eingepflanzte Muttersprache" (86). This extends the thematics of the "Zunge" metaphor. German is Canetti's fourth language. Yet it is his mother tongue in the most literal sense because it is the language imposed upon him and spoken by his mother. Thus Canetti's complex relation to the German language is bound up with familial, as well as with cultural and national motivations. (It is notable that in his Nobel prize acceptance speech, Canetti refers to the influence of cities, not nations, on his
development.) As the "Wortanfälle" essay demonstrates, it became both an act of faith and a recognition of debt for him to retain German during wartime exile in England. It is also illuminating that the young Elias only begins to make progress in his remarkably fast adoption of German when he abandons his mother’s authoritarian methods (which echo the text’s opening episode in their initial severity) and learns to write in German.

In this way the German language becomes a means of self-expression for the young Elias. His family’s movement between German speaking countries ensures that the question of linguistic displacement is not a pressing one in the second half of Die gerettete Zunge. His preoccupation with language is transformed into a preoccupation with literature as it becomes the medium of the intense literary conversations with his mother which characterise their relationship as he grows older. However, written language remains an issue. At school, Canetti finds it impossible to learn shorthand: "Ich empfand jedes Wort, als sei es für die Ewigkeit gemacht, und die sichtbare Gestalt, in der es erschien, war für mich etwas Unantastbares" (272). It would be wrong to interpret, as Sander L. Gilman does, this rejection of shorthand as a veiled rejection of Hebrew and its different script: "An das Vorhandensein verschiedener Sprachen war ich von klein auf gewöhnt, aber nicht an das verschiedener Schriften" (272). Canetti overcomes his initial reaction, just as he overcomes his preference for written language in Die Stimmen von Marrakesch, and thereafter uses shorthand happily. The "gerettete Zunge" retains a double thematic function throughout the text: it both saves and is saved. In this respect, it parallels the Krausian image of the "Fackel" and its complex dialectic of illumination and destruction, contradictory elements which summarise Kraus’s influence on Canetti.

The sensory images of the second and third volumes, "Ohr" and "Auge", are bound up with the "Zunge", since language (written and spoken) is the medium of expression of the insights they provide. Once overcome, his parents’ formerly alienating use of German becomes a means of inclusion and expression.

The title of the second volume of the Lebensgeschichte, Die Fackel im Ohr, which covers the years up to the writing of Die Blendung, suggests a shift of emphasis. The reference to "Die Fackel" acknowledges the profundity of Karl Kraus’s influence on the adolescent Canetti. The title also introduces the volume’s governing metaphor of "Ohr", the capacity for critical "Hören" which is also derived in part from Kraus. Kraus’s satirical energy derives from the recognition of the disingenuousness and obscurity of the
language of those in positions of power. His attacks are at their most effective in public readings, where again it is the oral power of language that attracts Canetti. Satire depends on an ability to listen and to turn the words of the manipulators back on themselves:

Daß man mit den Worten anderer alles machen kann, erfuhr ich von Karl Kraus. Er operierte mit dem, was er las, auf atemberaubende Weise. Er war ein Meister darin, Menschen in ihren eigenen Worten zu verklagen.

Kraus’s influence on the narratorial strategies of Die Blendung is obvious. What is perhaps less apparent at first sight is that the same patient emphasis on listening is central to the Lebensgeschichte. Canetti continues:

Viel wichtiger war, daß man gleichzeitig das Hören erlernte. Alles, was gesprochen wird, überall, jederzeit, von wem immer, bot sich zum Hören an, eine Dimension der Welt, von der man bis dahin nichts geahnt hatte, und da es um die Verbindung von Sprache und Menschen ging, in all ihren Varianten, war es vielleicht die bedeutendste, jedenfalls die reichste.

In this way, the connection between the governing metaphors of the first and second volumes is articulated. In his first essay on Kraus, "Karl Kraus, Schule des Widerstands", Canetti crystallises the above into the phrase,"das akustische Zitat" (GW 45), which summarises Kraus’s technique. The direct lineage from this formulation to that of the "akustische Maske", which Canetti coined to describe the technique of the 1930s plays and portions of Die Blendung, is obvious.

"Hören" also contributes to Canetti’s personal growth. Canetti’s first meeting with his future wife comes at the beginning of his obsession with Kraus, at the first lecture he attends. Naturally, the "Hören" motif is also applied to his relationship with Veza. His "nie zu erschöpfendes Gespräch" (185) with her comes to replace his intense communication with his mother, who develops an intense and willed dislike for Canetti’s future wife. As the chapter title "Karl Kraus und Veza" indicates, they become the twin sources of his Viennese education. The later description of the impact of his brief
acquaintance with Isaak Babel could just as easily have been applied to either Veza or Kraus: "Vielleicht trafen wir uns in einem Wort, das nie zwischen uns fiel, das mir jetzt immer in den Sinn kommt, wenn ich an ihn denke. Es ist das Wort lernen" (346). Die Fackel im Ohr traces the development of both Die Blendung and its author. "Hören" is integral both to the process of writing the novel and to Canetti’s personal survival: "Tot werde ich sein, wenn ich nicht mehr höre, was mir einer von sich erzählt" (311) After returning from his oppressive but liberating period in Berlin, Canetti energetically expresses his delight in listening to ordinary people in Viennese cafés (in contrast to the "Namen" of Berlin): "Jeden wollte ich sehen, hören, jeden lange, immer wieder, auch in der Endlosigkeit seiner Wiederholung hören" (399). Again, the learning process is emphasised: "Ich lernte es, die Leute nach dem Gehör allein auseinanderzuhalten" (399). This experience is directly incorporated into Die Blendung which, as we have seen, is crucially concerned with the inability of speakers to control their discourse:

Sie machten sich lächerlich in Worten, sie kämpften mit ihnen. Es war ein Zerrspiegel, in den sie sahen, wenn sie sprachen, in der Entstellung der Worte, die zu ihrem vermeintlichen Ebenbild geworden war, führten sie sich vor.

(399-400)

Art becomes another "Zerrspiegel", which reflects and distorts. Die Fackel im Ohr’s concentration on the importance of visual art demonstrates further the interdependence of the three volumes’ central metaphors. For example, in the section concerned with Rembrandt’s "Simsons Blendung", we learn: "An diesem Bild, vor dem ich oft stand, habe ich erlernt, was Haß ist" (135). Canetti has often acknowledged the crucial influence that visual art had on the writing of Die Blendung. Towards the beginning of Hochzeit, he has Kokosch read from the biblical description of the blinding of Samson, where the image again functions as an indication of the willed isolation of the play’s characters and as a foreshadowing of disaster (D 24f). The painting, which returns Canetti to the childhood "Mordanschlag" incident, underlines the power of art and the imagination to reinforce experience:

Wirklich wird erst das Erkannte, das man zuvor erlebt hat. Ohne daß man es
This could be a description of autobiographical narrative, in which "Bilder" (in the widest sense) combine with memory to form an artistic "Wirklichkeit" derived from (but not identical with) prior reality. A parallel passage from *Die gerettete Zunge* expresses the same notion in more personal terms:

"Brueghel ist mir der wichtigste Maler geworden, aber ich habe ihn mir nicht wie vieles spätere durch Betrachtung oder Nachdenken erworben. Ich habe ihn in mir vorgefunden, als hätte er schon lange, sicher daß ich zu ihm kommen müsse, auf mich gewartet."

(G 34)

Such confessions indicate Canetti's preference for disguised metatextual commentary. The passage also goes directly to the heart of one of the central problems of autobiographical writing: its relation to truth. One of his Aufzeichnungen memorably states: "Die Wahrheit ist ein Meer von Grashalmen, das sich im Winde wiegt" (PM 54). The quotation from *Die Fackel im Ohr* above emphasises the fact that the Lebensgeschichte is concerned with "Wirklichkeit", rather than "Wahrheit". The apparent unity of Canetti’s narratorial stance crumbles in the face of the multiplicity of external reality: "Die Wirklichkeit war nicht im Zentrum, wo sie wie an Zügeln alles zusammenhielt, es gab nur noch viele Wirklichkeiten und sie waren außen" (F 350). This picture of late 1920s Berlin is implicitly presented as an extreme version of the chaotic state of Europe in the late 1920s. The depiction of such plural realities is effected via the texts' interdependent (and to some extent interchangeable) governing metaphors: "Er lacht mit seiner Leber, ich lach mit dem Ohr" (NH 202).

With its concentration on "Sehen", *Das Augenspiel*, the final volume of the Lebensgeschichte, completes the writer’s powers of perception. This becomes an act of interpretation: "muß man nicht nur Erfahrungen machen, sondern sie auch merken" (155), resembling Rilke’s *Malte*, whose "Ich lerne sehen" becomes one of the motifs of his development as a writer. At the beginning of *Das Augenspiel*, Canetti is saved from the
disillusionment which follows the completion of *Die Blendung* by his discovery of Büchner. The "Verblendung" with which the novel infects its author is countered by exposure to Büchner’s technique of "Selbstanprangerung", which is rather similar to the Krausian "akustische Zitat". His characters’ language contains the seeds of its (and their) own destruction: it allows them to dig their own graves. Büchner’s example leads Canetti out of the "Wüste" and shows the way towards the writing of the savagely satirical *Hochzeit*.

The process continues in the second chapter of *Das Augenspiel*, "Auge und Atem", which depicts Canetti’s relationship with Hermann Broch. The discussion between Canetti and Broch about the nature of the modern novel, which I have already examined, concentrates on the novel as a way of seeing the world. Canetti makes particular reference to Broch’s eyes: "Wenn Augen atmen könnten, sie hätten den Atem angehalten" (24). The fact that Broch is introduced in these peculiar terms suggests that he has a special place in the third volume. In the following chapter, Canetti notes: "Der eigentliche Sinn, der Hauptsinn, durch den Broch die Welt um sich aufnahm, war der Atem" (35). Such is the consistency of Canetti’s judgement that the 1936 essay, "Hermann Broch. Rede zum 50. Geburtstag" describes the novelist in very similar terms. Broch is characterised by his breathing, which Canetti’s Aufzeichnungen demonstrate to be central to his defiance of death and limitation. By "Atmen" Canetti seems to mean the capacity to absorb, internalise and reproduce influence and knowledge: "Gefährlich die Denker, die nicht genug geatmet haben" (PM 213). Like the capacity for self-transformation, "Atem" stands in opposition to death. A later Aufzeichnung suggests their proximity: "Klarheit und Kürze hindern den Erzähler, denn er lebt von den unberechenbaren Sprüngen der Verwandlung und einem unerschöpflichen Atem" (FP 43). By implication, the association of Broch’s eyes with breathing suggests his exemplary status in the formation of Canetti’s death-defying conception of "Überleben". Echoing the synecdochic characterisation of *Die Blendung* and *Der Ohrenzeuge*, Canetti regards eyes as external indicators of internal traits.

The eye motif continues with the depiction of Canetti’s infatuation with Anna Mahler. The first references to Anna are to the beauty of her eyes, which defy the avarice of her mother and the "Froschauge" (A 57) of her mother’s husband, the despised Franz Werfel. In Canetti’s first meeting with Anna, blindness and (in)sight seem to
combine. The terms in which she is described are remarkable: "Sie bestand aus Augen, was immer sonst man in ihr sah, war Illusion [...] Wie soll man diese Ungeheuerliche wahrhaben: daß Augen geräumiger sind als der Mensch, dem sie zugehören" (73). This description recalls Die Stimmen von Marrakesch, in which the beauty of the women in the Mellah is chiefly reflected in their eyes. The familiar terminology of the following quotation suggests that Canetti is describing a fundamental element of his writing:

"Wer in ihr Feld gerät, ist zum Opfer geworden, nichts gibt es, das er vorbringen könnte und zu retten vermöchte er sich nur durch vollkommene Verwandlung. Da sie in der Wirklichkeit nicht möglich ist, sind ihr zuliebe Mythen und Menschen entstanden."

Her eyes have a dangerous power of attraction which Canetti is only able to resist with recourse to his emblematic capacity for "Verwandlung". It is striking that, blinded by these extraordinary eyes, Canetti is unable to remember the opening words to their conversation. Visual memory dominates. Ironically, Anna Mahler's interest in Canetti is, he claims retrospectively, purely in his writing.

The two pairs of eyes meet in the "Augenspiel" of the title during one of Canetti's readings of Die Komödie der Eitelkeit. Faced with Broch, Anna Mahler's "Augenspiel" retains the same erotic charge that captured Canetti: "sie waren von allem abgelöst, ineinander" (119). The meeting seems unequal. Broch's capacity for absorption and Anna's for seduction, allied with Canetti's confusion at trying to observe while reading (and his general subordination of sexuality), ensure that the incident is related in a muted tone of disappointment. This contrasts with the volume's emphasis on accurate observation. The sensuality of Anna Mahler's "Augenspiel" conflicts with Canetti's almost metaphysical conception of seeing. Yet, as the volume's title indicates, he cannot help being fascinated by their amorality.

The powers of "Hören" developed in Die Fackel im Ohr are completed and complemented by observation: "Um so wichtiger war es für mich, die Menschen genau zu betrachten, und zwar in der Vielfalt, mit der sie bei solchen Gelegenheiten aufeinander reagieren" (84).

Canetti's faith in his visual memory seems almost absolute, despite the interval of 50 years. It is contrasted with the blindness of prejudice,
familiar from *Die Blendung*, which colours his initial contact with the Bendikts, the family of the publisher despised by Kraus: "Ich faßte mich auf die übliche Weise. Ich belegte das Benedikt-Haus mit einem Bann und *sah es nicht*" (207). This is fitting, as one of the central concerns of the volume is the gradual movement away from Canetti’s "ernsten seelischen Versklavung" (147) to Kraus. Kraus’s self-fortifying language, characterised by its "dichtgefügten Festungssätze" (147), recalls *Die Blendung*. In effect Canetti creates his own version of Kraus’s "Chinesische[n] Mauer" (GW 50) to impede his perception. *Das Augenspiel* traces the destruction of this wall, which was a necessary preliminary to the construction of Canetti’s subsequent writing. In the final, muted judgement of Kraus’s decline and death, the "akustische Zitat" is turned on its creator, who is condemned, tried and obliterated by his own discourse:

... er als Person war in mir wie in vielen unterdrückt, ausgelöscht, überhaupt nicht, nirgends vorhanden. Es war eigentlich so, als habe er vor seinem versammelten Publikum eine seiner großartigsten Reden gegen sich gehalten und damit vernichtet. (269)

Having liberated himself from Kraus’s influence, it remains for Canetti to reconcile himself with the other great influence of his early life, his mother. This process is also described in terms of vision. Two factors make reconciliation possible. Firstly, in the chapter "Die letzte Version", his mother relates to him for the first time the circumstances surrounding his father’s death. The repetition of the title of the chapter which depicts Canetti’s father’s death in *Die gerettete Zunge* suggests that the Lebensgeschichte is formed out of a series of parallel, co-existing narratives. Two absolutes, two final versions, are posited, which confirm the shifting (transformative) nature of narrative truth and echo the "Privateigentum" chapter of *Die Blendung*. "Die letzte Version" is also a rewriting of the most formative event of Canetti’s life - his father’s death - and therefore reveals his mother’s part in the creation of Canetti as writer: "Auf ihre hochfahrende Weise hatte sie mich anerkannt, das Buch sei so, wie sie selber geschrieben hätte, es sei wie von ihr" (211). The second factor prompting reconciliation is his mother’s severe illness which inspires Canetti to reveal that he has continued his relationship with Veza and that the stories of other women were also merely fictions.
However, soon after this confession, his mother once more assumes her former attitude, which is one of willed "Verblendung": "sie wolle mich nie mehr sehen" (218).

Tellingly, "Augenmythologie" (239) also dominates the final chapter, "Tod der Mutter". It begins: "Ich fand sie schlafend, die Augen geschlossen" (299). Open eyes signal both vitality and acceptance: "mir war, als hätte sie sie gegen mich verschlossen" (299). The "Durchschauen" which is such a vital constituent of his mother’s moral example in Die gerrettete Zunge (see G 189) is abandoned as she chooses not to see through the fiction of the flowers which Canetti pretends to have brought from Rustschuk. Illness concentrates her vitality into one area: "Alles was ihr an Leben blieb, war in die Augen gegangen, die schwer waren vom Unrecht, das ich ihr angetan hatte." (304).

Understanding has become a (willed) function of the visual rather than the intellectual. Eyes are also mirrors in which the observer sees the reflection of his own assumptions. It is through her eyes that Canetti’s brother, Georg, judges the degree of her illness. After she dies, Georg tries to keep her alive through language: "Solange er die alten Worte sagte, war sie für ihn am Leben. Er gab sich nicht zu, daß sie ihn nicht mehr hörte" (307). As the Lebensgeschichte has attested, language is only viable in a communicative situation, in the interrelation of Zunge, Ohr and Auge. Georg’s attempts simultaneously to become both speaker and listener are genuine attempts to overcome the impact of their mother’s death. As such, they are allied to Canetti’s concern with "Überleben". It is revealing that Canetti does not himself participate in this quixotic attempt to defy truth and that the death of his mother is experienced (filtered) through another.

Leerstellen

In Die Fliegenpein, Canetti writes: "Es ist wahr, daß man viel vergessen hat. Aber was alles nachgewachsen ist und die ‘leeren’ Stellen erfüllt! Das ist das Interessante an einer Lebensgeschichte" (FP 122). I want now to consider the issue of these "leeren Stellen". In one of the few articles to address this aspect of Canetti’s texts, David Darby has written rather tentatively that "these forgotten details may be seen to function as a trope of psychological realism [...] and may be read as contributing to a function of verisimilitude". The admission of gaps both maintains the illusion of verifiability and
enables other omissions to pass unobserved. In particular, Canetti's treatment of history reveals the highly personal motivation behind his exclusion of certain events.

If we examine Canetti's presentation of historical events, the narrative appears to be relatively "ahistorisch". In a 1972 interview with Joachim Schickel, Canetti lists some of his earliest experiences of the "Masse", which include local events such as the burning of a house in Rustschuk and global events such as the sinking of the Titanic and the appearance of Halley's comet. In *Die gerettete Zunge* the arrival of the comet is associated with "das Ende der Welt" (28), a mass expectation that must have had considerable impact on the young Canetti and which was almost fulfilled by the outbreak of the First World War. In fact Canetti's father dies directly after reading a newspaper report about the conflict in the Balkans which led to the outbreak of the war proper two years later. While Canetti can only speculate on the potential link between the news and his father's death, he can be more certain about the permanent effect on his own psyche:

> Seit damals hat es in der Welt Krieg gegeben und jeder, wo immer er war, und im Bewußtsein meiner Umgebung vielleicht kaum gegenwärtig, traf mich mit der Kraft jenes frühen Verlusts und beschäftigte mich als das Persönlichste, das mir geschehen konnte. (72)

As he states clearly in the Schickel interview, his "Trotz-Einstellung zum Tod", so central to his writing, stems from this dual experience. Thus, when events are given prominence, this is almost always because they have some personal significance. Usually they have some relevance to Canetti's growing preoccupation with the themes of *Masse und Macht*. In this sense, David Darby is correct in seeing the Lebensgeschichte as the tracing of the development of the writer of this work. Although Canetti seems to have had the knack of being in the right place at the right time, we are not permitted to dwell on glimpses of Lenin in a Zürich café or Frankfurt during the period of inflation. When Canetti makes explicit reference to historical context, particularly to the growing unrest of the late 1920s and 1930s, it is usually to concentrate upon its effect on his writing:

> Die Dringlichkeit war groß, die Dinge in Deutschland gingen immer wieder rascher weiter, aber noch immer hielt ich die Situation nicht für irreversibel. Was
durch Worte im Gang gehalten wurde, konnte durch Worte aufgehalten werden. Ich hielt die Komödie, sobald sie abgeschlossen war, für eine legitime Entgegnung auf die Bücherverbrennung. (A 115)

This faith in the rehabilitative power of language recalls many of the Aufzeichnungen and, more particularly, the late essay "Der Beruf des Dichters". However, language is inadequate to describe the hollow excitement of his two short stays in Berlin. This period, despite the friendships with Babel and Grosz, is largely one of exclusion and reaction, demonstrated most clearly by Canetti's fascination (and disgust) with Brecht's capacity. This paradoxical attraction/repulsion is central to the following description:

Nun wäre es gar kein Unglück gewesen, daß nichts von den Berliner Wochen versickert war, daß man alles bewahrt hatte. [...] Aber ein Bericht hätte das Wesentliche daran nie erfaßt: die Drohung, mit der es geladen war, und die gegensätzlichen Richtungen, in die es zog. Denn der eine, einheitliche Mensch, der es aufgefaßt hatte und nun scheinbar alles in sich einhielt, war ein Truggebilde. (F 350)

The connection to Magris's illustration of Canetti's dual purpose of "sich enthalten" and "sich verstecken" is underlined by Canetti's recognition of the "zentrifugale" (F 350) and plural nature of "Wirklichkeit", to which I have already referred. Defining events apart, Canetti tends to reflect history through the attitudes and actions of others.

One such defining event is the burning of the Justizpalast in 1927, which Canetti witnessed. It is the central historical experience of the Lebensgeschichte and as such it is granted a chapter of its own. He has often written of the crucial significance of this event for his subsequent work. Writing over fifty years later, the talismanic word still dominates:

Ich sehe mich nicht gut an diesem Tag, aber ich fühle noch die Erregung, das Vorrennen und Ausweichen, das Flüssige der Bewegung. Alles ist beherrscht durch das Wort "Feuer", dann durch dieses selbst. (F 277)
This appeal to transcendent emotional honesty contrasts markedly with the reticence of Canetti’s overall narratorial strategy. Early in *Die gerettete Zunge*, Canetti explains the translation of the Bulgarian fairy tales of his childhood into German in the following terms:

> Ich bin der Sache nie nachgegangen, vielleicht hatte ich eine Scheu davor, das Kostbarste, was ich an Erinnerung in mir trage, durch eine methodisch und nach strengen Prinzipien geführte Untersuchung zu zerstören. \( \text{(G 16)} \)

Canetti’s characteristic avoidance of systematicity does not obscure the underlying desire to avoid explanation and interpretation in case it destroys the object of inquiry. He prefers to allow language to stand alone, to reverberate with multiple significance. This explains the relative absence of meta-narrative in the texts. The "Leerstellen" which do exist are neither highlighted nor obscured by commentary: we might see this in the light of his mother’s emphasis on "Geheimnisse" and "Verbote" (particularly regarding sexuality). Memory and fabrication collude:

> Als früher Anhänger des Odysseus mochte ich wohl komplett erfundene Geschichten, in denen man zu jemandem anderen wurde und sich verbarg, nicht aber kurzbeinige Lügen, die keine dichtende Aktivität erforderten. \( \text{(G 260)} \)

Memory and "Leerstellen" are continuously adapted in a process akin to "Verwandlung". This is articulated again towards the end of *Das Augenspiel* in the words of Dr. Sonne:

> "Es ging darum, daß nichts Gelebtes verleugnet wurde. Der Wert eines Menschen bestand darin, daß er alles enthielt, was er erfahren hatte und es weiter erfuhr" \( \text{(A 278)} \).

Axel Gunther Steussloff comments: "Fast scheint es, als formuliere Sonne hier ein Programm, wie es der autobiographische Text vollziehen wird" and it is true, as I shall discuss later, that Sonne’s language frequently resembles Canetti’s own tone. Of course, this process of creative memory is the work of the "erzählende" self: "Aber ich erinnere mich doch nur, um jetzt zu leben" \( \text{(GU 141)} \). Confirmation can be found in the much-quoted "Glaubensbekenntnis", which sums up so many of the concerns of the Lebensgeschichte:
Ich bin im Gegensatz zu vielen, besonders solchen, die einer redseligen Psychologie erlegen sind, nicht der Überzeugung, daß man die Erinnerung drangsalieren, kujonieren und erpressen oder der Wirkung wohlberechneter Lockmittel aussetzen soll, ich verneige mich vor der Erinnerung, vor jedes Menschen Erinnerung. Ich will sie so intakt belassen, wie sie dem Menschen, der für seine Freiheit besteht, zugehört, und verhehle nicht meinen Abscheu von denen, die sich herausnehmen, sie chirurgischen Eingriffen so lange auszusetzen, bis sie der Erinnerung aller übrigen gleich.

(F 342)

Memory is an individual, active process, to be encouraged tentatively by listening to it. An ironic reference to memory's adaptions of "Nasen, Lippen, Ohren", the external signifiers of the senses which are so central to the Lebensgeschichte, follows the extract quoted. This emphasises the fact that memory is sensual as well as intellectual. The final lesson of the Lebensgeschichte comes at the conclusion of the paragraph in an ironic adaptation of Martin Luther: "aber die Erinnerung sie sollen lassen stân" (342). This embryonic view of memory's dependence on forgetting has been a central aspect of autobiographical narrative since St. Augustine and undermines the impression that the text gives of possessing a dominant narratorial authority. It also demonstrates in a rather muted form what Magris calls "die Austauschbarkeit und tödliche Symbiose von Selbstverteidigung und Selbstzerstörung" in Canetti's texts.

Sonne

In Das Geheimherz der Uhr, Canetti characterises his text in the following terms:

Daß so viel Menschen darin vorkommen und daß manche von ihnen mehr Raum einnehmen als der Erzähler selbst, mag verwirrend erscheinen. Es ist aber die einzige Möglichkeit, die Wirklichkeit eines Lebens wiederzugeben, seiner starken Richtung zum Trotz.

(GU 197)

The concluding "zum Trotz" underlines the Lebensgeschichte's opposition to the generic conventions it seems to embody. While Canetti remains a remarkably shadowy figure,
his text is filled with portraits of famous artists, writers and musicians. In a sense they represent the Pestalozzi Kalender of his childhood transformed into reality. However, it is rather figures like his mother, his wife, Thomas Marek and Dr. Sonne who come to exert a dominant influence on the text and on the formation of the narrator. It is their centrality which enables Canetti to claim that his Lebensgeschichte does not revolve directly around him. However, these secondary figures serve tacitly to reinforce Canetti’s self-representation, as Martin Bollacher states: "Der Autor lebt in seinen Charakteren, die in ihm sich widerspiegeln". The texts represent a development of the "akustische Maske" technique, fused with the powerful descriptive brevity which is a feature of Der Ohrenzeuge. The three volumes take elements from all of Canetti’s work - the satire of the 1930s fiction and drama, the obsession with "Masse und Macht" and the reticent concision of the Aufzeichnungen - in order to demonstrate Canetti’s resistance to specialisation. The generic interplay and interdependence of Canetti’s writing are most concisely demonstrated by a comparison of "Der Maestroso" in Der Ohrenzeuge, Masse und Macht’s chapter "Der Dirigent" and the portrayal of Hermann Scherchen in the "Der Dirigent" chapter of Das Augenspiel. The figure of the "Ohrenzeuge", with whom Canetti’s conception of the writer has much in common, is representative of the interaction between the three volumes’ governing metaphors: "Der Ohrenzeuge bemüht sich nicht hinzusehen, dafür hört er um so besser" (OZ 49). I would like to concentrate on just one representative figure from the Lebensgeschichte, Dr. Sonne, in order to examine how Canetti operates as "Ohrenzeuge" to his own life.

Like Marek, who dominates the final section of Die Fackel im Ohr, Sonne represents the triumph of symbolic mind over symbolic body. Sonne’s unique status is underlined by the fact that the entire second section of Das Augenspiel is named after him, the only figure to be honoured in this way. Broch’s characterisation of him as "der gute Mensch" (A 126) (which ironically recalls Pfaff’s characterisation as "der gute Vater" in Die Blendung) is intriguing even before Canetti realises upon being introduced to him that it is Sonne whom he has been observing in the Café Museum for over a year and a half and whose face so closely resembles that of Karl Kraus. In effect Sonne replaces Kraus as a moral influence; the social upheaval of 1930s Vienna, understated by Canetti, is filtered through and made bearable by the conversations with Sonne. Only rarely does Canetti makes explicit the all-pervading effect of the pressure of events:
Man muß dazu sagen, daß die Zeit schon damals von Schlagwörtern verseucht war und es schwerfiel, einen Fleck zu finden, der von ihnen frei war, auf dem man sich nicht beengt fühlte. Die höchste Tugend seiner Rede war, daß er zwar präzis, aber nie knapp war.

Canetti expands upon this later, when Sonne is described as being formed from pure language: "er bestand aus seinen Sätzen" (138). (Elsewhere, Canetti echoes the formulation, saying of the conversations with Sonne: "daß ich auch aus ihnen bestehe, sie sind der wichtigste Ring des Baums" (NH 173).) Sonne is seen in opposition to the "unsägliche Langeweile" (A 143) which characterises so many intellectual responses (of which Kraus's is exemplary) to the events of the 1930s. Sonne implicitly inspires Canetti's own resistance to such tendencies.

There are two further ways in which Sonne is an exemplary figure. These are both related to Canetti's description of him as "unerreichbar" (A 149), a characterisation which is equally applicable to Canetti's own narratorial aloofness. Sonne's reticence is related both to his Jewishness and to his morality. Sonne never admits to Canetti that he is a (Hebrew) poet, a reluctance which anticipates Canetti's own life and the decades spent working in obscurity on Masse und Macht. Despite praise from Musil and Thomas Mann, it is revealing that it is Sonne's opinion of Die Blendung that Canetti awaits with the most expectation and apprehension. When judgement comes, it is precise and perspicacious. The value of this "Schatz" (202) is underlined by the fact that Canetti characteristically denies us most of its content. This reluctance is indicative of a broader reluctance to articulate in too much detail the contribution that Sonne made to Canetti's intellectual development. This is explained in part by the fact that Canetti recognises he appears too idealised a figure: "Hättest du Sonne ein wenig schlechtgemacht, er wäre glaubwürdig" (GU 201), although it is important to note Veza’s opposing characterisation of Sonne's destructive effect on the thinking of others. In fact, Sonne's refusal to be judgemental or limit his knowledge through specialisation makes him resemble an idealised self-portrait at times. Sonne is predominantly a moral figure and largely responsible for curing Canetti of the fascination with "das Böse" which he has inherited from Kraus - if anyone represents "Das Gewissen der Worte", it is Sonne. One of the Aufzeichnungen confirms his influence on the narratorial passivity of the
Lebensgeschichte: "Versuche, nicht zu urteilen. Stelle dar" (GU 142). Like Saul Bellow’s Mr Sammler, Sonne’s apparent disinterest masks a profound concern with history and morality. In this way, he becomes a model for Canetti in later life. Of the "Figuren" who contribute to the creation of the Lebensgeschichte, Sonne has the highest status.

Sonne counters Canetti’s increasingly judgemental character in the first part of Das Augenspiel, which seems to have resulted from his entry into the literary circles of 1930s Vienna. Conversation with Sonne becomes a haven in this brittle and vain world, rather as the time spent with Marek helped him recover from his period in Berlin. Sonne stands in direct contrast to the self-serving attitude of others:

Da war zuerst einmal das Fehlen alles Persönlichen. Er sprach nie von sich. Er sagte nie etwas in der ersten Person. Er sprach einen aber auch kaum direkt an. Alles wurde in der dritten Person gesagt und dadurch distanziert. (A 131)

The resemblance to Canetti’s own narratorial strategies is striking once again, which are reflected in the following comment: "Ich: das schneidende Wort" (FP 78). Canetti is able to adopt Sonne’s characteristic reticence in the Lebensgeschichte without abandoning the first person. The use of the distancing third person, so common in recent autobiographical narrative, is much more a feature of Canetti’s Aufzeichnungen: "Es genügt, von sich in der dritten Person zu reden; ‘er’ ist weniger lästig und gefährlich als ‘ich’" (PM 49). Curiously, Canetti is able to incorporate this depersonalisation into his autobiographical narrative without abandoning the first person. In the Lebensgeschichte Canetti’s aim is not to construct a representative life or a personal history as such; it is rather to trace the development of the writer who came to write Die Blendenung, Masse und Macht, the Aufzeichnungen and, most importantly, the Lebensgeschichte itself.

The almost unspoken acknowledgement of their shared ethnicity is the second feature of Canetti’s relationship with Sonne. It is tempting to associate Sonne’s preference for "Gesetz" over "Urteil" (A 133) with the authority of Talmudic law. Sonne makes no explicit declarations: "Das Wort ‘Jude’ hat er weder von sich noch von mir gebraucht. Es war ein Wort, das er auf sich beruhen ließ" (148). Their reluctance directly to acknowledge their common racial origin, despite growing anti-Semitism,
underlines their unspoken solidarity. Silence, which Canetti often favours over language as a form of communication, is a feature of their friendship. Sonne's subtlety is more effective: "Er versäumte keine Gelegenheit, meine Herkunft wahrzumachen" (278). Through Sonne's gentle persuasion, Canetti begins to articulate more directly both the Spanish and Jewish aspects of his identity against the background of the Spanish civil war and growing anti-Semitism in Central Europe. Sonne's influence is surely detectable in Canetti’s guiding conception of "Plurinationalismus" (PM 67), just as the tone of many of the Aufzeichnungen seems to have derived from him.

Vertreibung and rebirth

Sonne’s tacit foregrounding of the issue of Jewish identity brings into focus an important subtext of the Lebensgeschichte, which is the final aspect that I wish to discuss. I would like to suggest that the series of rebirths and Vertreibungen, around which the texts are structured, are intimately related to Canetti’s representation of his (displaced) Jewish identity. The "erzählende" self of the Lebensgeschichte is constantly adapted and re-presented, even re-created, during the narrative. This is no accident; as Julian Preece has stated: "Nothing is included for the sake of honesty or completeness [...] each memory and each anecdote has its place in a scheme which amounts to a personal mythology." The community of Sephardic Jews into which Canetti is born in Rustschuk is founded on the experience of "Vertreibung" and acceptance into the "leidenschaftlichen Universalität" (G 10) of the wider multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. I believe that we can read the sequence of rebirths in the light of Jewish "Vertreibung". It is by no means uncommon to construct an autobiographical narrative around a series of figurative rebirths - we might think of Sartre’s Words: "I never stopped creating myself; I was both giver and gift" or Bernhard’s texts, which I discuss in the next chapter. However, Canetti’s metaphors of "Wiedergeburt" and "Vertreibung" occur so frequently and with such emphasis that I think they must be held to suggest a deeper significance.

The first rebirth occurs at the beginning of Die gerettete Zunge, when the return of the young Canetti’s father precipitates an astonishing recovery from serious burns:

Es war der Arzt, der uns alle drei zur Welt gebracht hatte, und er pflegte später
zu sagen, daß von allen Geburten, die er erlebt habe, diese Wiedergeburt die schwerste gewesen sei. (G 42)

A similar transformation occurs when he later learns German: "wurde ich unter der Einwirkung der Mutter zur deutschen Sprache wiedergeboren" (G 91). This implicitly associates the pain of the rebirth with the passion that he later brings to his relationship both with the German language and with his mother. Thus, in a Lebensgeschichte in which sexuality is generally only present as a willed absence, an erotic charge is associated with the German language (as it was in the relationship between his parents), which helps to explain the durability of Canetti's faith in it as a means of expression. Similarly, Canetti tends to express the impact of influential figures or books on him in terms of "geistigen Wiedergeburten" (A 14) or identity formation. The earliest example of this, as we might expect, comes in a comment on the conversations with his mother, which are so important to him during the early years in Vienna: "Ich kann diese Gespräche nicht mehr im einzelnen wiedergeben, denn ich bestehe zum guten Teil aus ihnen" (G 105; cf. G 149). It is interesting to note that the formative power of the conversations obliterates his powers of recollection. The same sweeping formulation, familiar from the descriptions of Sonne, is applied to his debt to Kraus: "Aus diesen Vorlesungen bestand ich" (A 270).

The earlier acknowledgement of his mother's influence precedes a clear statement of identity:


This explicit statement of the multiplicity of personal identity, which is echoed elsewhere in the text, demonstrates that Canetti's self-sufficiency is dependent on his capacity for "Verwandlung". His development is associated with interaction: influential experiences are likely to contain a "menschlich" element. The early English books of which he says again: "daß fast alles, woraus ich später bestand, in diesen Büchern enthalten war" (G 49)
are invested with such significance because he associates them with his father. Similarly,
the impact of "Gilgamesch" is explicitly linked to the actor bringing it alive, which gives
the work the aspect: "der mein Leben, seinen innersten Sinn, Glauben, Kraft und
Erwartung wie nichts anderes bestimmt hat" (F 59). The combination of these influences
and rebirths forms "das verborgene Leben meines Geistes" (G 106) which informs and
controls the written work. Chronologically, this is the first real evidence that the
Lebensgeschichte of the writer comes to dominate that of the man. However, the two
selves coexist in a tension that is a founding principle of the Lebensgeschichte and which
is much closer to the experiments of modern autobiographical narrative than many critics
have acknowledged. One of the Aufzeichnungen illustrates this cogently and profoundly:
"Ich will mich so lange zerbrechen, bis ich ganz bin" (PM 150). Frederike Eigler has
illustrated how far Canetti distances himself from Heissenbüttel's "Literatur der
Selbstentblößer": "Für Canetti scheint die Grenze der autobiographischen Selbstdarstellung
dort erreicht, wo die Selbstentblößung vieler Gegenwartsauteuren beginnt". Eigler’s
comment occurs in the context of a discussion of the vagueness of Canetti’s portrayal of
his political position in the 1930s. However, if we make a distinction between Canetti
the man and Canetti the writer, then the Lebensgeschichte’s political ambivalence can be
seen to correspond to the positively humanist perspective of Masse und Macht and its
examination of the rise of fascism. In any case, in a text which sees the self as a plurality
founded on "Verwandlung", the notion of "Selbstentblößung" is likely to be misleading.
Canetti concentrates on the development of the writer rather his life as a man. This in
itself involves an act of self-transformation: "Ich will nicht wissen, was ich war; ich will,
was ich war, werden" (GU 83).

In the "Letzte Donaufahrt" chapter of Die Fackel im Ohr, the doctor who
witnessed Canetti’s first "Wiedergeburt" assumes that this early experience, coupled with
the shock of his father’s early death, would have motivated him towards a career in
medicine. This underlines the formative significance of these early experiences and
implies that Canetti’s decision to become a writer was motivated to some degree by a
wish to come to terms with his father’s death. Later Canetti refers to medicine as the
"Geschenk" that he gave his younger brother (F 129). On several occasions, Canetti has
acknowledged that his father’s death has a central place in the development of his defiance
of death, a concern which dominates his writing and hence his life. Rather than regarding
the series of rebirths as "[e]ine Folge immer neuer Tode des Vaters". I believe we should see them conversely as multiple acts of defiance of that early death.

"Vertreibung" is also a form of rebirth. The opening sentence of Die Fackel im Ohr underlines Canetti's willingness to submit to such changes: "Die wechselnden Schauplätze meines frühen Lebens nahm ich ohne Widerstand auf" (F 9). This recalls Masse und Macht's description of Jewish identity: "Ihr Ziel ist das Gelobte Land, und sie sind eine Masse, solange sie an dieses Ziel glauben. Die Geschichte ihrer Wanderung ist die Geschichte dieses Glaubens" (MM 40). We can relate this to Canetti's experience of seeing a large group of Galician Jews crammed into a railway carriage in Vienna. History has added retrospective horror to this image. Sander L. Gilman misreads Canetti's response, which is explicitly one of "Entsetzen" (G 131), to his companion's unspoken abhorrence. There is no evidence that Canetti shares his mother's condescending attitude towards Eastern Jewry once he is mature enough to have developed his own opinions. It is similarly difficult to read anything other than regret and guilt into Canetti's reaction to the suicide of the Polish Jew, Backenroth, which again foreshadows the Holocaust. In fact, many of the Aufzeichnungen collected in Die Provinz des Menschen (the title is revealing) are concerned with the need to reverse the negativity commonly associated with the experience of displacement: "Hitler hat die Deutschen zu Juden gemacht" (PM 67). By transforming the "Machtausüber" into victims and reversing these identities (which were not mutually exclusive before Hitler), Canetti both elides and reinstates cultural difference, portraying it both as a representative characteristic of the alienation of modern existence and as a potential means of overcoming that alienation.

Before examining how this discussion of Canetti's Jewish identity can be related to his conception of "Verwandlung", it is important to recognise that it is in the figure of Sonne that the governing sensory metaphors of the Lebensgeschichte converge. It is significant that it is Sonne, with his physical resemblance to Kraus, who finally liberates Canetti from his domination: "Die Befreiung kam durch dieses Gesicht, das so sehr dem des Unterdrücker's glich, aber alles anders, komplexer, reicher, verzweigter sagte" (A 147). It is as if the sensory organs that Canetti considers to be founding features of the writer have come together to form, in Sonne's face, a "Vorbild" at a time in which he had rejected the very possibility of "Vorbilder". Canetti combines the metaphors
aesthetically to construct a self able to overcome the "Desidentifikation" which autobiographers such as Manès Sperber have experienced in confronting their past selves. We might recall Bakhtin's concept of "Rede-Physiognomie", which Stefan H. Kaszynski associates with Canetti's "akustische Maske". In contrast to De Man's image of autobiography as "De-Facement", Canetti seems rather to derive from Sonne a dominant attitude of self-effacement.

4 Verwandlung and Identity

The construction of the Lebensgeschichte around this series of "Vertreibungen" and rebirths, which I have associated with Canetti's Jewish identity, suggests the flexibility of his notion of "Heimat". At the end of his essay, "Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch?", Jean Améry concludes with "die nüchterne Feststellung: Es ist nicht gut, keine Heimat zu haben". In contrast to Améry's subdued pessimism, Canetti seems to locate his "Heimat" in language itself: "Wie oft muß man sagen, was man ist, bis man es wirklich wird?" (PM 169). His emphasis on the interdependence of identity and articulation goes to the heart of autobiographical narrative. The concern with the potential purification of language, which I have highlighted throughout the discussion of the Lebensgeschichte, derives from his mother: "Die Mutter, die über die Reinheit unserer Sprache wachte und nur Sprachen mit Literaturen gelten ließ, war besorgt, daß ich mein 'reines' Deutsch verderben könnte" (G 161-162). Whereas his mother is motivated by a snobbish dislike of the Swiss accent, Canetti's intention seems to be to infuse language with a moral quality which will attempt to reverse the corruption of modernity. In one of the most-quoted of the Aufzeichnungen, he explicitly associates his retention of German with his Jewish identity:

Die Sprache meines Geistes wird die deutsche bleiben, und zwar weil ich Jude bin. Was von dem auf jede Weise verheerten Land übrig bleibt, will ich als Jude in mir behüten. Auch ihr Schicksal ist meines; aber ich bringe noch ein allgemein menschliches Erbteil mit. Ich will ihrer Sprache zurückgeben, was ich ihr schulde. Ich will dazu beitragen, daß man ihnen für etwas Dank hat. (PM 62-3)
We might term this moral concern "Das Gewissen der Worte". Like Der Ohrenzeuge's "Silbenreine", another Aufzeichnung captures the corrective element of Canetti's aspirations for language: "Er wartet auf ein Wort, das ihm alle Worte rehabilitiert und rechtfertigt" (PM 150).

This would seem to have moved us a long way from Die Blending. Like the 1930s plays, the novel is concerned with the abuse of language, which removes rather than restores its moral component. It seems that thereafter Canetti channelled his fascination with irrationality into researching and constructing Masse und Macht, with its "methodisch unmethodisch" systematicity without system. The thematic concerns of the 1930s do not disappear; rather in the later writing they are approached from a reversed perspective, which is not content merely to replicate and re-present confusion and isolation. Where the novel concentrates on impeded perception, the governing sensory metaphors of the Lebensgeschichte rehabilitate the individual's powers of perception and articulation. There, the concentration on linguistic purity is reflected in Canetti's narratorial minimalism, which allows language a form of independence. The narrative is not self-conscious because it focuses on language as semi-autonomous sound, as sensory input. Yet, it is important to emphasise that this reticence is a unifying element in Canetti's work; it is also present in Die Blending, where it reinforces the novel's overriding sense of indeterminacy. In his post-war writing, Canetti concerns himself with the insights that can be gained from trying to attain the (unachievable) goal of linguistic and ontological purity: "Menschen durch Worte am Leben erhalten - ist das nicht beinahe schon so, wie sie durch Worte erschaffen?" (PM 80). Luciano Zagari has written:

Canettis Aufzeichnungen können in dieser Hinsicht gleichsam als Vorstudien betrachtet werden, die dazu dienen sollen, die nötigen Vorbedingungen zu errechnen, damit das Leben anders wird, damit Utopie eintritt. [...] Mit wertfreier Sachlichkeit bezeichnete Canetti als Utopie alles das, was unter heutigen Umständen einfach als unrealisierbar gelten muß.\footnote{62}

It is important to emphasise, as Zagari does, that Canetti is not diverted by the apparent impossibility of his task - this is most obviously demonstrated by his enduring "Trotz-Einstellung zum Tod". The Aufzeichnungen, in particular, demonstrate that in exile
Canetti is able to accept the "Heimatlosigkeit" and linguistic confusion which characterise the modern world. "Verwandlung" is the means of maximising this emblematic experience.

Canetti’s use of the term "Verwandlung" is elusive of clear definition. It represents an accumulative process which stresses the need to accommodate multiple perspectives within a shifting overview - the kind of minimal governing presence Canetti achieves in all his writing. It is discussed in anthropological terms in *Masse und Macht* and in a literary context in the 1976 lecture "Der Beruf des Dichters". However, in the *Aufzeichnungen* Canetti moves between the two usages, which ensures that what is already (perhaps self-reflexively) a rather pliant concept appears even more mutable. It is upon the form of "Verwandlung" outlined in "Der Beruf des Dichters" that I wish to concentrate.

Axel Gunther Steussloff has made the important observation that the representative "Dichter" of Canetti’s essay is not necessarily identical with Canetti himself. The essay is aspirational in its appeal for the writer to exercise "Verantwortung" (GW 283). Canetti opposes the anachronistic term "Dichter" to accounts of literature’s decline and writers who "statt zu verstummen schrieben [sie] dasselbe Buch immer wieder" (279), a characterisation Bernhard took to apply to himself and which prompted a bitter counter-attack from him. The "Dichter"’s role as "der Hüter der Verwandlungen" (283) has two important consequences. Firstly, the writer is to protect the "literarische Erbe der Menschheit", which is full of stories of "Verwandlungen". (This forms part of Canetti’s pre-eminent interest in myths - "sein Lebenselixier" (FP 74).) The second aspect of the role is closer to what we have been discussing above. The writer is to promote transformation in "einer Welt, die auf Leistung und Spezialisierung angelegt ist" (GW 285). The concentration on systematicity and specialisation is one of the most damaging aspects of modernity in Canetti’s view. This is reflected in the fact that the *Aufzeichnungen*, which contain the Lebensgeschichte’s doubts, are opposed to the kind of organisation (represented most excessively by Der Ohrenzeuge’s "Tückenfänger") which is an inescapable element of writing: "Er will zerstreute Aufzeichnungen hinterlassen als Korrektur zum geschlossenen System seiner Ansprüche" (FP 30). "Verwandlung", with its "gegenwissenschaftliches" force, is a weapon against the closure of categorisation and the linguistic corruption that limit the individual’s potential
in the modern world: "Nur durch Verwandlung in dem extremen Sinn, in dem das Wort hier gebraucht wird, wäre es möglich zu fühlen, was ein Mensch hinter seinen Worten ist" (286). The writer's function is to hold on to "Hoffnung" in a world of chaos (288). In an interview with Horst Bienek, Canetti describes Die Blendung as an attempt: "die Wirklichkeit wie mit Scheinwerfern von außen her, vom Rande her, ableuchten". Where the novel represses its sense of optimism (see A 42), the hope appealed to in "Der Beruf des Dichters" is pre-eminently a feature of the Lebensgeschichte’s portrayal of the writer’s development in the face of the chaos of modernity. This is demonstrated by the sense of collision between the apparent unity of the text and the instability of its historical background. Another Aufzeichnung suggests that "Verwandlung" is situated somewhere between the two positions:


The section in Masse und Macht that is devoted to "Verwandlung" is largely concerned with negative elements of the concept. However, like the later essay, it opposes "Verwandlung" to "Machtausübung": "Der Machthaber führt einen unaufhörlichen Kampf gegen spontane und unkontrollierte Verwandlung" (MM 434). This can lead to the kind of paranoia that we find in Kien, who is unsettled and finally undone by his brother’s apparently endless capacity for transformation. A paradox is uncovered if we follow Kurt Bartsch in seeing Canetti’s conception of the writer as a "Gegenbild" to that of the "Machthaber". For as Bartsch and others² have pointed out, the concern with "Überleben" in Canetti’s later work, and particularly in the Lebensgeschichte, makes his position seem contradictory. His minimal narratorial presence in the Lebensgeschichte allows his governing metaphors a freedom analogous with that of "Verwandlung", making him both "Machtausüber" and "Verwandlungskünstler". A degree of narratorial authority is necessary to prevent the kind of uncontrolled transformation familiar from Die Blendung. "Macht" and "Verwandlung" operate in tandem, eliminating their excesses. "Verwandlung" also parallels "Überleben", which operates as a willed denial of the inevitability of death.
Both "Überleben" and "Verwandlung" derive their validity from their capacity to extend boundaries. Something of this interaction between the extreme and the constrained is evident in the following Aufzeichnung: "Es interessiert mich nicht, einen Menschen, den ich kenne, präzis zu erfassen. Es interessiert mich nur, ihn präzis zu übertreiben" (PM 285). It is Canetti's recognition of the necessary limitation of "Verwandlung" which prompts me to dispute J.P. Stern's dismissal of the concept. He recognises that the use of "Verwandlung" in the Aufzeichnungen, where brevity of form precludes the possibility of exposition, largely eschews the negative aspects associated with the term in Masse und Macht, but goes on to claim that: "enough of an outline is given to indicate its closeness to Rilke's images of Wandel and Verwandlung*. However the redemptive power of Rilke's images of "Wandlung" in the Sonette an Orpheus, images that are closely allied to transcendence and poetic inspiration, seem a long way from Canetti's conception of the willed but necessarily transient defiance of death and modernity: "Die Verwandlungslehre verspricht ein Allheilmittel zu werden, bevor sie noch ganz durchdacht ist" (PM 40).

Franz Schuh has argued that Canetti's "Verwandlung" is fundamentally opposed to modernity:

Vielleicht kann man von daher sagen, daß Canettis Werk eine Art poetischer Geschichtsphilosophie des Verlusts der Balance zwischen Identität und Verwandlung in diesem Jahrhundert ist.**

As early as 1943, Canetti anticipated the displaced self coming to be seen as a paradigmatic condition of (post) modernity: "Erst im Exil kommt man darauf, zu einem wie wichtigen Teil die Welt schon immer eine Welt von Verbannten war" (PM 37). I want finally to suggest that Canetti's conception of "Verwandlung" is intimately connected with the experience of displacement, a feature of his life from his childhood and an inescapable element of the exiled Jewish community into which he was born. Indeed Canetti's "Verwandlung" is strikingly similar to formulations that have been used to define the effects of displacement in recent studies. In an essay entitled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall writes: "Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference."** Similarly, Homi Bhabha's notions of "cultural translation" and "cultural hybridity",**
which focus on identification rather than identity, also resemble the oscillating force of Canetti’s "Verwandlung". Such theories, grounded in socio-historical conceptions of (displaced) identity, seem to me to come far closer to Canetti’s "Verwandlung" than Rilkean notions of transcendence and thus demonstrate that, despite appearances to the contrary, Canetti’s work is founded on the experience of cultural and linguistic displacement. Where Die Blendung focuses on rigidity, in the context of which destruction is the only available means of transformation, the Lebensgeschichte offers a more benign version of the self’s ability to construct, destroy and reconstruct its own identity. In "Wortanfälle", Canetti comments:

Es scheint mir, daß der Mensch heute [...] nach einer privaten Sphäre sucht, die seiner nicht unwürdig ist, die sich deutlich vom Allgemeinen abhebt, in der dieses sich aber vollkommen und genauer spiegelt. Es geht um eine Art von Übersetzung des Einen ins Andere, nicht eine Übersetzung, die man sich als freies Spiel des Geistes aussucht, sondern eine, die so unaufhörlich wie notwendig ist, von den Konstellationen des äußeren Lebens erzwungen und doch mehr als Zwang.

(GW 174)

The location of this private sphere is the German language, which is the medium of Canetti’s expression of his remarkable and plural sense of self-sufficiency in his autobiographical narrative.
CHAPTER TWO
THOMAS BERNHARD'S "GLEICHGÜLTIGKEIT"

There is a degree of self-stylisation in Bernhard's writing and presentation of himself as a public figure which makes the relation between his fictional and autobiographical texts central to any examination of his work. In the early part of his career, this self-dramatising tendency is evident in the speeches that he gave in receipt of various literary prizes, in which his tone and style are almost indistinguishable from that of his fictional protagonists. Early interviews like "Drei Tage" seem with hindsight to be highly self-conscious exercises in image creation. The interviews, which occurred with increasing frequency after he began writing the series of autobiographical texts, are as (deliberately) unreliable and controversial as Bernhard's fiction. They form part of his work's wide-ranging and fundamental exploration of truth and artificiality. Therefore, I believe it is naive in dealing with a figure as complex and, strange as it may seem, playful as Bernhard to see the autobiographies or the interviews - forms conventionally regarded as revelatory or confessional - as keys with which to unlock the mysteries of the fictional texts. It is perhaps more useful to examine the interplay between the fictional and the autobiographical, both within individual texts and within groups of texts.

Bernhard's career is punctuated by a series of re-evaluations. The disappearance of "Der junge Schriftsteller" in the story of that name parallels the disappearance of the Bernhard of the relatively conventional poetry and prose of the 1950s before his re-emergence as the creator of *Frost*. The negativity of the title of *Verstörung* is at least partially related to the process of self-representation, as is demonstrated by its narrator's claim: "An jedem Tag baute ich mich vollkommen auf und zerstörte ich mich vollkommen." (41) The autobiographical texts are similarly explicit in their identification of the proximity of self-representation and self-manipulation. To Bernhard revelation is only another form of disguise, as Eva Marquardt confirms: "Die wirkliche oder vermeintliche Selbstenthüllung ist zugleich eine Stilisierung seiner selbst". The controversies and court cases associated with such works as *Die Ursache* and *Der Stimmenimitator* result from his increasing willingness to exploit his public position in Austria and delight in causing scandal: "Ich schreibe, um zu provozieren".2

Bernhard's writing is unimaginable without its Austrian settings. Yet, he offers
no descriptions of landscape or city: Bernhard’s pictures of Austria are, as Hans Häßler has observed, "letzlich im Text als negative Paradigmata bloß abstrakt präsent". His figures’ monologues are characterised by their savage, lacerating "Österreichbeschimpfung". His "Haßliebe" for his country differentiates him from the distancing experiences of exile shared by Canetti and Weiss. However, Bernhard’s attitude to Austria (compounded by the criticism it attracted) almost amounts to a form of internal exile. Moreover, there is a sense in which German language writers in post-imperial Austria can be regarded as being "linguistically displaced". The Austrian tradition of "Sprachskepsis", associated with Hofmannsthal, Kraus and Wittgenstein, has had a vital influence on Austrian literature of the modern period and its relation to the German cultural tradition. This is particularly true of the Austrian literature of the 1960s, the period in which Bernhard came to prominence, when a radical concern with language mirrored the political radicalism that is associated with West German literature of the time.

It is interesting that these parallel trends led to the "Neue Subjektivität" of the 1970s. Many critics have regarded Bernhard (along with Weiss), as a precursor of this development, albeit "als extremer Pol negativer Subjektkritik". Bernhard’s writing also became more directly autobiographical, although his autobiographical texts are stylistically akin to his fiction to perhaps a unique degree. Indeed, it would be quite plausible to graft a section of one of the autobiographical texts onto one of Bernhard’s fictional texts without detection, such is his writing’s unity of form. His language often appears almost autonomous, like the dancer in Der Stimmenimitator: "Der Tänzer, meinte er, dürfe, während er tanzt, niemals an seinen Tanz denken, er dürfe nur tanzen, sonst nichts" (76-77). Yet conversely, Bernhard’s unity of form derives to a large extent from his writing’s radical subjectivity. He is very much preoccupied with the exploration of "the grey, shady and ambiguous area between art and reality". The increasing confluence of his public persona and narratorial tone suggests that much of the power and vitality of Bernhard’s writing derives from its radical investigation of the frontier between experience and its linguistic representation. In order to trace the interplay of fictional and autobiographical in Bernhard’s work, it is necessary to assess the place in his work of the autobiographical fiction, the fulcrum which links the early and the late prose. All of Bernhard’s texts are located in the space between autobiography and fiction, totalisation.
and partiality, self and discourse. *Korrektur* is explicit: "Daß es möglich ist, zwei (scheinbar) entgegengesetzte Gegensätze gleichzeitig zu denken und darin zu handeln, so Roithamer" (334). Bernhard Sorg classifies the position of the self in Bernhard's texts as: "Teil eines unendlichen Balanceaktes zwischen Nichtigkeitsgefühlen und Omnipotenzwahn". It is upon such oppositions, in which the only form of synthesis is the temporary "Gleichgültigkeit" which exists between the warring extremes, that Bernhard's work is founded. Claims are followed by counter-claims, as if, like Strauch, Bernhard himself "gehört zu denen, die alles flüssig machen" (*Frost* 111). I want to investigate the relationship between self and discourse in Bernhard's writing, to see how his peculiar mixture of assertion and denial drives his idiosyncratic prose. His conclusion after his grandfather's judgement of the parabolic bicycle incident at the beginning of *Ein Kind* captures succinctly the paradoxes inherent in Bernhard's work: "Denn selbst in meinem Scheitern ist noch meine Größe erkennbar" (25).

1 *Kalkwerk/Kunstwerk*

Before looking at the autobiographical texts, I want to examine *Das Kalkwerk*, a representative text from the first part of Bernhard's career, which appeared in 1970. Bernhard's 1960s fiction is characterised by its bleakness, its black humour and its paradoxical use of language and repetition to reflect the impossibility of communication. *Das Kalkwerk* is constructed from multiple contradictory perspectives and seems to be designed to undermine the very possibility of definitive or conclusive utterance, as if in fulfilment of Bernhard's roughly contemporaneous self-characterisation in "Drei Tage" as "ein Geschichtenzerstörer" (13). The much-cited lines from *Gehen*: "Im Grunde ist alles, was gesagt wird, zitiert" (22) are revealing in this context. *Das Kalkwerk*'s unnamed narrator, an insurance agent who investigates the novel's central murder, remains in the background. His attempt to piece together a coherent narrative from the conflicting evidence with which he is confronted is an exercise in futility, echoing *Frost*'s narratorial task: "Etwas Unerforschliches zu erforschen" (7). It is part of the deep affinity between Bernhard's prose and music that his texts resemble variations of each other. For example, Heinrich Lindenmayer sees one of the sources for *Das Kalkwerk* in
Watten's narrator's comment: "Es sind immer die größten Widersprüche in allen Zeugenaussagen". This remark underlines the fact that, like parts of Die Blendung, Das Kalkwerk is structured as a detective novel in reverse. The attempt to illuminate the "immer mehr verfinsternde Finsternis", which is the emblematic setting of much of Bernhard's early writing, with "ein juristisches Licht" (9) is doomed to failure. The novel propels the narrator and the reader further and further from resolution. Bernhard's manipulation of syntax and repetition mimes this movement. A critic's reflection on Der Untergeher is also applicable in this context: "Bernhard's fugues are not cyclical, not static; they are evolving spirals."

Konrad's murder of his wife is the novel's catalyst. It is referred to at the beginning of the narrative in a characteristic subversion of both generic and chronological convention. Konrad stands at the centre of the novel, the first of Bernhard's major protagonists to be obsessed with the (ultimately unsuccessful) writing of a scientific study. Das Kalkwerk, like Bernhard's work in general, contains little plot: "Zu evozieren ist er da, nicht zu räsonieren". Much of the criticism of the monotony of Bernhard's work has stemmed from the failure to recognise that his texts' modulations and reiterations of familiar themes and (limited) plots constitute fragments of an investigation of the possibility and status of modern narrative. Thus, the focus on the criminal act performed in alienated isolation recalls many of the short pieces in Bernhard's early Ereignisse and several of the stories collected in Erzählungen. However, the roots of Das Kalkwerk are to be found in Verstörung, where the narrator's father's visit to the "Industrielle" contains the later novel in miniature:

Das Jagdhaus habe er schon vor fünfzehn Jahren dem Fürsten Saurau, den wir anschließend auf seiner Burg Hochgobernitz aufsuchten, abgekauft, damals schon im Hinblick auf die schriftstellerische Arbeit über ein durch und durch philosophisches Thema, über das er niemals spricht. [...] Er arbeite Tag und Nacht, schreibe und vernichte das Geschriebene wieder, schreibe wieder und wieder und vernichte wieder und nähere sich seinem Ziel.

Like Konrad, the Industrielle lives incestuously with his half sister: "wie Mann und Frau zusammen" (43). (It is a feature of Bernhard's pessimistic view of human relations that
in most of his work, with the exception of *In der Höhe*, sexuality is associated with incest and depravity.) It is essential for any understanding of Bernhard's development to recognise how explicitly and radically *Das Kalkwerk* extends the earlier prose. It is notable that Konrad's predecessor in *Verstörung* succeeds in writing his study before repeatedly destroying it, a process which anticipates *Korrektur*. In contrast, Konrad is able neither to near his goal nor to write at all. His fractured consciousness is reflected in part in *Das Kalkwerk*’s adoption of the fragmented form familiar from the earlier texts *Amras* and *Ungenach*. I quote the opening of the novel to provide a sense of its unsettling form:

...wie Konrad vor fünf einhalb Jahren das Kalkwerk gekauft hat, sei das erste die Anschaffung eines Klaviers gewesen, das er in seinem im ersten Stock gelegenen Zimmer habe aufstellen lassen, heißt es im Laska, nicht aus Vorliebe für die Kunst, so Wieser, der Verwalter der mußnerschen Liegenschaft, sondern zur Beunruhigung seiner durch jahrzehntelange Geistesarbeit überanstrengten Nerven, so Fro, der Verwalter der trattnerschen Liegenschaft, mit Kunst, die er, Konrad, hasse, habe sein Klavierspiel nicht das Geringste zu tun gehabt, er improvisierte, so Fro, und habe, so Wieser, an jedem Tag eine sehr frühe und eine sehr späte Stunde bei geöffneten Fenstern und bei eingeschaltetem Metronom auf dem Instrument dilettiert...

(7)

Such stylistic density is characteristic of Bernhard's early prose. In *Das Kalkwerk*, for the first time, this density is sustained over 270 pages. The frequent references to its sources, "so Fro", "so Wieser", maintain constant doubts about the authenticity of their statements in the reader's mind. As the narrative progresses (or rather spirals), these obsessively interpolated asides fragment the narrative, unsettling and irritating the reader, who is also forced to evaluate the conflicting evidence. Trivial detail conceals more significant information. In the opening paragraph, Konrad's "Dilettantismus" contrasts with the seriousness with which he approaches his study, "Das Gehör". His delight in improvisation suggests an independence which is paralleled by the young Bernhard's approach to learning the violin in *Die Ursache*. Bernhard’s use of language is itself analogous to musical improvisation in its rejection of convention and delight in variation,
both of which mask a complex structure and design. His obsessive prose style reflects Konrad’s monomaniacal character:

Fro meint auch, daß Konrad keinen Grund habe, nicht die Wahrheit zu sagen, das sei ja gerade das Charakteristische an Konrad, daß er in seinem Leben immer ein sogenannter Wahrheitsfanatiker gewesen sei, so auch jetzt. (15)

This description of Konrad recalls many of Bernhard’s other single-minded protagonists; similar or identical descriptions are advanced of Roithamer in Korrektur, Der Theatermacher and more parodically of Alte Meister’s Reger. According to Reger, such a concern with truth stands in direct opposition to Austrian tradition: "Der Österreicher ist alles andere als ein Revolutionär, weil er überhaupt kein Wahrheitsfanatiker ist" (241). As the quotation above reveals, it is one of the founding tenets of the novel that, like Konrad himself, neither the narrator nor his witnesses can be conscious of the profound undermining of the very concept of (narrative) truth that the novel’s investigation represents. It is a typical reflection of Bernhard’s use of contradiction that the above characterisation of Konrad is countered several times in the narrative: "Jahrzehntelang sei ja die Lüge und nichts mehr als die Lüge das einzige Mittel zwischen ihm, Konrad, und seiner Frau gewesen" (43). It is important to note that Konrad fails to recognise that his commitment to intellectual truth is contaminated by the mutually-deceiving nature of his relationship with his wife. The novel is founded on the principle of narrative self-subversion. This is underlined by the extremely frequent use of the subjunctive, which subliminally alerts the reader to the subjectivity of all discourse, and the related use of the familiar Bernhard adjective "sogenannt". Bernhard’s use of language stands in opposition to Konrad’s "Studie", the motivation behind his self-enforced isolation and uncompromising search for perfection:

Das tatsächlich Wesentliche einer jeden Methode sei ja ihr absolutes Gehör, wie er sich ausgedrückt haben soll, zur Weiterentwicklung. Jetzt könne es sich nur noch um die Vervollkommnung dieser seiner Experimente handeln und damit um die Vervollkommnung seiner Studie, die er durchaus im Kopf habe. (65-6)

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The thematic anticipation of *Korrektur* is striking. Konrad’s inability to complete (indeed to commence) his study stems from his need to be all-encompassing. Urs Bugmann sees the recurring motif of the study as analogous to the "Bewältigungsversuch" represented by the autobiographical texts, in which Bernhard’s totalizing impulses are repeatedly undermined. In this respect Konrad recalls Strauch and Saurau in the earlier novels, whose negative desires for totality are reflected in the insane linguistic inventiveness of their lengthy neologisms. Konrad’s instability is the result of a surfeit of perception and an inability to resist the lure of perfection. Interestingly, the narrating insurance agent’s task - to produce a coherent narrative from a mass of tangled perspectives - parallels Konrad’s ambition. Konrad’s declaration when fortifying the Kalkwerk: "Der Sicherheitsfaktor sei der allerwichtigste Faktor" (23-24) echoes the narrator’s need to conclude Konrad’s Lebensversicherung case. Both are doomed to failure. Bernhard frequently employs the prefix "ver" to reverse or intensify meaning. "Versicherung" thus implies both the intensification of security and its reversal, which results in death and the complete absence of certainty that the novel embodies. "Versichern" and "vernichten" combine. We may here be approaching what Frost calls: "eine organische fruchtbare Doppelbedeutung des Wahnsinns" (231).

Ironically, Konrad also has glimpses of the folly of his ambition:

Aber jede Vorstellung sowie jede Vorstellung einer Vorstellung sei in jedem Falle immer eine irrtümliche, erniedrigende. Das müsse man wissen, wenn man denke. Das Tatsächliche sei tatsächlich immer anders, das Gegenteil, immer das Tatsächliche, tatsächlich. Daß wir aus Täuschung existieren und aus nichts sonst, sei nicht unbedingt auszusprechen. (33)

The virtuosity of Bernhard’s manipulation of language reveals how compactly Bernhard uses repetition to challenge the reader, forcing them to recognise the shades of meaning inherent in the use of any one word. As Saurau states in *Verstörung*: "Jeder Begriff ist in sich wieder unendlich viele Begriffe" (170). In the quotation, the opposing uses of "tatsächlich" set up a miniature form of the negative dialectic that is the foundation of Bernhard’s prose. Polarities are invoked but not reconciled; the characteristic process of mutual contradiction, of claim and counter-claim, is extended infinitely. The section
following the passage quoted makes it clear that Konrad is primarily referring to the delusive effect of the Kalkwerk itself. It is important to recognise that, like so much in Bernhard, Konrad’s attitude to the Kalkwerk parallels the author’s own "Haßliebe" for Austria. Just as his relation to Austria is central to Bernhard’s writing, so too the Kalkwerk seems to be an essential precondition for the writing of Konrad’s study:

... das Kalkwerk ist meiner Studie nützlich, heute bin ich nicht mehr dieser Ansicht, heute weiß ich, das Kalkwerk hat mir restlos die Möglichkeit genommen, die Studie niederzuschreiben. (211-212)

It would be unwise to overlook the existential force that the word "nützlich" carries for Bernhard (see the discussion of Der Keller below). The Kalkwerk is also referred to as Konrad’s "einzige Rettung" at this point. However, conversely, the Kalkwerk is identified elsewhere with the "Kerker" that Sicking represents for Konrad. His obsession with constructing the building as a fortress only reinforces this: "alles festverschlossen und festverriegelt und festvergittert" (23). His concern is with keeping himself and his wife in, rather than with excluding others. Despite his obsession with silence and privacy, Konrad explicitly identifies the Kalkwerk as "das Gegenteil von einer Idylle" because it fails to provide the means of satisfying what Jens Tismar calls: "der Wille zur individuellen Selbstbehauptung." The facilitating function of the Kalkwerk is ultimately reversed when Konrad redefines his life goal: "Unser Ziel ist das Kalkwerk gewesen, unser Ziel ist der Tod gewesen durch das Kalkwerk" (225). The reader is constantly reminded by the presence of various other unassimilable aspects of the narrative, such as Konrad’s wife’s repeated knitting of one glove, that it is impossible conclusively to explain the murder. As a result the reader shares the narrator’s failure to construct a meta-narrative or to escape the indeterminacy which dominates the text. This dynamic once again leads to Korrektur.

Konrad’s accounts of two dreams towards the end of the text reveal his mental deterioration. In the first dream, roles are reversed: Konrad succeeds in writing his study, whereupon his wife burns it. The victim becomes the tormentor and seizes the responsibility for the study, which weighs so heavily on Konrad. The dream is associated with the act of murder: "Eine solche lückenlose Erzählung eines solchen fürchterlichen
Traums, soll Konrad zu Fro gesagt haben, und man vernichtet den betreffenden Menschen" (193). The second dream is similarly violent: Konrad negates the Kalkwerk and its contents, including his wife, covering them with black paint before killing himself. This act of destruction, which replaces the darkness of the novel’s opening with "die endgültige Finsternis" ("Drei Tage" 18), anticipates the dynamics of Korrektur and Auslöschung, although its unyielding negativity leaves no room for the tentative, restorative element of the latter novel’s conception of "Vernichtung".

As Robert S. Leventhal has suggested in an essay on the novel, Das Kalkwerk draws an implicit connection between the act of murder and the act of narration, as the dreams confirm. After all, Konrad quite literally tortures his immobile wife with language:

Konrad sei fürchterlich, gleichzeitig hilfsbereit, Sadist, gleichzeitig fürsorglich. [...] Er, Konrad, tyrannisere seine Frau mit unverständlichen Sätzen, die er einmal laut, einmal leise, einmal kurz, einmal lang, abwechselnd in eines ihrer beiden schon auf das Schmerzvollste entzündeten Ohren hineinrede, indem er die Arme, wie auch immer wieder von der Konrad gesagt wird, die von ihm in sie hineingesprochenen Sätze kommentieren lasse bis zur Bewußtlosigkeit.

(137-138)

We have already seen that their relationship denies language its communicative function. The self-contradictory dynamic which characterises their marriage is demonstrated by Konrad’s oscillation between solicitude and cruelty, mastery and enslavement. This is also related to his rather paranoid claim that "alle Meinungen richten sich naturgemäß gegen mich, bringen mich fortgesetzt einen Schritt weiter" (86), which identifies the sense of gaining strength through adversity which is also central to Korrektur. I wish here only to note the recurrent note of opposition. Konrad’s wife’s similar attitude is associated with her demise: "Sie sei [...] immer gegen das Kalkwerk und also auch schon immer gegen ihn selbst, gegen seine Studie also, konsequent zu Ende gedacht, auch gegen sich selbst" (21). Thus she becomes the victim of his study; Konrad’s savage extension of his experimentations are for his own benefit rather than hers, as he admits: "auf der urbantschitschen Methode beruhend, experimentiere ich sie (seine Frau) zu Tode" (115).
Yet, paradoxically, the possibility of writing the study is inextricably dependent upon the survival of his wife:

Konrad hatte ein beinahe erreichtes Lebensziel vor Augen, so Wieser, sie, seine Frau, hinderte ihn, dieses Lebensziel, das Niederschreiben der Studie, zu erreichen. Er mußte sie umbringen, schließlich mußte er sie umbringen, so Wieser. Daß er, indem er sie, seine Frau, umbrachte, im selben Augenblick auch die Studie umbrachte, stehe, so Wieser, auf einem anderen Blatt. (214)

The reference to his "beinahe erreichtes Lebensziel" reveals the degree of self-deception in this remark. It anticipates the autobiographical texts, in which the "Ziel" is the representation and creation of the self. Konrad is unable to achieve this unity of identity. The removal of the obstacle, his wife, fails to facilitate the writing of the study. In fact, there is a sense in which in killing his wife (and half sister), Konrad is in fact killing himself. The self-deluding wait for "den idealen Moment, die Studie niederschreiben zu können" (269) is ironically terminated by the act of murder: "Beiden Konrad wäre in einem einzigen Augenblick alles zerstört gewesen." (215) This sentence underlines the fact that his wife does not possess her own name or identity; she is referred to throughout the novel as "die Konrad". Leventhal sees her as Konrad's "mimetic double". Thus, the Konrads are a variation on the pairs of brothers that recur in early texts like Amras and Frost. She is both part of him and his opposite; he is unable to function without her.

Her association with Romanticism, signalled by her reading of Novalis, is countered by Konrad's reading to her from Kropotkin. His descent into insanity suggests the contemporary inadequacy of both philosophies, which, like the "urbanitischen Methode", are the offspring of nineteenth century rationalism. In fact, it is difficult not to associate the term "Kalkwerk" (which is repeatedly linked with the unwritten study) with "Kunstwerk" and to conclude that the novel is in fact intimately connected with the construction motif of Korrektur and Ja, which encompasses both the material need for shelter and the process of artistic creation. Konrad's study and the Kalkwerk itself combine to unbalance him, to lead him to murder.

As we have seen, language becomes an intimate part of the novel's act of destruction. In another act of reversal, the instrument Konrad uses to torment his wife
turns against him:

Die Wörter ruinieren, was man denkt, das Papier macht lächerlich, was man
denkt, und während man aber noch froh ist, etwas Ruiniertes und etwas
Lächerliches auf das Papier bringen zu können, verliert das Gedächtnis auch noch
dieses Ruinierte und Lächerliche. (147)

The concept of the failure of language, both as a means of communication and as a means
of expression, lies at the heart of Bernhard’s fiction. Its association with "Lächerlichkeit"
is familiar. Das Kalkwerk extends the negative view of language which pervades
Bernhard’s early fiction. In Verstörung, Saurau claims that his meandering, self-pitying
tendency towards monologue is universal: "wir sind in einem Zeitalter der
Selbstgespräche" (138). Language dominates these early novels, which in a radical sense
create and are created out of pure discourse: "Die Dauerredner Bernhards […] reden nicht
nur, sie fassen in Worte, was sie sind und tun". Having reduced (or elevated) language
to a weapon, Konrad is unable to restore it to its original function and write his study.
His failure is the result of his inability to maintain a sense of proportion:

Wie er ja auch seiner Frau täglich sage, er habe alles in die Studie, die er im Kopf
habe, wie er immer wieder betone, investiert, und sie ihn genauso tagtäglich als
einen Narren, dem sie zum Opfer gefallen sei, bezeichne. (245)

It is in part his wife’s recognition of his diminishing sense of identity and balance that
causes Konrad to murder her. It is the truth that the "Wahrheitsfanatiker" cannot face:

... könnte ich die Studie aufschreiben, hätte ich die Studie aufgeschrieben, alles
wäre anders, alles wäre erleichtert in mir und das heißt, ich wäre die
Gleichgültigkeit selbst, alt und gleichgültig, was für einen Zustand kann man als
einen besseren bezeichnen?, so Konrad zu Wieser. (254)

"Gleichgültigkeit" is paradoxically the closest Bernhard ever comes to a state of
transcendence, as my examination of Der Keller will attempt to demonstrate. Gehen’s

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final sentence is informative: "Der Zustand der vollkommenen Gleichgültigkeit, in welchem ich mich dann befinde, so Karrer, ist ein durch und durch philosophischer Zustand" (101). The novel's perspectivisation of discourse is a reflection of this "Gleichgültigkeit". Like practically all of the protagonists of the early fiction, it is Konrad's failure to detach himself from his singular devotion to his Studie that unbalances him. His excessive faith in the power of language to render meaning destabilises him in exactly the same way that his dream of his wife's destruction of the (non-existent) study does. The ending of Das Kalkwerk expresses the quality that Konrad lacks: "das Wichtigste habe ihm gefehlt: Furchtlosigkeit vor Realisierung, vor Verwirklichung" (270). Irony accompanies Konrad's recognition that: "ein Endpunkt ist der Anfangspunkt für einen weiteren Endpunkt und so fort" (77) because it is precisely upon his failure to find an "Anfangspunkt" that the novel is founded.\(^8\) This notion of an infinitely self-mirroring play of beginning and conclusion, which itself reflects the assertion-withdrawal dialectic which I believe to be central to his writing, brings us to the thematics of Korrektur.

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It is said of Konrad at one point that: "er hasse alles was korrekt sei" (73). Korrektur represents a "Korrektur" of Bernhard's work. Its title is characteristic: the fact that many of his titles seem interchangeable underlines the fact that his texts resemble (musical) variations on each other. Frost, Verstörung, Auslöschung or Der Weltverbesserer could serve as a title for any number of texts. I intend to examine Korrektur fully later in the context of the discussion of Auslöschung. First it is necessary briefly to look at its place in Bernhard's development. Korrektur has often been seen as a "Sackgasse" by critics,\(^9\) the terminating point of the early fiction, overcome by Die Ursache's adoption of subjectivity. This is a partial view, suggested by the almost simultaneous appearance of Korrektur and Die Ursache. I prefer to regard Korrektur as both closure and opening. If Korrektur is a corrective, it summarises the concerns of the early texts and offers a way out - the Heideggerian "Lichtung" - in which the text concludes and Roithamer expires. The endless grafting of correction upon correction echoes the endless totalising of Strauch or Konrad, as well as Bernhard's prose style in general. Roithamer's gradual recognition of the impossibility of perfection is mirrored by Die Ursache's recognition of the
inevitable partiality of truth. Unlike Konrad, Roithamer succeeds in writing his study and in constructing the Kegel, however imperfectly. Like Konrad, he is destroyed by it.

*Korrektur*’s narrator has a much greater sense of his own self than earlier Bernhard narrators. Nevertheless, resembling a maturer version of his predecessor in *Frost*, he seems constantly to subordinate his own sense of identity to that of a stronger character, Roithamer. As so often in Bernhard, *Korrektur* summarises many of the concerns of the earlier texts. The construction of the "Kegel", which destroys Roithamer and his sister, parallels Konrad’s deadly obsession with his study. The Kegel’s status as corrective to the Altensam estate continues the "Herkunftskomplex" theme which occurs in *Amras*, *Verstörung* and so constantly elsewhere. In every case, the threat of the decaying, unwanted inherited estate is a cipher for Austria and Bernhard’s simultaneous delight and horror at its having become "Ein Nichts in Kultur und Kunst" ("Politische Morgenandacht" 13).

Finally, *Korrektur* is a profound examination of the nature of artistic and philosophical construction. The agonies surrounding the building of the Kegel, with their biographical and thematic echoes of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kafka (to name but three), anticipate the pain of the autobiographical texts’ examination and reconstruction ("Korrektur") of the self. Taken together, *Korrektur* and *Gehen* are fictionalised philosophical investigations around which (parodic) elements of the later prose and plays speculate.

2 Autobiographisches

The manuscript which Roithamer leaves behind and which forms the basis of *Korrektur*, is as autobiographical as it is concerned with the Kegel project. This underlines the existential function that Roithamer’s Kegel and Konrad’s study fulfil in *Korrektur* and *Das Kalkwerk* and which is paralleled in other texts. After *Korrektur*, Bernhard devoted himself almost exclusively to the autobiographical texts which inhabit the central phase of his career as a writer of narrative fiction. I hope to prove that, more radically than most writers, Bernhard’s autobiographies cannot be separated generically from his narrative fiction. In an interview, Bernhard once claimed:
Ich habe auch nie ein autobiographisches Werk schreiben wollen, ich habe eine echte Abneigung gegen alles, was autobiographisch ist. Tatsache ist, daß ich in einem gewissen Moment meines Lebens Neugier auf meine Kindheit bekam.20

This statement, however exaggerated, goes some way towards undoing the early critical reaction to Die Ursache. Eine Andeutung, the first of the autobiographical texts, which critics seized upon as a solution to the "Kreuzworträtsel" of the preceding fiction.21 There is also little doubt that Bernhard’s choice of title deliberately prompted such a reaction. In a writer as provocative and playful, as open and oblique as Bernhard, such encouragement should be regarded with suspicion.

How do we know that Die Ursache and the texts that followed it are autobiographical? Unlike Canetti, Bernhard does not offer even an ambiguous generic classification. Indeed the subtitles of the first four volumes, like the subtitles of the later prose and plays, subvert conventional notions of genre. However, with Die Ursache Bernhard’s prose begins to display a new willingness to represent experience in the first person without frame or mediating narrator, which makes them appear more autobiographical. The fact that the autobiographical texts were published initially by Residenz Verlag in Salzburg (the object of Die Ursache’s most virulent tirades), rather than Suhrkamp, ironically reinforces the impression that they are acts of revenge on his native land. Comparison of the autobiographical volumes with autobiographical material, such as the "Unsterblichkeit ist unmöglich" essay about his childhood, uncovers only inconsistency and distortion. In this way, the autobiographical texts radically destabilise narrative possibility and narratorial authority in much the same way as the conflicting perspectives of Das Kalkwerk and the other early texts do.

The first four volumes of the autobiographical series share the same form of title - two nouns, the first defiantly definite, the second supplementary and more abstract. Die Ursache sets a precedent in that the supplementary second noun undermines its predecessor, as well as subverting generic classification. (Cf. Frost: "Ursache und Wirkung haben bei mir dieselbe Bedeutung" 287). The absoluteness of "die Ursache" suggests a development from and explanation of earlier abstract and all-encompassing titles such as Frost, Verstörung, Gehe. It suggests causality, linearity. In contrast, "Eine Andeutung" is tentative. It reverses the implications of "Die Ursache", indicating the
partiality and subjectivity which colour the text and reflect the uncertainties and multiple perspectives of Bernhard's earlier narratives. Moritz Meister claims in Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh: "Ein Schriftsteller beschränkt sich auf Andeutungen/ er kann sein Werk nicht erklären" (89). Hans Höller comments that the titles of the autobiographical texts "stellen literarische Leitwörter im ganzen vorangehenden Schaffen des Autors dar". The very existence of five volumes is a subversion of autobiography's traditional definitiveness and unity. Thus, the title Die Ursache. Eine Andeutung reflects the dialectic of assertion and withdrawal that I have already identified in Bernhard's work.

Like most of Bernhard's texts, the autobiographical volumes are prefaced by thematically charged epigraphs. Die Ursache's states that Salzburg has the highest number of suicide attempts in Austria, which itself has one of the highest suicide rates in Europe. Thus we immediately find ourselves in familiar Bernhard territory. It is noticeable that the external authority appealed to in the epigraph does not have the usual literary or philosophical source but is derived from the "Salzburger Nachrichten am 6. Mai 1975". This detail adds to the impression that Die Ursache is an objective inquiry, while simultaneously being almost impossible to verify. In this way, it also enacts the certainty-qualification dialectic of the title. So much is indicated before the text proper even begins.

The first sentence of Die Ursache reveals a great deal. Although uncharacteristically short (the opening sentence of Der Keller is almost 22 lines long), it is characteristic of Bernhard's style and summarises many of Die Ursache's concerns:

Die Stadt ist, von zwei Menschenkategorien bevölkert, von Geschäftemachern und ihren Opfern, dem Lernenden und Studierenden nur auf die schmerzhafte, eine jede Natur störende, mit der Zeit verstörende und zerstörende, sehr oft nur auf die heimtückisch-tödliche Weise bewohnbar. (7)

The complex syntax, with its clausal pile-up, is reminiscent of Korrektur and emblematic of the violence of growing up in Salzburg during the war. (The contemporaneity of the epigraph also suggests that the text's characterisation of Salzburg has no temporal restriction.) The circularity of Bernhard's clause manipulation, which is typically flamboyant and provocative, reflects his pessimistic view of human relations. The
division of its inhabitants into "zwei Menschenkategorien" is typically extreme and dismissive, permitting no dissent. The reader's attention is focused on the victims; the adjectives are singularly destructive and are not applied to the "Geschäftemachern". The intensification of "störende" to "verstörende", then "zerstörende", is again characteristic; these adjectives are frequently repeated components of Bernhard's writing and form a concise prelude to the "heimtückisch-tödliche" representation of life in the city. The sentence's superficial objectivity masks the radical subjectivity that is another feature of Bernhard's style. The first sentence contains no "ich", no name. It is not the kind of opening expected of an autobiographical narrative, although the force with which the sentiments are expressed suggests that Bernhard is describing his own experience. Formal identification of the "ich" with the "Studierenden" does not come until the following page. There, Bernhard explicitly indicates the distance between the narrating voice and the "Studierenden, der ich vor dreißig Jahren in dieser Stadt gewesen bin" (8). He then adopts a generalised "er" again, which in turn modulates into a representation of Bernhard himself. He continues to switch between the first and third person throughout the text, which suggests that he is unwilling or unable to maintain the first person form for extended periods. This reluctance to say "ich" until attention has been distracted by the embedding syntax that surrounds it at the beginning of Die Ursache, is also echoed in the technique of the formal fiction. After the experimental and self-revelatory In der Höhe (unpublished until 1989) in which Bernhard claims: "alles ist nur eine Vorbereitung auf mich selbst" (54), none of his early novels features a narrator commenting on his own experience. These narrators are filters, "Zuhörer" of maniacal monologues (Frost, Verstörung), elsewhere examiners of Nachlässe (Ungenach, Korrektur). Even as late as 1971 in a letter to Hilde Spiel, Bernhard explains his inability to write about Wittgenstein in the following terms: "Es ist, als würde ich über mich selbst etwas (Sätze) schreiben müssen, und das geht nicht." In a sense, the series of autobiographical texts represents the attempt to accommodate himself to the use of the first person. It seems likely that it was the wish to distract attention from himself by focusing on his alienating (and representative) experiences during the war, that caused Bernhard to open his autobiographical sequence with Die Ursache. The final volume, Ein Kind, is perhaps too personal and uninhibited to begin the sequence. The writing of Ein Kind results from the liberation of the "ich". It is (in relative terms) the most relaxed of Bernhard's works,
which is no doubt why it has been characterised as his "most beautiful" book.\textsuperscript{35}

It is a given of critical reactions to Bernhard's writing that any summary which restricts itself to recounting the novel or play's plot will be inadequate, even misleading. It is form not content that gives his work its power, interest and humour. However, the autobiographical texts are necessarily more focused on events. \textit{Die Ursache} is structured around Bernhard's school experiences during the war and immediately thereafter. This anchors the narrative in a way that contrasts with the abstract discursiveness of \textit{Gehen} or the meandering spirals of \textit{Korrektur}. During the war and alienated by the horror of external events, Bernhard experiences a kind of inner displacement. His only escape at this time, significantly termed his "Zuflucht zu sich selbst" (15), comes from the solitary violin playing which accompanies his thoughts of suicide in the claustrophobic school "Schuhkammer". Outside, Salzburg is "eine perfide Fassade" and "eine Todeskrankheit" (11). The choices are suicide or:

\begin{quote}
direkt oder indirekt langsam und elendig auf diesem im Grunde durch und durch menschenfeindlichen architektonisch-erzbischöflich-stumpfsinnig-nationalsozialistisch-katholischen Todesboden zugrunde [zu gehen]. (11)
\end{quote}

The violent language is again characteristic, the technique that of qualified totalisation. The passage's listing (there are many other examples in his work) is an attempt at an absolute representation in language of the horror of Salzburg. Yet the gesture is always a futile one; the search for the "Ursache" can only ever be "Eine Andeutung". \textit{Das Kalkwerk} anticipates this theme when Konrad (who ought to know) claims: "die Ursache finde man nicht, werde niemals gefunden, immer nur eine Ersatzursache" (173). The amassing of detail is an attempt to overwhelm the reader, as if by repeating subjective claims frequently enough they will attain the status of objective truth.

\textit{Die Ursache} has also a broader, national context. Bernhard is concerned with reminding those that have forgotten of the horror of the war years, the legacy of which the subsequent Austrian Republic has inherited:

\begin{quote}
In mir selbst sind diese furchtbaren Erlebnisse immer noch so gegenwärtig, wie wenn sie gestern gewesen wären, Geräusche und Gerüche sind augenblicklich da,
\end{quote}
wenn ich in die Stadt komme, die ihre Erinnerung ausgelöscht hat, wie es scheint…

In Bernhard's autobiographical texts, the self does not so much meet the world as repudiate it. *Die Ursache* attempts to counter the falsification of memory, to reverse the accepted historical narrative - revealing another sense of his self-characterisation as "Geschichtenzerstörer". Despite his repeated claims that he "nur andeute, wie ich damals empfunden habe, nicht wie ich heute denke" (106), Bernhard's narrator is very much concerned with the lingering effects of the past. His use of "ausgelöscht" is revealing in this context because it indicates the positiveness hidden behind Bernhard's apparent nihilism. Destruction is the prelude to reconstruction. What is important is that the mistakes of the past are actively remembered and avoided in the future. In *Auslöschung* Murau says: "Das Alte muß aufgegeben werden, vernichtet werden, so schmerzhaft dieser Prozeß auch ist, um das Neue zu ermöglichen" (211-212). This destruction is paradoxically effected by the act of recollection (the text itself), which reinstates memory by destroying the self-serving post-war "Vernichtung" of remnants of the Nazi era, most succinctly symbolised by the Catholic takeover of the Internat referred to below. I shall return to these aspects of Bernhard's work later in the discussion of *Auslöschung* and *Korrektur*.

Bernhard is able to enlarge upon the horrors and hypocrisies of his childhood with a succinct and provocative image. After the war, he was one of the few to return to the same Internat; only the governing authority had changed. In testament to the appalling effect of the war on his generation, he makes a relatively rare appeal to generality:

... geistig eingeklemmt zwischen Katholizismus und Nationalsozialismus sind wir aufgewachsen und schließlich zerquetscht worden zwischen Hitler und Jesus Christus als volksverdummenden Abziehbildern. (113)

The division of the text into two self-mirroring sections, in which the sadistic brutality of the Nazi and Catholic directors of the Internat are explicitly equated, is paralleled in this extract. Its complex syntax echoes the claustrophobic verbs before concluding with the bathetic but sinister "volksverdummenden". The use of "wir" indicates that the
reluctance which marked self-revelation at the beginning of the text has been at least partially overcome.

It is the recognition of the value of remembering that enables Bernhard to overcome his reservations. As in Frisch’s contemporaneous Montauk, Montaigne, whose Essais have been regarded as one of the inaugural autobiographical projects of modern subjectivity, is invoked as Bernhard’s guide in this process of recollection. This injects an element of morality, which is largely absent from the early fictional texts, into the narrative, as Christa Bürger has indicated. At times in Die Ursache, Bernhard becomes a "Zuhörer" to Montaigne in much the same way as the narrator of Frost is Strauch’s "Zuhörer". The frequent "so Montaigne" interjections fulfil the same embedding function as similar phrases in the fiction. Indeed, we might even compare the division of the series into individual volumes with Montaigne’s separation of his narrative into essays. One of the most revealing of a series of quotations from Montaigne states: "es gibt nichts Schwierigeres, aber auch nichts Nützlicheres als die Selbstbeschreibung" (127). This prompts a revealing confession:

Man muß sich prüfen, muß sich selbst befehlen und an den richtigen Platz stellen. Dazu bin ich immer bereit, denn ich beschreibe mich immer und ich beschreibe nicht meine Taten, sondern mein Wesen. (127)

This passage would seem completely to undo autobiography’s traditional grounding in extra-textual verifiability. William J. Donahue offers a further gloss on this aspect of Die Ursache:

Mit dem zu seiner Zeit noch nie auf Literatur gezogenen Begriff "Essai" [...] wollte Montaigne sowohl das Tentative als auch das ausgesprochen Persönliche an seinem Werk zum Ausdruck bringen. Etwas Ähnliches drückt Bernhard mit dem Begriff Andeutung aus.27

In any case, Bernhard seems to derive a new readiness to speak of himself directly from Montaigne. Thus with his decision to leave school at the end of the volume, the self has become his primary consideration.
If the autobiographical texts herald a loosening in Bernhard’s prose style, then this change surely begins in earnest in Der Keller. Eine Entziehung. This is indicated by its title. The appearance of "Entziehung", where we might expect "Erziehung", continues the impression of a subversion of the traditional concerns of autobiography. (Although the volume also depicts an important "Erziehung"). It is also close to Der Atem’s "Entscheidung", suggesting that the life-threatening conditions of that volume are also symbolically present prior to Der Keller’s escape. The volume’s epigraph, naturally from Montaigne, further undermines the title: "Alles ist unregelmäßige und ständige Bewegung, ohne Führung und ohne Ziel". What kind of "Entziehung" can this be? The opening pages of the volume demonstrate that leaving school is in fact the narrator’s salvation. The endlessly repeated motif of this section is his move "in der entgegengesetzten Richtung" (a familiar and thematically-charged phrase) from the accepted educative path into the "Lebensmittelsgeschäft". A passage from the early part of the volume will give a sense of its atmosphere and its manic repetition of motifs:

Ich wollte von Anfang an nicht nur nützlich sein, ich war nützlich, und meine Nützlichkeit war zur Kenntnis genommen worden, wie bis zu meinem Eintreten in den Keller meine Nutzlosigkeit zur Kenntnis genommen worden war, [...] Und heute weiß ich, daß tatsächlich diese Kellerjahre die nützlichsten Jahre meines Lebens gewesen sind...

Soon after this, Bernhard claims: "auf einmal existierte ich intensiv, naturgemäß, nützlich" (13). It would be difficult to find a parallel positive reference to existence in Die Ursache. Like "naturgemäß, nützlich" is one of Bernhard’s key words, which have an almost deconstructive function. He uses them to expose the triviality of the everyday use of language while simultaneously reinstating and extending their initial signification. We might recall Roithamer’s hope: "eine tödliche Wirkung [...] in ein Nütliches, mir Nützliches umzukehren" (156). "Nützlichkeit" seems to function in opposition to the whole horror of existence, with which Die Ursache is concerned. (It is a far broader concept than the "nützlich" which Canetti uses to characterise the role of the writer in "Der Beruf des Dichters".) For Bernhard, "nützlich" captures that quality of experience which enables the individual to carry on and to avoid the temptation of suicide, the
"eigentliche wesentliche Korrektur" (Korrektur 326). "Natürlich" has a similar force, representing a corrective derived from nature which is opposed to the artificiality of language and modernity. It is opposed to the bland common use of "natürlich" and echoes the examination of the relationship between "Kunst" and "Natur" which pervades his work, most notably perhaps in Korrektur. As ever in Bernhard, repetition initially strips the words of meaning, before renewing them with increased power. Indeed, we might compare this restorative process with both the impulse behind Auslöschung and the Keller experience’s production of a "wiedergewonnene[n] Lebensfreude" (61), which is not something ordinarily associated with Bernhard. Walter Benjamin’s comment: "Die Geburtskammer des Romans ist das Individuum in seiner Einsamkeit" would be a fitting characterisation of Bernhard’s early novels. In contrast, one of the results of this new "Nützlichkeit" is his pleasure at his "unmittelbaren direkten Zugang zu Menschen" (11), a rebuke to his grandfather’s faith in the isolation of the individual. Bernhard’s adoption of more autobiographical narrative with its direct focus on lived experience opens the way towards the post-autobiographical inclusion of forms of valuable human contact, as demonstrated by the friendships central to Wittgensteins Neffe or Auslöschung. In Der Keller Bernhard finds value for the first time in contact with ordinary people, who are free of the hypocrisy that characterises most of Salzburg and who even possess "eine intensivere, deutlichere Sprache" (26). This repetition of "intensiv" reinforces the implied parallel with Bernhard’s own familiar linguistic directness. Yet, as Der Keller progresses, it moves further and further away from the stylistic density which marks the early prose and which endures into Die Ursache. The "Kehrtwendung" (the volume is founded on a series of verbs and nouns of retreat and escape) represents his defiance: "[ich] bin gegen alles auf das Arbeitsamt in die Gaswerkgasse gegangen" (21). The experiences in the Keller (ironically referred to as his "ureigentliches Lebensmittel" (49)) represent an act of self-discovery most apparent in the narrator’s willingness to refer to himself as "ich". The Keller, allied to his music lessons and business training, becomes more instructive than the Internat had been.

In Der Keller, the stifling effect of Bernhard’s family, a characteristic which he applies to families in general, becomes clearer. Urs Bugmann considers Bernhard’s contempt for Salzburg at the beginning of Die Ursache, with its references to "Mutter- und Vaterlandschaft", to reflect his disillusionment with his parents, which is transferred
onto the city. In Der Keller, Bernhard is less oblique. In an anticipation of the later volumes, he speaks of a need "um sich Luft zu machen, um überhaupt atmen zu können" (37). Thus his "Entziehung" is not only from education, but also from his family, and more importantly, from his grandfather's dominating influence. For the first time the young Bernhard begins to think independently, even to criticise his grandfather:

Er hatte mir den Weiterweg nicht mehr zeigen können. Was ich von ihm gelernt hatte, taugte auf einmal nur mehr noch in der Phantasie, nicht in der Wirklichkeit. [...] Er hatte etwas zwingen wollen mit mir, was nicht zu zwingen gewesen war. (51)

Unlike Strauch's comment: "Ich bin mir sicher, daß Phantasie eine Krankheit ist" in Frost (36), this is not a criticism of imaginative thinking, as Bernhard has already expressed his delight at "dem ganzen Reichtum meiner Phantasie" (38)). It is rather a recognition that he has partially outgrown his grandfather's influence and needs to confront conflicting views. As we have seen, Bernhard's writing is opposed to singular perspectives. He is explicit towards the end of Der Keller:

Ich liebte den Gegensatz, wie ich auch heute vor allem den Gegensatz liebe, der Gegensatz von Scherzhauserfeldsiedlung und also Keller und Vorhölle als Hölle und Zuhause zu Musik und Pfeifergasse, der Gegensatz zwischen allen diesen salzburgischen Unvereinbarkeiten meiner Jugend hat mich gerettet, ihm verdanke ich alles. (100)

This facility for opposition, familiar from Das Kalkwerk, is a crucial part of his identity: "Nur weil ich mich gegen mich stelle und tatsächlich immer gegen mich bin, bin ich befähigt, zu sein" (107). We might recall that in "Drei Tage" Bernhard claims his writing is formed: "Aus Opposition gegen mich selbst" (15). Later in Der Keller he adds: "Ich bin keinen Weg gegangen im Grunde, wahrscheinlich, weil ich immer Angst gehabt habe davor, einen dieser endlosen und dadurch sinnlosen Wege zu gehen" (111). The repeated decisions and changes in direction which dominate the autobiographical texts combine to form "der Weg zu mir" (20). The recurrent image of the "Weg", which often
reads like a parody of the determinism of established religion, is related to his pervasive conception of "Gleichgültigkeit". Allied to the related notions of "Gleichgewicht" and "Gleichwertigkeit", this attitude is intimately connected to the assertion-withdrawal dialectic I have identified as being central to his writing. Rather than merely indicating a governing sense of apathy in his writing, "Gleichgültigkeit prevents Bernhard from having to sanction any single path, method or viewpoint. It allows neutrality to coexist with passion and concern. As he once claimed in an interview: "Mein Standpunkt ist die Gleichwertigkeit aller Dinge... Ich red' ja über den Tod wie ein anderer über a Semmel". Typically, this is both a clever summary of his position and a recognition of the partial artificiality of the rage that lies behind the provocativeness of his writing. The feeling of "Gleichgültigkeit" is in fact taken from one of Bernhard's customers in the cellar and summarised as "ein klares, ein kurzes, einprägsames Wort: egal" (118). We might compare Roithamer's own final attitude: "und auf den letzten Zettel, es ist alles gleich" (87). Such an attitude is opposed to received values and thus related to the central concept of "naturgemäß": "Die Natur kennt keine Wertunterschiede" (Der Keller 119). It constantly juxtaposes the extremes within which his writing operates. As Bernd Seydel declares: "Die Gleich-Gültigkeit ist selbst kein Wert, sondern eine Haltung."

The central event of Der Atem. Eine Entscheidung occurs as a consequence of the "entgegengesetzte Richtung" chosen in Der Keller. Bernhard contracts "eine schwere sogenannte nasse Rippenfellentzündung" while working during winter. Thus illness comes to dominate the third and fourth autobiographical volumes, as it dominates much of the fiction. The third volume's strange combination of "Atem" and "Entscheidung" suggests an unnatural alliance between the intellectual and the corporeal. The situation in which Bernhard finds himself in Der Atem confronts him with the real possibility of death. The renewed choice between the "beiden möglichen Wege" suddenly becomes an existential one. The fact that the central episode of this volume is his Lazarus-like escape from near death, gives the autobiographical texts a grounding in the kind of horror that Die Ursache's exaggerations had threatened to reduce to mere rhetoric.

When he nearly suffocates, Bernhard makes a conscious decision to remain alive: "Jetzt will ich leben" (16). This becomes the ultimate self-reinvention:

Die Tatsache, daß die schwere, nasse Wäsche nicht auf mein Gesicht gefallen war
und mich nicht erstickt hatte, war die Ursache dafür gewesen, daß ich nicht aufhören wollte zu atmen.

At this point the source of the breath-asphyxiation motif in Bernhard's writing becomes clear. His texts are full of suffocating atmospheres, indeed his prose at its most dense can appear to be designed to exhaust language, although its concomitant, paradoxical vitality is a testament to his underlying refusal to submit. As Eugenio Bernardi has stated, Bernhard's monologic writing is dominated by his unique voice, which punctuates the seemingly infinite clauses of his labyrinthine sentences. Caribaldi's claim in Die Macht der Gewohnheit is telling: "Wenn die Atmung funktioniert/ funktioniert auch die Hohe Kunst" (168).

Critics, notably Jean Améry, have claimed that Der Atem represents a shift, even a humanisation of Bernhard's work and of the autobiography in particular. This overlooks the self-development and change in tone which occurs in Der Keller. However, the harrowing nature of the early part of Der Atem immediately gives it a directness and emotional appeal which had only gradually crept into the previous volume. However, the "ich" no longer questioned in Der Keller frequently reverts to "er" in Der Atem in the face of the threat of extinction. Survival reinforces that peculiar mixture of the "lächerlich" and the "tödlich" that characterises Bernhard's writing. As the narrator claims in Der Untergeher: "Wer nicht lachen kann, ist nicht ernst zu nehmen" (116). This is most clearly demonstrated in the theatrical metaphor which Der Atem develops from Der Keller: "Das Ganze hatte viel mehr, als ich mir zuzugeben gewillt gewesen war, mit dem Theater zu tun und war auch Theater, wenn auch ein schreckliches und erbärmliches." (40) The hospital is populated not by "Menschen" but by "Marionetten", stripped of dignity. Theatrical images, which can be traced all the way back to Frost, are a constant feature of Bernhard's method of representing the artificiality of reality. Towards the end of Der Keller, Bernhard characterises his life as a theatre: "Jede dieser Figuren bin ich, alle diese Requisiten bin ich, der Direktor bin ich." (113) Here, the metaphor is used in a more positive and all-encompassing sense than is the case in Der Atem. It suggests the multiplicity of perspectives that combine to form the self: "Wir, das bin ich". In such ways Bernhard finds it easy to create an inner life for himself, an inner life which his illness threatens to destroy. His period in hospital destabilises him.
He interprets the death of his grandfather, which occurs during his stay in hospital, in both tragic and liberating terms:

Zum erstenmal in meinem Leben war ich frei und hatte mir diese plötzlich empfundene totale Freiheit in einem, wie ich heute weiß, lebensrettenden Sinne nützlich gemacht. (83)

We have already noted how, in Der Keller, "nützlich" always has "lebensrettende Sinne". It is significant that, although he regards his grandfather’s death as a liberation and the beginning of his "zweite Existenz", it also leads to the isolation that characterises the fourth autobiographical volume. Towards the end of Der Atem, he is forced to confront external reality: "Ich hatte überhaupt nichts werden und natürlich niemals ein Beruf werden wollen, ich hatte immer nur ich werden wollen." (121) We can compare the words of the narrator of Amras: "Das ganze Leben: ich will nicht ich sein, Ich will sein, nicht ich sein..." (64). The autobiographical texts have a vital place in tracing how the desire for an authentic existence develops into the desire to attain a sense of identity. If the notion of "ich werden" seems strange, then we must realise that, until his grandfather’s death, Bernhard was heavily dependent on him as "Vorbild". This is most clearly demonstrated in Ein Kind and echoed in the depiction of figures like Strauch and Garibaldi in the early plays and novels. Therefore, the autobiographies can be read as the coming to terms with and partial "Entziehung" from the overwhelming influence of the grandfather. Seen in this light, Bernhard’s entire career becomes a "Korrektur" of his grandfather’s poverty and lack of recognition as a writer. Thus Der Atem extends Der Keller’s concern with self-determination. Their tracing of the gradual assumption of responsibility for the self is already a long way from the exaggerated accusations of Die Ursache.

Die Kälte. Eine Isolation reiterates Der Atem’s grappling with life and death. The isolation of the subtitle refers to Bernhard’s feelings of abandonment after his grandfather’s death and as his mother’s health deteriorates. Rather than undermining or questioning the title, the supplementary noun intensifies it, adding to the text’s dominant feeling of desperation. The title also recalls the Erzählungen and Frost, in which Strauch claims: "Die Kälte ist eine der großen A-Wahrheiten" (254). Like the epigraph to Amras,
the volume's epigraph comes from Novalis: "Jede Krankheit kann man Seelenkrankheit nennen", which recalls his grandfather's conviction that all illness is psychosomatic. The volume's implicit questioning of the Romantic identification of illness with insight also reflects Bernhard Fischer's characterisation of Bernhard's texts as "polemische Gegenstücke zur Romantik". In the first part of Die Kälte, Bernhard succumbs to the feeling of "Hoffnungslosigkeit" which accompanies his relapse. In the Grafenhof he is again an outsider because values have been reversed. The fact that no shadow has been found on his lung means that he is not "positive". Where illness is a precondition of belonging, positivity is perverted into a reflection of severe incapacity. His second decision to overcome hopelessness enables him to escape the tragic fate associated with illness in Amras. This second decision to live anticipates the end of the volume (which also terminates the chronological sequence of the autobiographical series), when Bernhard once again rejects established wisdom (this time medical) in favour of self-reliance outside the institution.

Die Kälte's shift is accompanied by his turn to literature. Writing (accompanied by music) becomes the defining activity of his existence: "Bald werde ich außer diesem Gedichtbündel nichts mehr haben auf der Welt, das mir etwas bedeutet" (37). Writing becomes both the self's foundation and the activity through which the self is sought. The "Beobachterposten" (32) which he has adopted in the Grafenhof is applied to his own identity. At this point the autobiographical narrative, hitherto relatively linear, becomes a meditation on a meditation:

Wie war das also wirklich, fragte ich, chronologisch?, und packte alles Eingepackte, Festverschnürte wieder aus [...] bis ich alles ausgepackt hatte, den Krieg und seine Folgen, die Krankheit des Großvaters, den Tod des Großvaters, meine Krankheit, die Krankheit der Mutter…

The "Paket" of memories is then reassembled and becomes a powerful metaphor for the autobiographical texts as a whole: "Ich trage es heute noch, und manchmal mache ich es auf und packe es aus, um es wieder einzupacken und zuzuschnüren." (62) The process of recollection becomes an active process. In contrast to the Proustian model of involuntary memory, remembering is seen as a method "mich zu erforschen vom Grund
auf" (70), recalling *Frost*. However, Bernhard's family is unable to help illuminate what he terms "das Dickicht meiner Herkunft" (77). The subject of his father's abandonment of Bernhard's mother is completely taboo. Indeed, if Bernhard is to be believed, his mother transferred much of her anger at his father onto the only remaining evidence of the event: Bernhard himself. She burns his only photograph of his father: "das mir so ähnlich war, daß ich erschrocken bin" (75). The resemblance helps to explain his mother's unjust attitude to him. Here too are the roots of *Auslöschung*’s preoccupation with photography. In a sense, Bernhard was displaced in his own family, sharing his surname only with his grandmother. This may be the source of Strauch's comment in *Frost*, which reverses the hierarchical relation of language and identity: "Die Namen formen die Menschen" (128). Interestingly, when he visits his paternal grandfather, who has nothing good to say about Bernhard's father, it is the ugly furniture which is emphasised and which he assumes to have been made by his father, a carpenter. The furniture is implicitly presented as an act of rebellion, which parallels his father's escape from paternal responsibility. This impression is reinforced in a later reference to his father's destruction of his parents' home:

> Mit diesem Blick auf das brennende Elternhaus hatte er nicht nur die Heimat, sondern überhaupt den Heimatbegriff (für sich) ausgelöscht. Er habe seine Tat nie bereut. (115)

The authority for this final conjecture is characteristically obscure. However, the roots of Bernhard's fictional obsession with inheritances and Nachlässe are surely apparent (the use once more of "ausgelöscht" is revealing) and, through his father's exile, implicitly related to his complex "Haßliebe" for Austria. Indeed, what is Bernhard's entire oeuvre if not an act of rebellion, particularly in the autobiographical texts in which he delights at being able to use his own experience to offend?

*Ja*, a novel which, like *Der Atem* was published in 1978, also shares the autobiographical texts' new directness, being narrated, without mediating frame, in the first person. It has been seen as "eine Art 'kommunikativer Wende'" in Bernhard's work. Geoffrey Plow contrasts *Ja*’s "private compulsion to recollect" with the contemporaneous *Der Stimmenimitator*’s "public compulsion to report". Thus the texts
are separate distillations of autobiography's mixture of the private and the public. Der Stimmenimitator contrasts with Ja in that it offers a depersonalised, journalistic response to crisis. Its series of short texts read like an indictment of their narrator’s inadequacy in the face of human tragedy. In particular, the "Stimmenimitator"'s absence of identity, which is characteristic of the text’s narrator, subliminally reminds the reader of the unity of voice that characterises all of Bernhard’s other writing. The narrator of Ja shares with the autobiographical narrators a concern with illness and isolation. His "Beobachtungsgabe" (61) anticipates Die Kälte, as does the intrusion of die Schweizerin "in dem lebensrettenden Augenblick" (11). The recognition that responsibility fundamentally lies with the self echoes the thematics of the autobiographical texts, which are never quite so unequivocal:

_In jedem Augenblick sind wir auf der Suche nach einem oder nach mehreren Schuldigen, damit uns wenigstens für den Augenblick alles erträglich wird und kommen naturgemäß immer, wenn wir ehrlich sind, auf uns selbst._ (80)

Most importantly, Die Kälte’s contradictory play on positive and negative is shared by Ja. The text’s title is explained in its final sentence. When the narrator asks the Schweizerin "ob sie sich selbst eines Tags umbringen werde. Darauf hatte sie nur gelacht und Ja gesagt." (148) The simplicity of this conclusion heightens its effect. As another example of Bernhard’s use of contradiction, it requires no further exegesis.

I want to discuss Ein Kind only in general terms. This final volume, which concentrates on Bernhard’s childhood prior to the events of Die Ursache, is interesting in that it disrupts the linearity of the series, giving it a cyclical structure which violates chronology’s position as a governing principle of autobiography. In addition, Ein Kind is more episodic than the previous texts. Its title suggests (ironically?) a new representativeness and modesty, being both the portrait of what passes in Bernhard for a pre-school idyll and a memoir of his grandfather. It also notably contains a description of the deprivation of his birth and first year in Holland that is as harrowing as it is fictitious. Yet the obvious affection that lies behind the (by no means hagiographic) portrait of his grandfather minimises the rage. It is from his grandfather that he learns the value of imaginative self-recreation: "Wir erfanden uns eine Welt, die mit der Welt,
die uns umgab, nichts zu tun hatte." (83) The volume also contains, associated with his mother, one of the recurrent images that constantly features in his work:

Freilich, ein sogenanntes normales Leben hätte meiner Mutter vieles erleichtert; so war jeder Tag nichts anderes als ein Drahtseilakt, in welchem die ganze Zeit zu fürchten gewesen war, daß man abstürzt. Wir alle waren fortwährend auf dem Drahtseil und drohten ununterbrochen abzustürzen, tödlich. (44)

The precariousness described in this passage is also reflected in the Voltaire epigraph which precedes the text and in another reflection that goes to the heart of Bernhard's autobiographical project: "Die Fragen häufißen sich, die Antworten waren immer mehr Mosaiksteine des großen Weltbilds" (71).

* 

The repeated decisions and changes in direction which structure Bernhard's autobiographical texts bring to mind Canetti's images of rebirth. However, recalling autobiography's foundation in the confessional, I would like to extend Gerhard Vom Hofe's identification of the autobiographical texts as a self-determined version of the Lazarus myth and suggest that we can read them as a conversion narrative. Bernhard's continued redefinitions and resurrections are part of the relentless self-reinvention which I have already identified in his writing. Thus his "negative[r] Theologie" requires a series of conversions (and counter-conversions), rather than the more linear development depicted in St Augustine's canonical narrative, where, intriguingly, conversion is also preceded by "the difficulty I had in breathing and the pain in my lungs". Furthermore, the conversion narrative can be said to be paradigmatic of autobiographical writing in general: "Language does not provide a document of conversion, nor is it the scene of conversion. Language is conversion." This returns us to the self and discourse dialectic with which I began. In effect, Bernhard provides his own counter-texts. The totalising impulse behind his use of language is constantly undermined and relativised, reflecting the "Gleichgültigkeit" motif. This dynamic has interesting effects when applied to autobiographical narrative, which presents itself as a "truthful" linguistic representation
of experience. As we have seen, much of the early part of Die Ursache is concerned with memory's countering of what he calls "verfälschte Geschichte" (25). This documentary imperative is alluded to again later:

... dieser Augenblick, zu sagen, was gesagt werden muß, was angedeutet sein muß, muß ausgenutzt werden, der Wahrheit von damals, der Wirklichkeit und Tatsächlichkeit, wenigstens in Andeutung zu ihrem Recht zu verhelfen. (62-3)

The concern with veracity is constricted by the acknowledgement that these are only notes and "Andeutungen", in the same way that much of Bernhard's prose is fragmentary, formed from "Erinnerungsfetzen" (Wittgensteins Neffe 32). Echoing the narrator of Amras, "Reger states in Alte Meister:

Erst wenn wir das Glück haben, ein Ganzes, ein Fertiges, ja ein Vollendetes, zum Fragment zu machen, wenn wir daran gehen, es zu lesen, haben wir den Hoch-ja unter Umständen den Höchstgenuß daran. (41)

Both Konrad's and Roithamer's madness are clearly related to their "Wahrheitsfanatiker"'s obsession with absolutes, qualities they share with Canetti's Kien whom they frequently resemble. Unlike his protagonists, Bernhard's delight in totalisation (most obviously demonstrated in his compulsion to list) is limited. Ria Endres identifies the paradoxical process: "Bei Bernhard wird aus dem Mangel eine aufgeblähte, leere Fülle"." Once the narratorial focus narrows from the historical to the personal in Der Keller, Bernhard's attitude becomes clearer. Although he acknowledges the impossibility of expressing truth in language, such truth can only be approached by attempting to express it. As Oehler claims in Gehen: "alle Sätze [...] sind gleichzeitig richtig und gleichzeitig falsch" (17). Der Keller sees the possibility of (narrative) truth in similar terms: "Das Beschriebene macht etwas deutlich, das zwar dem Wahrheitswillen des Beschreibenden, aber nicht der Wahrheit entspricht, denn die Wahrheit ist überhaupt nicht mitteilbar" (32). This position is developed via the characteristic Bernhard method of repetition and inversion. "Wahrheit" becomes the recurrent motif, occurring 29 times in less than two pages. Thus the term is invigorated and reassessed through reiteration. Noel Thomas has written:
The whole text of *Der Keller* stands under the ironical shadow of the word "Wahrheit" [...] the dogmatic assurance with which statements are made is accompanied by total insecurity as regards the nature of truth.\(^6\)

In *Der Atem*, Bernhard shifts responsibility on to the reader: "Hier sind Bruchstücke mitgeteilt, aus welchen sich, wenn der Leser gewillt ist, ohne Weiteres ein Ganzes zusammensetzen läßt" (69). Like all narrative, autobiographical narrative depends to a large extent on the reader’s willingness to invest in what they are reading, to believe. The truth may be a distortion and beyond representation, but the self’s part in its attempted creation is also a key element in Bernhard’s writing. Towards the end of *Der Keller*, he claims: "Hätte ich, was alles zusammen heute meine Existenz ist, nicht tatsächlich durchgemacht, ich hätte es wahrscheinlich für mich erfunden und wäre zu demselben Ergebnis gekommen." (110) This may be Bernhard’s most radical subversion of autobiographical discourse. Like the related concept of "Verstellung", it is a clear acknowledgement of the conscious role which self-reinvention plays in his development. Interestingly, Bernhard provides us with a fictional parallel in the roughly contemporaneous *Die Billigesser*, in which Koller advocates literal self-stylisation. As Koller’s field of study is physiognomy, we might read this in the light of de Man’s image of "Autobiography as De-Facement" once again:

> Es ist auch kein absurder Gedanke, zu behaupten [...] daß er seinen Körper verunstaltete und in der Folge ganz einfach mehr oder weniger vernichtete, seinem Geist zuliebe, denn an ihm, Koller, war wie an keinem anderen Menschen deutlicher sichtbar, daß er tatsächlich sein eigenes Werk gewesen war, in jeder Beziehung. (79)

The self thus becomes its own author.
In *Auslöschung* Bernhard combines the monomania of his early fiction with the self-parodying humour of the later texts, in the process forming the most wide-ranging of Bernhard’s many reckonings with Austria as both nation and inheritance. There is evidence that *Auslöschung* was written in the early 1980s but only published in 1986 as his final novel. As a result, *Auslöschung* becomes part of Bernhard’s inheritance motif and his relentless self-manipulation as public figure. In fact, it is only one of several testaments he bequeathed. In addition to *Auslöschung*, he left *Heldenplatz*, the controversial last play, and *In der Höhe*, a 1959 novel published for the first time just after his death, its appearance adding a pleasing circularity to the chronology of his work. Most telling is Bernhard’s actual will, in which he banned the publication of any work unpublished during his lifetime, as well as the performance of his plays or the republication of his texts in Austria for fifty years. This defiant gesture is surely the ultimate mingling of the fictional and the (auto)biographical, designed to end his life as public figure in controversy. It is not insignificant that the second half of *Auslöschung* is entitled "Das Testament". This reinforces the novel’s status as Bernhard’s fictional "Nachlaß" and I shall treat it as such.

"Auslöschung" is one of the seemingly endlessly recurring keywords, like "Vernichtung" or "naturgemäß", which seem constantly to evolve in meaning. Towards the end of *Korrektur*, the following extract from Roithamer’s writings occurs:

... wir müssen alles verhindern, das unsere Beschäftigung mit diesem Geistesgegenstand beeinträchtigt oder beeinträchtigen könnte und also diesen unseren Geistesgegenstand, der uns fasziniert, zerstören, vernichten, auslöschen könnte, denn ein solcher Geistesgegenstand ist gleich zerstört und vernichtet und ausgelöscht und es ist immer nur der einzige Geistesgegenstand, einzig unterstrichen.

(324)

In view of the semantic collusion of "auslöschen", "zerstören" and "vernichten" and the identification of "vernichten" with "korrigieren" elsewhere in the novel, I would like to preface the examination of *Auslöschung* with a glance at *Korrektur*, which I regard as
a counterpoint to the synthesising thematics of Auslöschung.

Artificiality: Präparieren and Papierrosen

Korrektur’s epigraph is internal,48 a quotation from Roithamer’s writings: "Zur stabilen Stützung eines Körpers ist es notwendig, daß er mindestens drei Auflagepunkte hat, die nicht in einer Geraden liegen, so Roithamer". The language of the epigraph immediately introduces the thematic association of the Kegel’s construction with Roithamer’s mental stability. The reference to "Körper" suggests the illnesses that beset Bernhard’s early figures and Korrektur’s narrator, the physical need for shelter which is also related to Bernhard’s thematic "Heimatlosigkeit", and Bernhard’s corpus of writing which is constantly in need of (re)foundation. The epigraph supports the view that Korrektur is a bridging point in Bernhard’s development. The novel opens with a typically dense, meandering sentence 24 lines long, which outlines most of its plot and repeats the word "sogenannt" five times. This unsettling repetition once again casts doubt on the status of language as a means of expression. Korrektur is mediated via a narrator whose self-appointed task is the examination of Roithamer’s Nachlaß and the reconstruction of his life. The first part of the novel, "Der Höllersche Dachkammer", is structured around the narrator’s memories and his conversations with Höller about Roithamer. The second part contains the "Sichten und Ordnen" of Roithamer’s papers. Thus, although at first sight we do not seem to be faced with the multiplicity of perspectives that form Das Kalkwerk, closer examination reveals the conflicting evidence and contradictions* of both the narrator’s and Roithamer’s accounts.

We soon become aware that Roithamer’s mental constitution, like Konrad’s, is dependent on its overreaching ambition: "er hat plötzlich keine andere Wahl, als die Perfektionierung seiner Möglichkeiten" (40). Echoing the opening section of Die Ursache, Roithamer’s claims are extreme and exaggerated: everything connected with the Kegel’s construction has to be perfect and exact. His commitment to waiting for the "richtige Zeitpunkt" (238) echoes Konrad’s procrastination. Of course, the impossibility of making such a judgement lies in the fact that it can only be made retrospectively. Roithamer’s increasing instability is described later in terms of transgression: "Immer zu weit gegangen, so Roithamer, damit sind wir immer an die äußerste Grenze gegangen"

99
Holler, who like his namesake in *Das Kalkwerk* represents relatively uncomplicated reality, is less grandiose than Roithamer and the narrator in his use of language: "er sagte nicht, wie ich und wie Roithamer, Vollendung, er, Höller, sagte immer nur Fertigstellung." (130) Roithamer's grandiose language betrays the immodesty of his ambition. Had he been able to adopt Höller's relatively objective position (analogous to "Gleichgültigkeit"), he might have avoided failure. As in other texts, "Vollenden" comes to be associated with "Vernichten".

I would like to examine closely two elements of the text. *Korrektur* is such a unified narrative, with a narrow focus on Roithamer's intellectual achievements and struggles, that incidents which present other aspects of his and others' existence have a particular luminosity when seen against the dark background of Roithamer's obsessions. The first element is the narrator's account of his observation of Höller stuffing a bird in his workshop. Höller's practice of taxidermy is particularly interesting because it is an activity that parallels the construction of the Kegel, indeed the very practice of artistic creation. Taxidermy takes place on the boundary between art and artificiality, a boundary with which Bernhard seems to have become increasingly fascinated in his writing. Taxidermy also reconstructs the dead as art. It fulfills Roithamer's quest, which I have already quoted, to turn the Kegel's "tödliche Wirkung" into "ein Nützliches" (156). Andreas Gößling regards Höller's activity as: "das enfaltete Symbol solcher vorgeblich geistigen Produktivität, die in wahnhaft angemäßer schöpferischer Fruchtbarkeit das Lebendige nicht transzendiert, sondern als Totes wiederholt." This characterisation draws parallels with the Kegel project, which also conjoins the artificial and the natural.

In the "Drei Tage" interview, Bernhard declares: "In meinen Büchern ist alles künstlich, das heißt, alle Figuren, Ereignisse, Vorkommnisse spielen sich auf einer Bühne ab, und der Bühnenraum ist total finster" (12). There are also numerous plays on "Kunst" and "künstlich" in the 1980s novels, many of which are themselves examinations of the nature of artistic activity. There is no doubt something about the matter-of-factness of taxidermy's exploitation of death that attracts him. The narrator is completely captivated by Höller's activity and strangely fascinated by the exotic bird itself:

Immer wieder dachte ich, um was für einen Vogel es sich handelt, daß ich noch keinen so großen und so schwarzen Vogel gesehen habe, daß es sich
One commentator chooses to see the bird as Kafka,\textsuperscript{51} which seems to be making a little too much of Bernhard's hints and echoes. Bernhard's technique is one of overdetermination. Perspectives are offered simultaneously to create narrative "noise" and render simplistic notions of truthful representation problematic. This reflects Bernhard's characteristic "anarchische[r] Relativismus",\textsuperscript{52} which blurs the boundaries between his characters' and his own tirades and merges fiction with biographical traits of Wittgenstein and Glenn Gould, even of the actors themselves in the plays \textit{Minetti} and \textit{Ritter, Dene, Voss}, to set up multiple signifying processes that reverberate in the mind of the reader or spectator. Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler has characterised this process in the following way: "Die Mehrdeutigkeit, Mittel der Erkenntnis geworden, macht die Einheit dessen sicher, was verschieden nur schien. Sie dient der Präzision."\textsuperscript{53} The technique resembles an extension of Brecht's "Verfremdung" in that it challenges the reader constantly to question, to speculate and to make connections. As we are told in \textit{Ungenach}: "Wir fragen, aber wir bekommen keine Antwort" (89). In the passage quoted above, it is tempting to relate the strangeness of the bird to Roithamer himself. For what is the narrator's careful examination and preparation of his Nachlaß, if not an intellectual version of "Präparieren"? Indeed, the narrator's awed reaction to Höller's activity, from which he is unable to avert his gaze even though it disgusts and unsettles him, parallels his reverent attitude to Roithamer's Nachlaß (and perhaps the effect of Bernhard's prose style on the reader). Indeed, he spends more time considering Höller's collection of birds than he does examining the Kegel, which he never attempts to visit and which is not described in detail. Eventually, the narrator is distracted. When his attention returns to the workshop, he contemplates Roithamer's intellectual approach to the issue:

Für ihn, Roithamer, dachte ich jetzt, waren diese ausgestopften Naturgeschöpfe als Kunstgeschöpfe immer Anlaß für verschiedene Betrachtungsweisen über Natur und Kunst und Kunst und Natur gewesen, sie waren ihm immer die rätselhaftesten Kunstgeschöpfe gewesen, weil gerade noch Kunstgeschöpfe undsofort und

This "Natur-Kunst" dialectic is one of the oppositions upon which Bernhard's fiction is founded. It is also of note that taxidermy is a practice that goes back generations in Höller's family; his continuation of the tradition stands in direct opposition to Roithamer's rejection of what he regards as the burden of inheritance. The narrator explicitly links the practice of taxidermy with Roithamer's speculations on the relation between art and nature. Thus an implicit connection is posited to the Kegel, another artificial construction placed at the centre of nature. Both processes are concerned with power, with manipulating reality: "um sie zu bewältigen, der Kontrolle eines willkürlich erbauten Formkalküls zu unterstellen, wo sie de-realisiert, entlebendigt werden." However, the Kegel is unique, rather than an artificial representation of nature, which suggests that it will have a profoundly subversive effect in the Kobernauerwald.

The narrator terminates his speculations about the stuffed birds in exasperation: "Aber ich war zu keiner Definition mehr befähigt gewesen" (174). A similar conclusion emerges from the second section of the text I wish to discuss. When the narrator is diverted from his observations of Höller, he distracts himself by pulling out Roithamer's souvenir paper rose. The paper rose is a symbol of mystery, of the unassimilable, inexplicable detail. Roithamer had won two dozen yellow paper roses at a fair in a shooting competition. The event is perplexing because Roithamer had always hated hunting and shooting (which he associated with his family), and thus was as surprised as anyone with his unparalleled, perfect accuracy. Further confusion is associated with his decision to give away 23 of the roses (we are also told it was his 23rd birthday) to an unknown woman who resembles his sister, and to keep the remaining rose with his possessions in a rare act of apparent sentimentality. The narrator implies a connection to taxidermy when he describes the paper roses as being "schöner anzuschauen [...] als frische Rosen" (74). It is tempting here to see some link with Bernhard's relentless fictionalising of authenticity. The narrator, himself, is unable to come to any firm
Irgendwas war auf dem Musikfest mit Roithamer geschehen, dachte ich, während ich die gelbe Papierrose gegen das Licht hielt, eine Veränderung war während des Musikfestes damals in ihm vorgegangen, wenn ich auch nicht weiß, vielleicht auch nicht wissen kann, was für eine Veränderung. Aber sehen und suchen wir nicht in allem, das wir sehen und denken gleich immer eine Bedeutung?

The narrator of *Das Kalkwerk* could not have conceived of this final insight. Like the rather ridiculous and self-parodic "Kabelgummiwurst" which he discovers later, the paper rose becomes a symbol to Korrektur's narrator of the very difficulty and arbitrariness of assigning meaning. As Beckett muses similarly in *Watt*: "But what was this pursuit of meaning, in this indifference to meaning? And to what did it tend? These are delicate questions." Gernot Weiß's conclusion, in his survey of critical explanations of the symbol, that "die gelbe Papierrose für Roithamer keine Bedeutung hat" is unsatisfactory because Bernhard is surely appealing to (and frustrating) the reader's desire to explain. As undecidable as Bernhard's texts, it surely has several, co-existent meanings, rather than none. Perhaps Roithamer associates it with the deadliness of the Kegel, as Margarete Kohlenbach has suggested, or perhaps it is a veiled, satirical reference to Hofmannsthal's *Der Rosenkavalier*. The fact that Roithamer's mother, whom he despises, "hatte zeitlebens einen Haß gegen Papiere gehabt" (299) may also have some significance. Yet, for the narrator the rose does not renew speculations about the relation between art and nature. Unlike a "natural" rose, it endures and invites speculation, just as Roithamer's Nachlaß survives to torment the narrator. For the narrator the rose represents the folly of excessive thought:

Alles ist das, das es ist, sonst nichts. Wenn wir für uns alles, das wir wahrnehmen und also sehen und alles, das in uns vorgeht, immerfort an Bedeutungen und an Rätsel knüpfen, müssen wir früher oder später verrückt werden, dachte ich. Wir dürfen nur sehen, was wir sehen und es ist nichts anderes, als das, das wir sehen.

(171-2)
Konrad and Roithamer, Strauch and Karrer are destroyed by the totalising impulse which
the narrator rejects. The quotation's final sentence might be said to describe the process
of reading (although it sidesteps the issue of interpretation once again) and it is important
to note that the narrator's act of narrating is itself largely an act of reading. He then
promptly renews speculation about the birds. The reader, like the text itself, is left
between the related positions of overdetermination and the refusal to assign meaning.
This seems to be confirmed towards the end of the text when the rose is referred to in
Roithamer's own notes: "solange wir die Grenze, die äußerste Grenze, nicht durchstoßen
haben, sind wir nicht wahnsinnig, so Roithamer. In Anschauung der gelben Papierrose,
 nichts sonst (3. Juni)" (361). The echo of the narrator's own conclusion in the "nichts
sonst" suggests that, if the rose has any significance at all beyond the sentimental, that
significance has died with Roithamer. The text itself reflects this indeterminacy, offering
multiple perspectives like Das Kalkwerk, as well as a concomitant reluctance to be tied
to one particular sense. Having recognised this pattern, which represents an infinite
extension of Bernhard's characteristic assertion-withdrawal dialectic, we can proceed to
a consideration of the very act of "korrigieren" upon which the novel is based.

One of the earliest textual references to the act of "korrigieren" identifies it
immediately with destruction and madness. It refers to the completed study of Altensam,
which Roithamer: "wieder zerstört hat, indem er sie zu korrigieren und wieder und wieder
zu korrigieren angefangen und [...] durch unausgesetztes Korrigieren vernichtet [hat]"
(85-6). The narrator concludes, however, that correction is in fact a creative process: "er
hatte solange die Studie korrigiert, bis nicht, wie er geglaubt hat, die Studie vernichtet
gewesen, sondern eine neue Studie entstanden war" (86). Warning bells are sounded in
Korrektur by Roithamer's inability to limit himself: "Jede Idee und jede Verfolgung einer
Idee in uns ist das Leben, so Roithamer, Ideenlosigkeit ist der Tod" (205). Although,
like Beckett's protagonists, Roithamer recognises that the striving for perfection is a
utopian quest, he cannot but try to attain it. In this respect the novel echoes the
autobiographical texts in their treatment of "Wahrheit". It is Roithamer's refusal to limit
his conception that undoes him. Reversing Murau's conception of "Auslöschung",
construction modulates into destruction. Like Konrad, Roithamer's identity comes to
depend on his project to the point of self-destruction. Roithamer's "Selbst-
Verwirklichung" is attained at the expense of his and his sister's existence. This is a
familiar consequence of the intensification and reversal inherent in Bernhard’s use of the prefix "ver"; Hans Ehrig sees in Bernhard: "Leben als ver-gehen, vergänglichkeit ist ein zermürbernder krankheitsvorgang". For Roithamer correction becomes a form of madness:

Wir sind immer ganz nahe daran, uns zu korrigieren, alles zu korrigieren, indem wir uns umbringen, aber wir tun es nicht. Unsere ganze Existenz als eine einzige bodenlose Fälschung und Verfälschung unserer Natur korrigieren, so Roithamer, aber wir tun es nicht. (326)

Again Roithamer mirrors Konrad’s obsessional attempts at totalisation: "Alles sei schließlich der Kegel" (347). As Roithamer’s need to correct becomes more obsessive, it becomes increasingly meaningless:

Was er als Verbesserung bezeichnet hatte früher, sei doch nichts anderes als Verschlechterung, Zerstörung, Vernichtung. Jede Korrektur sei Zerstörung, Vernichtung, so Roithamer. (356)

This alternating process of destruction and falsification is infinite and futile, concluding in "Korrektur der Korrektur der Korrektur der Korrektur" (361). This phrase, with its manic and infinite extension of Bernhard’s familiar claim and counter-claim dynamic, could represent his work as a whole. For Bernhard, criticism and correction have an immanent value. As Eva Marquardt comments:

Bernhard geht es nicht um Kritik an etwas, sondern um Kritik, die ihre Berechtigung in sich selbst hat. Kritik ist für Bernhard eine Form der Auseinandersetzung mit der Realität, die niemals endet.

Roithamer shares this inclination towards opposition, but his inability to stop the corrections, to limit the qualifications, destroys him. The only possible conclusion to endless reconsideration is the "tödlichen Zeitpunkt" (346). Death has a unique status in Bernhard’s work as the ultimate corrective. Marjorie Gelus has emphasised the vitality
paradoxically inherent in its negativity: "[Death] can emerge as one of the few spheres of narrated experience still capable of eliciting passion, coherence and clarity in either its narrators or its readers". Korrektur ends cryptically and economically: "Wir können solange in der höchsten Intensität existieren, als wir sind, so Roithamer (7. Juni). Das Ende ist kein Vorgang. Lichtung." (363) It is left to the reader to feel the resonance of the final word, to decide whether the "Lichtung" offers a "neue Gelegenheit zur Orientierung" or the finality of closure.

Wolfsegg as Austria

If Korrektur is concerned with the construction that destroys, Auslöschung details the destruction that liberates. As Jean Améry writes in the Austrian section of his book of autobiographical essays: "Ein Ich läßt sich dort sich errichten, wo man das Alte niedergeissen hat". Auslöschung broadens Korrektur's scope, becoming a deconstruction of twentieth century Austria. I want to examine two aspects of the novel: its characteristic fictionalisation of his "Haßliebe" for Austria and the extent to which, as Bernhard’s last novel to be published, it summarises the concerns of his prose in general.

One aspect of Auslöschung that has been insufficiently stressed is the fact that it is the second reworking of one of Bernhard’s early stories. "Der Italiener. Fragment" was first published in 1967 but written earlier and initially described as a fragment from a novel, presumably Verstörung. In 1970, the story was rewritten and filmed, with a script by Bernhard, and published in the same volume as the image-forming "Drei Tage" interview, which suggests a kinship between the story and Bernhard’s highly self-conscious self-representation. A decade later, Bernhard returned to the plot once more, expanding it into Auslöschung. It is most unusual for Bernhard to return directly to the same material twice, which suggests a highly personal investment in the material. The centre of the original fragment is the "Kindervilla" which becomes the central to the second half of Auslöschung. It is perhaps sufficient here to include a comment from "Der Italiener. Fragment" that suggests Bernhard’s highly personal investment in the narrative: "Es gebe,’ sagte er, ‘kein Mittel, sich selbst zu entfliehen’" (142).

Auslöschung’s subtitle, "Ein Zerfall", is both a play on the novel as representative "Fall" and an intensification of the governing "Verfall" of Buddenbrooks, placing Murau’s
family in the same representative position relative to the twentieth century that the *Buddenbrooks* occupy in relation to the nineteenth. (The attack on Thomas Mann towards the end of the novel underlines this connection.) Murau's first name, Franz-Josef, identifies him firmly with his nation. The novel is prefaced by an epigraph from Montaigne, which in its emphasis on "wie der Tod mich beständig in seinen Klauen hat", echoes Bernhard himself, particularly the much-cited lines from the Büchner prize acceptance speech which is one of the founding moments in the creation of Bernhard's public persona. Bernhard is circumspect in his choice of epigraphs. They are absent from few of his texts and create a literary lineage by which his work is legitimised. *Auslöschung*’s epigraph from Montaigne signals its intimate and exploitative relation to the autobiographical texts. It offers a final examination of the problems and contradictions of literary self-representation. When Murau makes the following apparently innocuous remark: "Ich habe Selbstgestricktes immer gehaßt, wie Selbstgekochtes, wie alles Selbstgemachte im Haushalt überhaupt" (101), it is surely an ironic comment on the novel itself. Despite his denials, Murau's *Auslöschung* is as much the survey of the creation of a self as *Die Ursache*. The remark also emphasises one of the developments that characterises Bernhard’s later prose texts. After the commencement of the autobiographical series, Bernhard’s fictional narrators, starting with *Ja*, are much more firmly delineated. *Auslöschung* comes closer to autobiographical narrative than Bernhard’s other late texts because Murau tells the story of his own life: he is not reporting the words of a second figure or another’s suicide. Murau’s "Zuhörer", Gambetti, although an integral and necessary part of the narrative (and its editor), has an important function. His presence enables the text to take the form of a written conversation, which facilitates the inclusion of the familiar, embedding "hatte ich zu Gambetti gesagt" interjections which multiply the number of textual levels and deny both narratorial omniscience and narrative certainty.

A further indication of *Auslöschung*’s proximity to autobiography is contained in Murau’s reference to a discussion of Sartre’s autobiography *Die Wörter* (see p.472). Paul John Eakin characterises Sartre’s text as an "anti-narrative narrative, an anti-autobiography", the latter term becoming *Auslöschung*’s own model, as I shall demonstrate. Sartre is also profoundly aware of the closeness of self-representation to self-stylisation: "since I had discovered the world through language, for a long time I
mistook language for the world". Auslöschung is also a parody of the Proustian grand autobiographical narrative. The following recollection offers a hint:

... ich hatte den Gutenachtkuß innerlich abgelehnt, ich haßte ihn, wenngleich ich ihm auch niemals entkommen bin. Noch heute verfolgte mich meine Mutter im Traum mit dem Gutenachtkuß...

Further to this, the novel concludes with both the beginning of its own composition and the death of its author/narrator (which the frame facilitates). Like Die Ursache and Korrektur, Auslöschung is divided into two symmetrical parts, two paragraphs: "Das Telegramm" and "Das Testament". The relentless, monolithic blocks of prose, "always on the verge of shriek", are taken to new extremes over the novel's 651 pages. Stretched to such length, the prose seems paradoxically to become even more vital, more compelling, taking Bernhard's daunting stylistics further than before and challenging the reader to follow.

Heiner Müller has remarked of Bernhard's attitude to his nation: "Es gibt keine bessere Österreichwerbung als Thomas Bernhard". Auslöschung is his most all-encompassing fictional examination of his relation to Austria. Therefore, it seems appropriate to discuss his complex relationship with his country in the context of Auslöschung, although the novel does overlap in this area with Die Ursache's cries of pain and betrayal. Bernhard's view of Austria is typically paradoxical in its mixture of vehemence and affection, as such texts as "Politische Morgenandacht", Holzfällen or the endless "Leserbriefe" demonstrate. In fact, there are very few texts that do not contain some form of criticism of Austria. It became an expected feature of his writing, so much so that passages from late works like Der Theatermacher and Alte Meister increasingly resemble self-parodies. Paradoxically, it is Bernhard's undeniable "Austrianness" which, intensified by a childhood experience of poverty, gave rise to a feeling of cultural disillusionment almost akin to displacement that characterises his attitude to post-imperial and post-war Austria. There seems little doubt that such sustained passion betrays deep concern and disillusionment. Bernhard's early fiction and poetry of the 1950s are startlingly different, part of the Austrian tradition of religious, harmonious "Heimatliteratur" to which his grandfather's writing also belongs. The shift from idyll
to anti-idyll (which is largely a matter of tone) represents the first major reinvention of Bernhard as a writer and an act of "betrayal" analogous to the rejection of his early supporters and friends depicted in *Holzfällen*. Bernhard was most explicit about his "Austrianness" in a 1983 interview published in *Le Monde*, which significantly only appeared in Austria years later:

Meine Schreibweise wäre bei einem deutschen Schriftsteller undenkbar, und ich habe im übrigen eine echte Abneigung gegen die Deutschen. [...] Vergessen Sie auch nicht das Gewicht der Geschichte. Die Vergangenheit des Habsburgerreichs prägt uns. Bei mir ist das vielleicht sichtbarer als bei den anderen. Es manifestiert sich in einer Art echter Haßliebe zu Österreich, sie ist letztlich der Schlüssel zu allem, was ich schreibe.  

Coming from a figure as manipulative of his public persona as Bernhard, these seem both suspicious and revealing comments. The fact that Bernhard explicitly refers to his "Haßliebe", a term that has frequently occurred in commentaries, as a key to his work suggests that he is playing a complex game with his critics, supplying them with the information they require couched in their own terms. (The title and subtitle of *Die Ursache* offer both a parallel and a warning). The first part of the quotation is more significant. It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Bernhard’s "Schreibweise" is derived from the habits and cadences of the specifically Austrian form of German. It is certainly of interest that Bernhard, like Murau, explicitly dissociates himself from "German" literature. Similarly revealing is the neutral reference to the Hapsburgs. Ulrich Greiner is explicit, if perhaps simplistic, in this context: "In der österreichischen Literatur stirbt noch immer der habsburgische Mythos. [...] Thomas Bernhard’s Werk ist eine einzige Anstrengung, den Mythos zu liquidieren". In fact, Bernhard offers no alternative to the Hapsburg myth, to which the estates and inheritances which populate his fiction would seem to be directly related. Bernhard takes no sides, offers no solutions (except contradictory ones), preferring to operate as a self-proclaimed "Störenfried", provoking reactions from all sides. It is tempting to view his long membership of the ÖVP in satirical terms; it is certainly difficult to explain it in any other way. "Politische Morgenandacht", his most explicitly political essay, is scrupulous in its rejection of
fascism, communism and socialism. There he declares: "mein Vaterland ist die Weltgeschichte" (11), echoing the way in which Austria becomes a paradigm of the decline of the modern world in Austschung and in Bernhard's work in general: "daß es sich nicht nur in Österreich so verhält, wie ich gerade wieder denke, sondern in ganz Europa und mit der Zeit mit erschreckender Schnelligkeit auch in der ganzen Welt" (81). However, it is Austria's history of post-imperial decline that Bernhard's numerous aristocratic figures lament. In "Politische Morgenandacht" he claims:

Österreich, mit seiner Vorstellung, die wir davon haben, muß der Wahrheit zum Opfer fallen. Die Vernichtung der Monarchie vor einem halben Jahrhundert, die Vernichtung Hitlers vor zwanzig Jahren, wir haben sie nicht genützt! (13)

The vocabulary and tone are characteristic; the nostalgic recognition of Austria's failure to profit from its liberation is one of the constant features of his writing. A character in Heldenplatz laments: "wir wollen alle nur in der Vergangenheit leben" (144). Bernhard's narratives are nearly all examinations of the past. Bernhard's by now traditional attacks on Austria are given renewed and representative power in Austschung by being focused on the eradication of Murau's family and its material representation, Wolfsegg. The concentration on the family estate recalls various Bernhard texts, most obviously Korrektur and Ungenach. However, these earlier texts have no firm historical context. They tend to be spatially, but not temporally, located in the "locus terribilis" that Austria represents for him. Austschung adds a firmer historical dimension, its reckoning with the post-imperial legacy is treated with an attention to detail only otherwise approached in Bernhard's prose in Die Ursache. It is interesting that Bernhard was much more ready to approach these issues in the theatre, perhaps because it offered an opportunity to confront the public directly. Der Präsident, Vor dem Ruhestand and Heldenplatz are all explicitly concerned with Austria's Nazi period and/or aspects of fascism, and the Dramoletten collected in Der Deutsche Mittagstisch are rather cruder variations on the same theme.

Like much of Ein Kind, the first half of Austschung is structured around Murau's inspection of photographs of his family. The photographs fulfil much the same function as the description of Wolfsegg does in the novel's second half: they are the main theme,
around which Murau's memories improvise. Like so much in Bernhard’s writing, his attitude to photography is strangely contradictory. Murau’s first reference is characteristically exaggerated:

... die Fotografie ist eine heimtückische perverse Fälschung, jede Fotografie, gleich von wem sie fotografiert ist, gleich, wen sie darstellt, sie ist eine absolute Verletzung der Menschenwürde, eine ungeheuerliche Naturverfälschung, eine gemeine Unmenschlichkeit. Andererseits empfand ich die beiden Fotos als geradezu ungeheuer charakteristisch für die darauf Festgehaltenen, für meine Eltern genauso wie für meinen Bruder. (26-27)

We might recall Alte Meister: "Jedes Original ist ja eigentlich an sich schon eine Fälschung" (118). To Murau, photography’s mendacity seems paradoxically to capture his family’s fraudulence. Photography is both a falsification and "das absolut Authentische". Any reference to authenticity in Bernhard’s writing should alert the reader. As Murau reveals in a later examination of a photograph of his sisters, it is the proximity of artificiality to naturalness that disturbs him. Murau (who classifies himself as "der zweifellos Kunstliche") claims later: "Es kommt zur Katastrophe, dachte ich, wenn der Natürliche auf den Künstlichen trifft" (338). This is very close to Roithamer’s ruminations on the stuffed birds. Murau concludes that we live in two worlds: "in der wirklichen, die traurig und gemein ist und letzten Endes tödlich und in der fotografierten, die durch und durch verlogen [ist]" (128), but exaggeration defeats his case. Murau fails to take into account the profoundly unsettling effect that the photographs of his family have on him, an effect which parallels the impact of the "Hitlerbild" in Die Ursache. After all, like Murau’s own narrative and Roithamer’s notes, photographs survive. Murau incorporates the photographs, which he has retained in the same way that his parents have kept paintings of family members, into the self-accusation which is part of the novel’s objective:

Indem ich diese und keine anderen Fotos der Meinigen aufbewahrt habe, noch dazu in meinem Schreibtisch, damit es mir jederzeit möglich ist, sie betrachten zu können, dokumentiere ich ja geradezu meine Gemeinheit, meine Unverschämtheit
It is not by chance that in the passage cited above his family is described as the "die darauf Festgehaltenen", for in the novel the value of photography lies in its opposition to the narrative rewriting of history, which Bernhard despised. Photographs are testaments and evidence: one of the most disturbing (if slightly comic) pictures displays his father in "Pumphose [...] in welcher er die ganze Nazizeit umhergelaufen ist" (246).

For once, the concentration on Austria is broadened, if still seen in terms of limitation:

Die Beschränktheit des Mitteleuropäers, der, wie ja gesagt wird, lebt, um zu arbeiten, anstatt zu arbeiten, um zu leben, wobei es ganz und gar gleichgültig ist, was unter Arbeit zu verstehen ist, war meinem Onkel Georg schon sehr früh auf die Nerven gegangen und er hatte die Konsequenz aus seinen Überlegungen gezogen. (37)

As Georg is to Murau what the grandfather is to the narrator of the autobiographical texts, any conclusion of Georg’s is likely also to hold true for Murau. The important element in this extract is the censorious reference to the representative "Mitteleuropäer". Generally, Bernhard’s reproaches are reserved for Austria alone, with occasional insults hurled at their Western neighbours. The reference to "Mitteleuropa" contains ironic suggestions of both Austria’s imperial past and the Nazis’ dream of annexing Central Europe. It underlines Auslöschung’s niggling concern with Austria’s association with German fascism. The chief symbol of this is Wolfsegg itself:

... ich hatte mich nicht beherrschen können und Gambetti zum wehrlosen Opfer meiner Wolfseggbeschimpfung gemacht, die tatsächlich zu einer Beschimpfung alles Österreichischen und schließlich dazu auch noch alles Deutschen, ja letzten Endes alles Mitteleuropäischen geworden war. (111)

However, Murau (like Bernhard) is also unavoidably stamped by his Austrian upbringing, which Gambetti recognises in referring to him: "als typisch österreichischen
Schwarzmaler" and "grotesken Negativisten" (123-4). It is of course in ironic response to his critics that Bernhard has Murau reply:

Daraufhin hatte ich gesagt, daß meine Übertreibungen in Wahrheit und in Wirklichkeit maßlose Untertreibungen seien, daß Wolfsegg, so wie ich es ihm beschreibe, in Wirklichkeit noch eine Idylle sei gegen das, was Wolfsegg wirklich ist. (124)

References to the subjectivity and partiality of "Wahrheit" and "Wirklichkeit" are reminders of Auslöschung's thematic proximity to Korrektur. Murau’s reference to idylls demonstrates that, as we have seen in the context of Das Kalkwerk, the construction of correctives to the traditional Austrian literary idyll has always been at the heart of Bernhard’s concerns. It is typical of his baiting wit that Murau’s "Untertreibung" is itself an exaggeration. In the same part of the monologue, Murau makes much of his description of Wolfsegg as "ein Puppenhaus" and his family as "Puppen". The familiar metaphor unites the criticism of Austria and the related attack on catholicism in the "Theatervilla" section later in the novel. As Murau states in a familiar formulation which sums up the interdependence of the autobiographical and fictional in Bernhard’s works: "Alles ist künstlich, alles ist Kunst." (126).

The artificiality of Wolfsegg is demonstrated by its repeated capacity to profit from the fluctuations of history. Murau frequently focuses on his family’s opportunism, which gives him the same feelings of rejection that Bernhard’s articulates towards the end of Ein Kind. Murau’s parents have a peculiar relationship to history:

Wir maßen uns an, habe ich gedacht, die Menschen wie die Meinigen aus dieser Welt und aus dieser Gesellschaft auszuschließen und zu sagen, sie seien nicht von dieser Welt, nicht aus dieser Zeit, sie seien unzeitgemäß, weil wir genau fühlen, daß wir unrecht haben, genau diese Leute wie die Meinigen, das sehe ich jetzt von Tag zu Tag deutlicher, leben zeitgemäß. (367)

Murau is careful not to conclude from his hatred of Wolfsegg that it stands alone. In a characteristic paradox, contemporaneity becomes atemporal: "Das Zeitgemäß ist also
tatsächlich immer das Unzeitgemäße, dachte ich" (368-9). Leslie Bodi provides a gloss on this:

As a historical narrative, Auslöschung is defined and intensified by the belated Vergangenheitsbewältigung of present-day Austria, the central historical concern of post-war German-language literature, in which the dialectic of contemporaneity and the non-contemporaneous [...] plays an important role."

Once again the novel’s proximity to Die Ursache becomes clear. For Murau, the order which dominates Wolfsegg has always stood in opposition to the authentic, chaotic world beyond it (see p.369). We might see Auslöschung itself as the introduction of external chaos into the hermetically sealed world of Wolfsegg (and by extension of Austria), a process most clearly signified by Murau’s constant attempts to air the building. "Atemnot", as Der Atem so powerfully demonstrates, is a necessary precondition to "Auslöschung".

In "Der Italiener. Fragment" (and the film), the Kindervilla, which is the centre of the text, had been used by the narrator’s father to hide escaped Polish prisoners, who had been discovered and executed by the Germans immediately before the end of the war. The memory of this terrifying formative event haunts the narrator and the text. In Auslöschung, Bernhard reverses the Kindervilla’s function:

... wir hatten, wie ich mich später erinnerte, jahrelang zur Kindervilla keinen Zutritt gehabt, des Rätsels Lösung war da, die Eltern hatten in den Nachkriegsjahren in der Kindervilla ihre nationalsozialistischen Freunde versteckt gehabt. (441)

Knowledge of "Der Italiener" makes this use of the Kindervilla seem even more sinister, for unlike the Poles, the Nazis were not discovered. This perversion of the villa’s original function parallels the war’s horrifying effects on Bernhard’s generation, as depicted in Die Ursache. Murau is reminded of this by the presence of (those he claims to be) former Nazis at the funeral. After the villa was reopened, it reverted to its original function, as a stage for the performance of plays by the children. The association with theatricality
makes the villa’s wartime function appear still more grotesque and links it to the
dishheartening process of recollection that is a feature of Bernhard’s autobiographical texts.
This is expressed clearly in the following thematic reflection: "Wir suchen überall die
Kindheit und wir finden nur überall die berühmte gähnende Leere" (598). Murau
concludes that it would be absurd to think that by restoring (correcting) the Kindervilla,
he could restore his childhood. The catholic "Trauerspiel" succeeds the "Schauspiel",
confirming that both Murau and the villa have been irretrievably tainted by the adult
world. It is in an act of retribution that Murau leaves Wolfsegg to the Israeliitische
Kulturgemeinde. This is the novel’s final act, an attempt to reverse history’s own most
inhuman act of extinction. Bernhard’s late work is notable for its emphasis on the
importance of Jewish artistic achievement and suffering. In Alte Meister Reger states:
"Diese russischen jüdischen Emigrantinnen sind ja die eigentliche intellektuelle Würze des
Wienerischen Gesellschaftslebens" (132). These words form both an act of reconciliation
and a final attack on what Bernhard saw as pervasive Austrian anti-semitism.

Paradigm and Parody

I would now like to examine Auslöschung’s position as both paradigm and parody of
Bernhard’s late fiction. Eva Marquardt has identified the shift in Bernhard’s concerns
from 1975, a year from which Bernhard increased his "Tendenz zur spielerischen
Verwischung der Grenzen zwischen fiktiver und realer Welt konstatieren". Auslöschung
is the most detailed representation of this shift, which is signalled from the beginning of
the text. The list of recommended German language literary texts, which Murau gives
to his pupil, Gambetti, includes "Amras von Thomas Bernhard" (7). In addition to Jean
Paul, the list places Bernhard in a direct line of descent from the Austro-Hungarian
modernists writing at the onset of imperial decline, Kafka, Musil and Broch. Towards the
end of the novel, Bernhard-Murau launches into a self-parodying tirade against Thomas
Mann and Goethe and their canonical status in German culture, which forms part of
Bernhard’s ambiguous relationship with the German language and its literature, an attitude
which both rejects and specifically favours Austrian literature. It seems that the German
cultural tradition is one of the targets of (and for?) Auslöschung:
Das deutsche Denken wie das deutsche Sprechen erlahmen sehr schnell unter der menschenunwürdigen Last seiner Sprache, die alles Gedachte, noch bevor es überhaupt ausgesprochen word, unterdrückt; unter der deutschen Sprache habe sich das deutsche Denken nur schwer entwickeln und niemals zur Gänze entfalten können im Gegensatz zum romanischen Denken unter den romanischen Sprachen, wie die Geschichte der jahrhundertelangen Bemühungen der Deutschen beweise. (8)

Bernhard's thematic identification of language with oppression is here given a new (parodie?) twist by being focused exclusively on German. Later in the novel, Murau articulates his disapproval of German language literature: "die ich immer geringer geschätzt habe als die russische, die französische, selbst die italienische" (238). It is part of the "Herkunftskomplex" which torments Murau. He wishes to destroy Wolfsegg, despite the knowledge that: "Ich wäre nicht der, der ich bin, wenn Wolfsegg ein anderes wäre" (105). Murau's self-imposed exile in Rome, with all its cultural and religious implications (Cf. "Der Italiener"), enables him to escape from Austria/Wolfsegg, although ties are maintained by his decision to teach the German language literature he claims to despise. It is significant that most of the narrators of Bernhard's late prose are exiles. They consciously choose their displacement, but are also unable to abandon Austria completely.

Yet, paradoxically, it was in fact Murau's interest in (German) literature and philosophy, his explorations of Wolfsegg's neglected five libraries, that alienated and liberated him from his family. He was punished as a child, by his mother who thought he had invented the names "Siebenkäs" and "Kafka", which are retained in Gambetti's list, to justify his laziness. In his rejection of the superficiality of his family, Murau's guide (a Bernhard text always has to have one) is Onkel Georg. Georg inhabits the "grandfather" role taken by Strauch, Saurau in the early fiction. However, Georg is granted a sensuality and an essential humanity which is largely absent from Bernhard's writing prior to the autobiographical texts. Georg is Murau's "Vorbild":

Er liebte die französische Literatur und das Meer und war ganz in diesen beiden Vorlieben aufgegangen. Oft denke ich, daß ich viel von meinem Onkel Georg
The implication behind this second sentence may help to explain both Murau’s and Georg’s censorious attitude to Murau’s mother. Murau and his uncle share an identity: “Wenn ich dich sehe, sagte mein Onkel Georg, sehe ich im Grunde immer mich” (57). Georg’s escape from Austria encouraged Murau’s rejection of his heritage; the words on Georg’s gravestone underline this and recall earlier Bernhard protagonists (although without their association with failure): "der zu dem richtigen Zeitpunkt die Barbaren hinter sich gelassen hat." (44) Similarly, the whole *Auslöschung* project has its roots in Georg’s testament, the “Antiautobiografie” which Murau suspects to have been an account of Wolfsegg and which his mother seems to have destroyed after Georg’s death. In a reflection of the text’s central dynamic, Murau wishes to correct his mother’s act of "Auslöschung" and replace his uncle’s account:


The last sentence recalls earlier, more severe examples of writer’s block. However, in this novel, the text is completed. The references to his uncle’s account reinforce the impression that *Auslöschung* in fact becomes Murau’s (and Bernhard’s) "Antiautobiografie”. Further evidence is supplied by the fact that, like Bernhard in *Die Ursache*, Murau terms his text "ein Bericht". Both narrators are motivated in part by the wish to come to terms with a self formed against the hostile background of "die Meinigen". Thus *Auslöschung* is Murau’s (and Bernhard’s) counter-text, his "Antiautobiografie".

It is only in Bernhard’s late fiction, perhaps only in *Auslöschung*, that the narrator is granted sufficient self-awareness to express self-criticism. He achieves this via his "Übertreibungsfanatismus" (611), the notion of fanaticism underlining Murau’s similarity
to Bernhard’s earlier protagonists. He elaborates: “Damals habe ich zu Gambetti gesagt, daß die Kunst der Übertreibung eine Kunst der Überbrückung sei, der Existenzüberbrückung in meinem Sinn” (611-2). To Murau, as to Bernhard, “Übertreibung” is an integral quality of artistic creation. Bernhard often claimed that only writing gave meaning to his life - in an early interview he says: "Ich schreibe, wie wer anderer raucht”, a view of writing which makes it seem addictive, essential and life-threatening. This is underlined by the identification of the failure to write with death in texts like *Das Kalkwerk*. We must see “Übertreibung”, which is described above in ontological terms, as a self-parodying element of the ranting "Korrektur" with which Bernhard opposes the artificiality of the modern world: "Um etwas begreiflich zu machen, müssen wir übertreiben, hatte ich zu ihm gesagt, nur die Übertreibung macht anschaulich" (128). As Bernhard Sorg comments perceptively: "Wer übertreibt, sieht die verborgene Struktur von Dingen". "Übertreibung" is an integral part of Bernhard’s prose style and part of his concept of authenticity, one in which pushing things to their limits is seen to be a necessary prelude to the recapturing of their essence.

_Auslöschung’s_ summarising status is further indicated by the fact that it is the title of both Murau’s and Bernhard’s texts. This is also true only of *Die Billigesser*. Both versions of *Auslöschung* are founded on the kind of destruction of "Herkunft" that we have seen before, most notably in *Korrektur*:

Das einzige, das ich schon endgültig im Kopf habe, hatte ich zu Gambetti gesagt, ist der Titel *Auslöschung*, denn mein Bericht ist nur dazu da, das in ihm Beschriebene auszulöschen, alles auszulöschen, das ich unter Wolfsegg verstehe, und alles, das Wolfsegg ist, alles, Gambetti, verstehen Sie mich, wirklich und tatsächlich alles.

(199)

It is as if Bernhard recognises the danger of Nietzsche’s negative view of "Herkunft", which Foucault characterises as "an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath". Murau is aware of the lessons to be learned from Nietzsche’s example: "ein Denken, das so weit in das Scheitern hineingetrieben ist, bis es nurmehr noch als wahnsinng bezeichnet werden konnte" (371), which is also a succinct summary of the destiny of
Roithamer, Strauch and others. Murau is entirely aware that the destruction of everything connected with Wolfsegg requires his own destruction: "Das allerdings, hatte ich zu Gambetti gesagt, ist mir wieder ein angenehmer Gedanke, meine Selbstzersetzung und Selbstauslöschung" (296). Thus Murau realises that the restorative function of "Auslöschung" (which is itself analogous to Bernhard's semi-deconstructive use of "Stichwörter" like "nützlich") necessitates his own destruction. This is surely related to the self-transformation and self-conversion structure of the autobiographical texts, in which the threat of extinction radically renews the self:

Denn wer aufhört, seine Erkenntnisse zu erweitern und seinen Charakter zu stärken, also an sich zu arbeiten, um soviel wie möglich aus sich zu machen, hat aufgehört zu leben und sie hatten alle schon um das zwanzigste Jahr zu leben aufgehört...

(77)

This opposition to "vegetieren", which recalls the thematics of Holzfällen, and Murau's own notion of "an sich zu arbeiten", underlines the fact that the Bernhard's concept of the self is very different from the unified identity of traditional autobiographical narrative. I have already noted that the post-autobiographical texts signal a shift in Bernhard's approach to narratology. The unrelieved tension created by Bernhard's complex narrative strategies, which become almost intolerable to the reader in early texts like Das Kalkwerk, is offset by his adoption of an increasingly self-conscious and humorous tone. The texts usually retain a perfunctory (almost self-parodying) frame which identifies the narrator and allows the main body of the text to be characterised by monologue. The late texts no longer have the fragmentary character of Amras or Ungenach. They are not second hand examinations of Nachlässe, but become (Bernhard's) Nachlässe themselves. When Murau's brother-in-law is examining the newspaper reports, oblivious to the tastelessness of his activity, Murau comments: "das Gedruckte ist das Tatsächliche und das Tatsächliche nurmehr ein vermeintliches Tatsächliches" (478). The unravelling force of "vermeintliches" is characteristic, in this context reminding the reader of the endless deconstructions of "tatsächlich" in Das Kalkwerk and their constant subversion of the relation between language and truth. In fact, Auslöschung functions as a point of thematic and stylistic convergence. It is the ultimate Bernhard intertext, a compendium of his
motifs, obsessions, recurrent phrases, even plots. Anke Gleber has shown how form and content, destruction and repetition, combine in sentences:

die organisiert sind nach diesen Prinzipien der sukzessiven Substitution - oder Destruktion - des Vorangehenden bei gleichzeitigen Repetition und Reiteration seiner Elemente, also nach der kontinuierlichen Auslöscharung und Ablösung von Sprache durch ihre Varianten.*

Murau incorporates elements of all of Bernhard's figures, most notably the narrator and the grandfather of the autobiographical texts. It is in this light that we should read Murau's self-definition towards the end of the novel:

Ich bin ja nicht eigentlich Schriftsteller, habe ich zu Gambetti gesagt, nur ein Vermittler von Literatur und zwar der deutschen, das ist alles. Eine Art literarischer Realitätenvermittler, habe ich zu Gambetti gesagt, ich vermittle literarische Liegenschaften sozusagen. (615)

Familiar with Bernhard's architectural metaphors of artistic creation from Korrektur and Ja, we might see Bernhard as a "Vermittler" of fictional "Realitäten" and Murau as the "Realitätenvermittler" of his other texts, which together constitute their own Auslöscharung. Bernhard emphasised the restorative force of his text in typically paradoxical terms in an interview with Krista Fleischmann: "Aber was heißt Auslöscharung? Wiederbeginn des Neuen."*

4 Holzfällen: Scandalising as Life

By way of conclusion, I would like to offer a reading of some aspects of Holzfällen, a novel which sheds further light on Bernhard's investigation of the boundary between the fictional and the autobiographical. Holzfällen achieved notoriety (and commercial success) upon its publication as a result of the court case brought by the real life model for the Auersberger characters in the novel. Bernhard did not deny the fact that he used
elements of these "autobiographical" acquaintances, Gerhard Lampersberg and his wife, for the character in the novel. His conception of fiction, which is founded on the notion of artificiality, became his defence in court. In Bernhard's view, something occurs in the process of translating lived experience into prose during the course of which nothing remains taboo. Comparison of elements of Hennetmaier's memoir with Ja or Fleischmann's Mallorca interview with Beton demonstrate how directly Bernhard was prepared to use lived or experienced events in his fiction. A hint is given in Die Kälte:

Hatte ich eine noch so geringe Scham, ich könnte ja überhaupt nicht schreiben, nur der Schamlose schreibt, nur der Schamlose ist befähigt, Sätze anzupacken und auszupacken und ganz einfach hinzuwerfen, nur der Schamloseste ist authentisch. Aber auch das ist natürlich so wie alles ein Trugschluß. (63)

Holzfällen's subtitle: "Eine Erregung" should have alerted Lampersberg and the Austrian media to the intentions behind the novel. It refers primarily to the condition of its narrator, but is also applicable to the scandal itself. It is a testimony to Bernhard's prose that, consciously or not, he was able to write its reception into the novel itself.

Holzfällen is structured almost entirely around the unnamed narrator's raving, insulting observations of the Auersbergs and their circle, following the funeral of their friend, Joana. This gives ample opportunity for characteristic Bernhard bile in expression of the narrator's rejection of his former mentors. For once there is no frame to distinguish the narrator's voice from Bernhard's own, thereby heightening the familiar play which is made on the proximity of "künstlerisch" and "künstlich". Inauthenticity is the norm:

Die künstlerische Gesellschaft aus Wien bewegte nur den Mund und genügte also nur einem theatralischen Effekt, dachte ich, wie auch ich die ganze Zeit auf dem Kilber Friedhof nur einem theatralischen Effekt genügte. (111-2)

It is vital to emphasise that Bernhard does not exempt himself from the gathering's artificiality. Earlier he indicates the theatricality of his own self-perception: "ich habe mein ganzes Leben nur gespielt und vorgespielt" (105). Indeed this association of
theatricality and death is a constant in his work, as is clear from the various prize acceptance speeches of the 1960s. In fact much of Holzfällen is concerned with the consideration of the distance between different versions of the self. The sociable "Unterhaltungsmaschine" of the 1950s is explicitly contrasted with the isolated narrator of the 1980s. I would prefer to see the novel not as a love story⁷ (although there are elements of this in his depiction of Joana), but as an act of self-reproach, in which Bernhard’s figures’ unyielding monomania and the sacrifices that he has made for his writing career are satirised:

Was für lacherliche und gemeine Menschen, dachte ich, auf dem Ohrensessel sitzend, und gleich darauf, was für ein gemeiner und lächerlicher Mensch ich selbst bin […] und ich dachte, daß ich selbst noch viel gemeiner und niederträchtiger bin als diese Auersberger, die dich mit ihrer Einladung, die du angenommen hast, übertölpelt haben. (39)

It would be hard to imagine such self-depreciation coming from Konrad or Saurau, or the Bernhard of "Drei Tage". In Holzfällen, Bernhard repeatedly returns to the question of responsibility, accusing himself and the Auersbersgers in turn for the break in their friendship. However elsewhere, in a characteristic gesture of self-contradiction, he implicitly associates himself with them, even at one point echoing the language of his obsessive fictional protagonists:

Wir treffen auf einen Menschen im richtigen Zeitpunkt und nehmen alles für uns Wichtige von diesem Menschen auf, dachte ich und verlassen diesen Menschen wieder zum richtigen Zeitpunkt, dachte ich. (220-221)

This exploitative attitude echoes Bernhard’s fictional manipulation of his "Haßliebe" for Austria. In Holzfällen Bernhard seems to be examining just how much he can get away with.

The final section of the novel offers the reader relief from the singularity of the narrator’s perspective. The narrative builds up to the entrance of the actor who dominates the final section of the book with one of his familiar rants against the self-importance of
the Burgtheater, to which the actor belongs. As he begins, the reader gradually becomes aware that the actor's complaints about the misery of Viennese and Austrian life are almost indistinguishable from those of the narrator (and Bernhard himself). The narrator's antipathy towards the Burgschauspieler begins to disappear when the latter savagely turns on another of the narrator's former associates. The ensuing tirade has all the characteristics of the disagreeable personas Bernhard adopts in early interviews. The narrator's attitude shifts completely when the actor changes tone:


This sentimental vision offers an alternative to the artificiality that has characterised the gathering up to this point. As the narrator states, somewhat surprisingly perhaps, "Wie schön das ist, sich ab und zu sentimental zu machen, dachte ich..." (271). With these words the actor becomes for the narrator an "Augenblicksphilosoph[en]" (309), attaining the elusive moment which Konrad, Roithamer and others have sought in vain. The actor becomes "hellsichtig" (308), a description opposed to artificiality and elsewhere reserved for the insight of those threatened with severe illness or death.88 The narrator continues:

Auf einmal hat mich der Burgschauspieler fasziniert, denke ich, allein wie er die Wörter *Wald, Hochwald, Holzfällen* ausgesprochen und dann mehrere Male wiederholt hat. Aber das heißt nicht, daß mir der Burgschauspieler jetzt sympathisch wäre. (311)

These are the characteristic cadences of the Bernhard narrator, who will not allow a moment of insight to colour his judgement: "Es gibt ja nur Vorurteile. Meine Urteile können nur Vorurteile sein.** It is interesting that the actor repeats the "Lebensstichwörter" (304) until they assume a significance beyond their surface meaning. As we have seen, it is from this process that a large part of the fascination and power of Bernhard's language is derived. It is also interesting that the narrator at no point attempts
to explain the impact of the three words. They are left to reverberate in the mind of the reader. In contrast, the narrator laments the general failure to find language with which to respond to Joana’s suicide. The relatively rare use of the pronoun "wir" confirms that the narrator is not exempted from the accusation: "Wir wollen etwas Zureichendes sagen, dachte ich augen-blicklich, und sagen etwas vollkommen Unzureichendes, ja etwas Peinliches, Widerwärtiges, Dummies" (313). This has been the constant theme and starting point of Bernhard’s writing since the 1950s: the failure of discourse in the face of death. Ja expresses this as an existential truth: "Es gibt ja nur Gescheitertes" (44). The value of the actor’s three words is that they seem to attain a kind of momentary insight, a glimpse of truth, which temporarily transcends the inadequacy of language.

Further to this, I would like to suggest two ways of reading the significance of the three words "Wald, Hochwald, Holzfällen" in the context of the novel and in the context of Bernhard’s work as a whole. The first striking feature of the grouping is their closeness. Each word builds on its predecessor in the kind of spiralling intensification, representing Bernhard’s prose style in miniature. "Wald" is an important figure in several of Bernhard’s early works. It is associated in Watten and many of the Erzählungen with the threat and wildness of nature and stands in threatening contrast to the "Kalkwerk" and to Roithamer’s Kegel. In Frost it is even described in terms of ontological (and Heideggerian) significance: "Im Leben gehe es einem wie im Wald, wo man immer wieder einen Wegweiser und eine Markierung findet, bis auf einmal keiner, keiner mehr kommt." (79) The "Hochwald" forms a link between "Wald" and "Holzfällen", while also implying an elevation or intensification. Gerhard Pail sees it as: "Verfestigung, als Bestärkung der Erkenntnis vom tödlichen ‘Wissen’ um das Leben." The image of "Holzfällen" points us towards other Bernhard texts. In Amras, the narrator explicitly contrasts his instability with the identity-forming authenticity of the "Holzfäller", whom he envies. Manual labour, rather than intellectual activity, becomes the basis of a possible recovery: "durch die Handarbeit komme ich einfach zu mir zurück, auf einmal verstehe mich meine Gedanken..." (76). The use of "einfach" (and accusative "mich") in a text which is concerned with the fragmentation and alienation of modern existence is telling. In fact, there are numerous Bernhard texts in which the intellectual agonies of the central figure are opposed to the "naturalness" of manual labourers, although in early texts such as Frost naturalness tends to be associated with corruption and rapacity.
Thereafter, manual labourers tend to offer a counterlife, an alternative to more artificial methods of living. In *Auslöschung*, for example, Murau states:

Diese Menschen, sagte ich mir auf der Fahrt, hast du ja immer geliebt, die einfachen, die einfachsten, die Bauern und Bergleute, die Handwerker, die Gastwirtsfamilien im Gegensatz zu den Deinigen im Wolfsegg oben... (312)

In *Holzfällen* such sentiments are abstracted into a vague fondness for nature, which can only be expressed more fully with reference to other texts. It is important to notice the depersonalisation in *Holzfällen*’s title: it is unusual to find a verbal noun as the title of a text. Like *Gehen*, "Holzfällen" denotes an activity, but in this case one which potentially endangers life and opposes the artificiality that characterises the novel as a whole and Bernhard’s writing in general. It is also an impossible abstraction, a dream opposed to the reality of Joana’s suicide.

The second sense in which we can read "Holzfällen" is more general. *Holzfällen*’s notoriety depended on its reception as a "Schlüsselroman". Bernhard defended his text as a work of fiction, which had changed beyond recognition the material upon which it was based. The wood about which Bernhard had no compunctions in felling is material from his own autobiography, translated into fiction. It is important to note that the actor’s wistful words derive from his role as Ekdal in Ibsen’s *Die Wildente*. In that play Ekdal is unjustly ruined and banned from the wood because he has illegally cut some timber. He says little, although his repeated cry "The woods avenge themselves" resonates throughout the play. We can relate this to Bernhard’s narrator’s regret at his past having caught up on him. Willi Huntemann comments that Bernhard’s narrator takes on the role of Greggers Werle, the "Aufklärer" in the play, whose commitment to truth leads directly to an act of suicide. However, in Bernhard’s novel the causality is reversed; Joana’s suicide becomes the catalyst for the narrator’s insight into the artificiality of the evening. Yet Bernhard’s commitment is not to truth over illusion, but to the interplay of truth and illusion. The narrator’s repeated and contradictory musings about who in fact has betrayed whom are unresolved. Characteristically, it is left for the reader to decide. It is not truth but Bernhard’s relentless self-reinvention and self-dramatisation that cause him to reject so comprehensively those who had been instructive
and supportive as he became a writer: "Wir sind nichts und sie machen etwas aus uns und wir haben sie dafür" (163). Elements of this trait can be detected in his portrait of his grandfather, particularly in *Der Keller*. Once he reinvents himself, the past and its associations are only so much dead wood. In an interview, he once claimed: "Ich bin auch immer bestrebt, die Leute auszurauben und alles aus ihm herauszuziehen, was drinnen ist. Soweit man das versteckt machen kann". Reflecting Bernhard’s governing conception of "Gleichgültigkeit", *Holzfällen* is situated between the autobiographical and the fictional and it is constructed as a challenge to the reader to recognise it as such.

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This notion of a challenge to the reader, represented by Bernhard’s formidable, reiterative blocks of prose with their teasing parallels and discrepancies, is crucial. The reader’s role is inscribed into his texts in the form of the "Zuhörer", whose mystified and partial insight parallels the experience of the reader. This brings us to a fundamental question, which critics have found extremely difficult to answer: How does Bernhard’s language, which seems to disregard the needs of plot, to be deliberately repetitious and reflective of a deeply pessimistic world-view, maintain the reader’s interest and its own compulsive vitality? I would like to suggest that the relentless assertion-denial dialectic, which I have traced through Bernhard’s work, has an important role. This dialectic is summed up by Bernhard’s recurrent "Gleichgültigkeit", which does not indicate neutrality, but rather a self-contradicting sense of balance which is intended to provoke a response. As Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler has identified, the reader’s active participation in the narrative is central:

> Die Gegensätze existieren nebeneinander, und die Virtuosität Bernhards offenbart sich gerade darin, daß er dem Leser die Möglichkeit gewährt, diese Grenzenüberschreitung zu vollziehen und ihn so in unvergleichlicher Weise zu aktivieren."" 

Bernhard’s prose maintains its energy and sense of progression as a result of (not in spite of) its exaggerated use of repetition and extremely limited action. The discrepancies and the conflicting claims which litter his narratives assault the reader in a way which mirrors
his hyperbolic prose style. However, this "Schwarz-Weiß-Schematik" ensures that the reader is rarely permitted to contemplate a fixed position for long; the only absolute value in Bernhard is death. Wittgensteins Neffe’s self-description could be said to characterise this approach: "Ich gehöre zu den Menschen, die im Grunde keinen Ort auf der Welt aushalten, und die nur glücklich sind zwischen den Orten, von denen sie weg und auf die sie zufahren." (144) Part of the power of his prose comes from its affinity to musical forms, an affinity which, like examinations of his humour, has largely resisted scholarly exegesis. Bernhard’s texts are carefully structured around patterns of variation and modulation, both in form and content. All of his texts, whether prose or drama, are extended monologues and it is from their captivating energy that the force of his prose derives. The uncompromising nature of the form is mirrored in the "Übertreibungskunst" of the speakers, who are able to provoke, entertain and despair without losing the reader’s interest. Oliver Jahraus writes of "Übertreibung": "daß sie geeignet dafür ist, die spirale Kreisbewegung der Wiederholung nicht engzuführen, sondern quasi spiralförmig auszudehnen." Thus repetition both reflects the form of Bernhard’s prose and liberates it. His writing is founded upon negativity, a negativity which is relativised to some extent by the vitality of his discourse: "Man selbst füllt die Leere aus. Ich fülle sie mit Sätzen aus". Perhaps it is the fundamental truth of Alte Meister’s claim that: "Das Fürchterliche ist ja auch immer lächerlich, so Reger" (267), first articulated in the Büchner prize speech, that lends Bernhard’s work its peculiar fascination. It is this recognition which structures the relentless juxtaposing of extremes around the notion of "Gleichgültigkeit" and which legitimises his all-encompassing and often trivial tirades. It is also this recognition that motivates his endless self-stylisation (Selbst-Korrektur) as public figure and writer. If at times his language resembles autonomous discourse, this only masks its extreme subjectivity, for it is the tension between the fictional and the autobiographical, as well as the tension between self and discourse, which puts the life into Bernhard’s writing. In the face of the "Leere" which threatens and to some extent constitutes his sense of identity, his language simultaneously opposes and enacts this governing instability in an enduring gesture of "Gleichgültigkeit".

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CHAPTER THREE
PETER WEISS: LEERE AND "VERDAMMTES-FÜR-SICH-SEIN"

It has been commonly acknowledged that *Abschied von den Eltern* and *Fluchtpunkt*, the autobiographical novels which Peter Weiss published at the beginning of the 1960s, anticipated the autobiographical turn in German language literature a decade later. This alone would justify Weiss's inclusion in a study of self-representation. However, in the 1970s Weiss, by now a Marxist, produced the monumental *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*, which returned to the material of the earlier autobiographical fictions and reinterpreted his life as if he had always been a committed, working class communist. This was not unprecedented in his work, as the 1960s texts were themselves partial reworkings of earlier autobiographical narratives. Thus, my examination of Weiss's prose will focus on Weiss's fictionalisation and rewriting of his experience. In Weiss's case it is not a question of comparing fictional texts with more autobiographical texts, but of relating different kinds of autobiographical narrative to each other. Even those texts which are not directly autobiographical are clearly related to the autobiographical texts, linked by their concentration on the displaced self.

In his diary *Die Schrift an der Wand*, Günther Anders describes the experience of exile in the following terms: "Und wenn man uns fragt, was unseren Haß hatte in Gang halten können, dann lautet die Antwort: unsere Abwesenheit". If there is an element that unifies the pre-political and political phases of Weiss's writing career, then it is the search for identity in the face of existential emptiness and the kind of absence which is an almost inevitable result of exile. In fact, Weiss's writing can be regarded as an act of resistance to the pervasive "Leere" which threatens to destroy it. Before examining his major prose works, I would like to look at one of the key texts from the self-politicising period of the mid-1960s, in which the "Leere" image is opposed to the struggle to uncover and articulate a sense of identity: "Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Sprache".

1 Laokoon

The "Laokoon-Rede" was given in acceptance of the Lessingpreis in April 1965, a year
which ranks after 1947 as the second turning point in Weiss’s career. The essay consolidates and extends the process of externalisation begun in 1947 and finally rejects the solipsism that had marked his previous work. As the Notizbücher attest, "Laokoon" was conceived contemporaneously to the composition of Die Ermittlung, which must have had considerable influence on it. It became an attempt to overcome what Weiss saw as the obsolescence of Lessing’s canonical "Laokoon" essay: "Lessings Ästhetik hat mit dem, was jetzt ausgesagt werden soll, nichts mehr zu tun" (N1 329). In addition to Die Ermittlung, in 1965 Weiss produced "Meine Ortschaft", his devastating personal account of a visit to Auschwitz, the two Dante essays in which we can detect the seeds of Die Ästhetik des Widerstands, and, later in the year, "10 Arbeitspunkte eines Autors in der eingeteilten Welt", the explicit declaration of the politicisation he had been approaching since completing Marat/Sade in 1964. I would like to single out "Laokoon" for special attention because I believe that it should be read both as an act of intellectual stock-taking on the threshold of commitment and relatedly as an articulation of the difficulties associated with the process of politicisation. This is indicated by its position at the end of Rapporte, where it is a bridging text before the overtly political essays collected in Rapporte II. Alfons Stöllner has identified the essay’s synthesising quality: "Die Diktion des Textes bleibt in der Schwebe zwischen autobiographischer Erinnerung, theoretischer Reflexion der Exilerfahrung und künstlerischer Fiktion". In fact, we might regard the text as a mid-point between the autobiographical fictions of Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt and their ideologically-motivated revision, Die Ästhetik. "Laokoon", which Michael Hofman calls "die Geschichte eines Bewußtseins", is the last (hybrid) autobiographical text before the turn to documentary theatre and as such it demands examination.

The essay begins by opposing a general tendency to take language for granted with the "Schreibende"’s insight into discourse’s intrinsic mystery: "Die Sprache erscheint ihm als etwas Unmögliches, das nur aus Trotz gegen diese Unmöglichkeit entstehen kann" (170). The writer (note that Weiss avoids "Schriftsteller" and Canetti’s "Dichter" in favour of a more generally applicable term) is sited on the frontier between language and silence. This sensitivity towards language establishes the essay’s closeness to Weiss’s autobiographical fictions. The essay begins with the child, who is clearly a representation of Weiss himself, in its pre-linguistic state, screaming inarticulately for comfort.
Language becomes a means of reassuring him:

Und es beginnt dieser Prozeß, der nie zu einem Ende führt, dieses immer wieder erneute Versuchen, sich selbst vor einem andern zu zeigen, und sich vor diesem andern mit seinen Absichten bemerkbar zu machen. (171)

This endless and ambiguous "Prozeß" echoes the seemingly endless attempt to uncover and communicate a sense of identity, which is a feature of all of Weiss's art. As the child "sucht sich die ersten kenntlichen Buchstaben zusammen, um damit seinen Namen abzubilden" (171), his sense of the self becomes dependent on the act of writing. Writing one's name is an act of self-discovery and self-confirmation: "Es hinterläßt seine Spuren, und was Spuren hinterläßt, ist vorhanden" (171). However, a residue of the pre-linguistic state remains. Curiously, this part of the essay reads like a simplification of Derrida's roughly contemporaneous writings. However, where Derrida writes of: "a trace which replaces a presence which has never been present, an origin by means of which nothing has begun", Weiss is able to theorise neither presence nor absence out of existence in this way. In fact, "Laokoon" is characterised by the fear of the absence which it associates with exile.

It is at this point that the essay's central opposition is first posited: "Die frühesten Bilder, die wir in uns tragen und die im Traum immer noch nachwirken, umreißen den Standort dieser Augenblicke" (171). The "Bilder" of dreams, elements of which dominate many of Weiss's paintings and writing, contain memories of pre-lingual identity, which language is unable to assimilate. A related notebook entry reads: "Mit den Bildern kam ich von der Sprache los - die Bilder lagen außerhalb der Sprache" (N1 339). When the child is introduced to language as an emblem of community and communication, he is confused by his initial confrontation with dictated words and responses. As Abschied attests, this renders identity problematic: "es erkennt die eigene Stimme nicht wieder, es lernt, dahinzureden." (172) The refusal to integrate has repercussions in later life:

Wenn es nicht teilnimmt an dem, was ringsum geschieht, sammelt sich in ihm jene Farblosigkeit, die den Schreibenden, Jahrzehnte später, wenn er versucht, seine Vergangenheit aufzufinden, jäh als Lähmung überkommt. (172)
This recalls the autobiographical fictions, which are largely concerned with the experience of exile. The child’s loss of voice anticipates the writer’s potential loss of language. The child’s response is to isolate himself in order to establish "eine absolute Herrschaft über die Welt" (172), as his counterpart does in Abschied. Gradually the child begins to adapt. Language offers "Zusammengehörigkeit" (173), intellectual communication and renewed self-confirmation, even the potential for "Selbststilisierung". Foreshadowing Die Ästhetik, dialogue becomes the approved form of linguistic appropriation: "In dieser Situation des Zwiegesprächs, des Wohnens in einer Sprache, könnte er bleiben" (174). In a manner which parallels Die Ermittlung’s dangerously simplistic identification of Nazism with capitalism, the events of 1930s Germany are treated paradigmatically. In a development which mirrors Abschied’s first experience of anti-Semitism, physical aggression and the violence of ideology are transmitted by language, which becomes a means of persecution. This reveals the destructive power of what George Steiner has called: "The unspeakable being said, over and over, for twelve years". Language becomes a threatening instrument of control, recalling its alienating autonomy at the beginning of the essay: "sie besitzen die Wörter nicht länger, die Wörter besitzen sie." (175) The parameters of reality, which language has previously delineated to the child, have been shifted. The only recourse is exile and "Sprachlosigkeit" (176).

The experience of exile resembles a return to childhood, particularly in its disruption of the self’s relation to its native tongue. Freedom is absolute and disorientating, as the exile is "zurückversetzt in sein erstes verdunkeltes Zimmer" (177). The exile’s name is one of the few persisting linguistic certainties, an identity defined in opposition to the prevailing chaos. The exile suffers from what Eva Hoffman calls "the loss of a living connection" with language. He is caught "zwischen zwei Sprachen", the former exchange of ideas is no longer possible and even his discursive powers decline. (A more personal and detailed discussion of this dilemma is found in Fluchtpunkt (61f.).) The native language comes to be associated with the "Traumbilder" of childhood, which are so common in Weiss’s prose. In a process which mirrors Canetti’s "Wortanfälle" essay, the exile performs mental gymnastics with his native language without the safety net of context:

Er saß mit Papier und Schreibstift, um einige von [den Wörtern] festzuhalten, er
bemühte sich, die Leere, die ihn umgab, mit Wörtern zu überspannen, er hielt das Papier über die Leere, er dichtete ein kleines Stück der Leere mit engen Reihen von Buchstaben ab, doch die Leere drang wieder durch, überflutete die Buchstaben, löschte sie aus. Sie waren nicht geschrieben, um gelesen zu werden.

This is an absolutely key passage in its depiction of the threat of "Leere" to the maintenance of linguistic competence, an opposition which is central both to the essay and to Weiss’s writing in general. The experience of displacement transforms the exile into "ein Nichts" (178); "Leere" represents the potential return to the "Schweigen" which preceded the child’s entry into language. Writing the native language becomes a quixotic act of necessary failure, its function being merely to make exile more bearable. Robbed of a communal language, the exposure to "Leere" prompts the exile to readopt the pre-lingual "Bild":

Dann geriet er in die Regionen, in denen die Wörter zu Chiffren wurden, zu Rebuszeichen, in denen sie sich zurückverwandeln in die Bilder, aus denen sie einmal hervorgegangen waren. Am Anfang waren die Bilder. Im Traum waren die Gegenstände und Ereignisse, die sich in ihm regten, losgelöst von der Tätigkeit des Benennens.

As we have seen, "Bilder" are immediate and pre-conscious, hence the echo of Genesis (and Goethe). The "Rebus" image is a recurrent one in Weiss’s writing. In a passage from Fluchtpunkt, which describes exactly the same frantic and arbitrary process of listing in the native language, words are also described as "Rebuszeichen" which temporarily satisfy before "sie verschwanden und ließen Leere zurück" (64). As Christa Wolf’s Cassandra states: "Vor den Bildern sterben die Wörter". Weiss has repeatedly emphasised the importance of the visual in all of his work, in paintings, writing and film. This makes it curious that there is no reference to film in "Laokoon" despite the fact that this is the medium which pre-eminently integrates Wort and Bild. Similarly, "Wort" and "Bild" fuse in the image of the "Rebus" and offer a potential means of opposition to the threat of "Leere". Weiss’s early, surrealistic prose often features violent, dream-like
images (see especially "Der große Traum des Briefträgers Cheval" in Rapporte). "Laokoon" offers an explanation, for dreams offer the exile an opportunity temporarily to escape the threat of the void:

Er projizierte die inneren Bilder auf Tafeln, und diese Tafeln brachen nicht, wie die Blätter mit Wortzeichen, vor der Leere auseinander, sie hielten, sie spiegelten sein Vorhandensein. (179)

"Bilder" are derived from experience, as words are, but they inhabit a different dimension: "alle Einzelheiten ergeben in Gleichzeitigkeit das Bild" (179). "Bilder" have an immediacy which denies language's reflectivity, enabling the exile to transcend linguistic confusion. In effect, the choice between language and "Leere" is overcome with recourse to the "Bild".

Having applied Lessing's central distinction between poetry and painting to contemporaneity, which is the chief purpose of his essay, Weiss turns to the Laokoon sculpture for the first time. While Laokoon and his younger son submit silently to their fate, the elder son is committed to "Selbstbefreiung" (like Weiss's autobiographical narrators) and remains capable of speaking out. He is still enough part of the world to be able to resist and to distance himself, if not to escape. The exile finds himself caught between the brothers' positions. The choice is to adapt or to submit: "Er mußte lernen, sich in der neuen Sprache anzusiedeln, oder er mußte in der Sprachlosigkeit untergehn" (181). This notion of transformation, which echoes Canetti, is important and is extended to the "Bild": "er verwandelt seine Unsicherheit zu etwas Greifbarem" (182). To depict horror or injustice is to begin to overcome it, a notion that lies behind the search for identity central to all of Weiss's autobiographical fiction. As Lessing's essay underlines, the advantage of "Bild" over "Wort" lies in its immediacy, the capacity of visual art to capture the moment: "Das Bild liegt tiefer als die Worte. Wenn er nachdenkt über die Einzelheiten des Bildes, verlieren sie sich schon. [...] Worte bezweifeln die Bilder" (182). In Weiss's terms, "Bilder" represent, "Wörter" interpret. (This is a rather simplistic dialectic, overlooking for the sake of the opposition the "Rebuszeichen" and the fact that every act of representation is also necessarily an act of interpretation, as the autobiographical narratives self-consciously demonstrate.) The exile turns to language
when he becomes weary of the laborious process of creating "Bilder". In contrast to the synchronic representations of visual art, language is capable of describing a process. In Weiss's own return to writing (in German) at the end of the 1950s, language becomes a means to an end:


The much-quoted image of "topographische Werkzeuge" reflects Weiss's frequent claim that his return to German was chiefly prompted by his recognition that it was his most efficient "Werkzeug". Critics have exaggerated the value of the image, overlooking, I feel, its studied neutrality. Words used as instruments by the craftsman (an image again to recur in Die Ästhetik's equation of the artist and the worker) have no connection to nation; they encompass the "Unzugehörigkeit" to which Weiss clings so ambivalently.

In an early notebook entry Weiss articulates his desire to infuse language with the sensuous and immediate power of visual art: "Dinge so beschreiben, als sähe ich sie zum ersten Mal, als seien sie mir völlig unbekannt. Das Schreiben dann ein Versuch, ihre Funktion zu deuten. Eine Entdeckungsreise" (N1 42). The exile's task is now to wait for the moment to break through "das Aussichtslose" (183). This moment, represented by Laokoon's elder son for all eternity, can endure for a lifetime: "es wurde wiederholt, daß sich in diesem Augenblick nichts mehr sagen ließ, daß alle Worte, gleich in welcher Sprache, ihren Sinn verloren hatte" (183). The implication that "das Aussichtslose" is also "das Unsagbare" again associates exile with the child's pre-linguistic experience.

Weiss's subsequent writing leads the reader to suspect that the exile may be awaiting the moment of political commitment. The exile finds himself "im Grenzgebiet der Denkfähigkeit", an area which defies representation. His fragmentary command of language temporarily seems to reflect his displaced sense of identity:

Solche Wörter hatten als letzte Konsequenz nur noch das Schweigen. Damit betrog er aber die Absichten, die in jeder Mitteilung lagen, denn im Wesen jeder Mitteilung ist der Wunsch nach Veränderung enthalten. (185)
The reduction of language to silence indicates the victory of "das Aussichtlose" over the individual, prefiguring the breakdown of the narrator’s mother in Die Ästhetik. However, if the threat of silence is overcome, language can again become the means "sich selbstständig zu machen" (186), as it was in childhood. Thus, having seen language emptied of meaning, the exile is able to reinvest his native tongue with significance by returning to it:

Wenn er jetzt zur Sprache zurückgriff, die er damals gesprochen hatte, dann sah er in dieser Sprache noch ein Werkzeug unter andern Werkzeugen. Die Wurzeln der Wörter waren verwirrt, die Wörter standen losgelöst von ihrem Ursprung, oft nur als leere Gehäuse, denen er erst einen Inhalt geben mußte. (186)

The repetition of "Werkzeug" indicates that the former aspiration to divest language of its cultural associations has been fulfilled. The image of "Wörter" ("Sprache" is abandoned because of its suggestion of a pre-arranged system) as empty signifiers, whose signifieds will be determined by the speaker, demonstrates that the exile has been able to turn the "Leere" (now reduced from an ontological threat to a mere adjective) to his own advantage. This achievement is the goal of the autobiographical fictions. As autobiographical narrative so frequently attests, the reconstruction of identity proceeds in parallel to the reconstruction of language. This is underlined in the penultimate paragraph of the essay:

Die Sprache gehörte ihm, mit allen Unzulänglichkeiten, mit ihrer Tendenz zur Selbstauflösung und mit ihrer plötzlich auftretenden Klanglosigkeit. Im Vergleich mit der Leere, durch die er gegangen war, war dies schon viel. (187)

In the final paragraph, the new reconciliatory use of language facilitates the movement towards a truth which "ist aus Zweifeln und Widersprüchen hervorgegangen." (187) The conclusion resembles a refined version of Fluchtpunkt’s ending; its choice of vocabulary also looks forward to Die Ästhetik, where self-contradiction is a fundamental component of the novel’s representation of Wahrheit and Wirklichkeit. Genia Schulz has implied "Laokoon"’s anticipation of the later text: "Die Fülle der Wortmassen, letztlich das
Druck-Bild, soll der Leere (des Bewuβtseins) Widerstand leisten, um den horror vacui zu bekämpfen". The echo of both Die Ästhetik and an early title of Fluchtpunkt ("Horror Vacui") reinforces the suspicion that the reconstructed language of the final section of the essay can also be read as the first tentative and oblique steps towards Weiss's acknowledgement of his shift to Marxism. For Weiss, Marxism is the language in which his favoured "In-Gegensätzen-Denken" (N1 850) synthesises in a quest for truth. The "Laokoon" essay is an important document in that it broadens Lessing's concern with art by addressing problems of identity and language. It is "Laokoon" that articulates most succinctly the struggle between language, identity and the void, which is so pervasive in Weiss's writing. Indeed, his subsequent political commitment can be seen as an attempt conclusively to overcome the "Leere". Like Canetti's "Verwandlung", the image is imprecise and all-encompassing enough to sustain renewed and various use. In an early notebook entry, Weiss includes the following aspiration: "Mit dem Schreiben ein Gerüst aufbauen über dem Nichts" (N1 68). It is by concentrating on this struggle between articulation and "Leere" that I wish to examine Weiss's major prose narratives in the remainder of this chapter.

2 Abschied to Fluchtpunkt

I would like now to examine Weiss's two "sogenannte[n] autobiographische[n] Bücher[n]" (PWG 42), Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt, which appeared so radically in the early 1960s. He has acknowledged the difficulties he experienced in the decade preceding their composition:

Die 50er Jahre waren im Grunde für mich mehr Exil als die Jahre während des Faschismus, während der eigentlichen Emigration, denn während der 50er Jahre wußte ich überhaupt nicht, wo ich hingehörte.¹²

This insight into Weiss's perpetual feelings of self-alienation is one which we should retain. I believe that Abschied and Fluchtpunkt deserve special attention because they summarise many of the thematic concerns of Weiss's pre-Marxist prose (earlier examples
of which I shall examine in the next section of this chapter) and, like "Laokoon", they write and rewrite Weiss’s experience in the face of the constant threat of "Leere". In addition, it is primarily these groundbreaking autobiographical texts which Die Ästhetik des Widerstands revisits, revises and reconstructs from a pre-determined ideological standpoint (or "Fluchtpunkt").

The title of Abschied von den Eltern indicates that the text focuses on the development of maturity. While Weiss avoided political engagement until the mid-1960s, the rejection of the bourgeois values of his parents is a constant of his artistic existence. The "Erzählung" - there is no direct reference to its autobiographical derivation - begins with the death of the narrator’s parents. However the text is not concerned with the loss of the parents, the "beiden Portalfiguren meines Lebens"(7), who are opposed throughout to the irrevocably self-absorbed narrator. Characteristically, the narrator’s grief at the beginning of the text is directed towards himself: "Die Trauer, die mich überrumpelte, galt nicht ihnen, denn sie kannte ich kaum, die Trauer galt dem Versäumten, das meine Kindheit und Jugend mit gähnender Leere umgeben hatte" (7). Immediately the text identifies the "Leere", which is so central to "Laokoon", augmented here by the melodramatic epithet. The sentence implies that his parents are to blame for the character of his childhood, an impression which is reinforced by the references to the narrator’s alienating "Erkenntnis eines gänzlich mißglückten Versuchs von Zusammenleben", which cluster in surrounding sentences. The parents become, in Karl Heinz Bohrer’s words, "Gegenständen, von denen eine schreckliche Leere ausgeht." From the onset, it is obvious that the narrator is the centre of the text. The narrative opens with the word "ich", and closes "auf der Suche nach einem eigenen Leben" in emulation of the narrator’s dominant quest to establish his own identity. Collages featuring "stilisierte Gestalten der eigenen Person" intersperse the first edition of the text; no dates are given and little attempt is made to engage with any form of external reality. The narrative is thus constructed out of what Walter Benjamin, referring to Proust, calls "die Penelopearbeit des Eingedenkens" and it becomes clear that "Laokoon"’s identification of exile as a paradigmatic human condition derives directly from Weiss’s own experience. Abschied anticipates the recognition of exile as the paradigmatic modern condition - the narrator’s search for identity is predicated upon his attempts to exile himself from his family. The family home is the first symbol of repression:
Im Haus herrschte das Dumpfe, das Eingeschlossene, und meine Sinne waren gefangen. Hier draußen öffneten sich meine Sinne, und als ich in die Laube trat, trat ich ein in ein Reich das nur mir gehörte, mein selbstgewähltes Exil. (16)

If any two sentences were required to represent the text as a whole, then these would be they. The tension between freedom and closure, constraint and self-exposure dominates the text, as it dominates autobiographical narrative in general. Weiss’s sense of identity derives from an identification with exile, "das Verstecktsein mit mir selbst" (16), which endures until the conversion to Marxism - one of the earliest texts declaring political commitment is the 1966 Princeton speech, "I Come out of my Hiding Place". When his mother calls out the narrator’s name, we are returned to the beginning of "Laokoon" once more:


The child refuses to admit his identity, a process which leads to complete self-renunciation, before the repetition of the name prompts unconscious self-assertion. It is important to note that this self-estrangement is internal, unlike the denial of identity by others which characterises the plays Die Versicherung, Mockinpott, and, most devastatingly, Die Ermittlung. In the passage quoted above, the pre-existential "formlos" period is represented as a kind of fluidity without authority, a harmonious period preceding responsibility, which once again echoes the beginning of "Laokoon". The avoidance of responsibility is a recurrent feature of Weiss’s early prose. It is to some extent this irresponsibility that the reformulations of Die Ästhetik are designed to correct.

It is consequently fitting, and pleasingly absurd, that the narrator should find a role model in the figure of a "Fassadenkletterer". Part of the appeal comes from the fact that neither the young narrator nor his nanny knows the meaning of "Fassadenkletterer". He is attracted by the appeal of the (pre-cognitive) unknown, the unusual and the dangerous:
... es war als blickte ich in meine eigene Zukunft hinein als ich atemlos, mit verkrampften Fingern und Zehen, den Bewegungen des Mannes an der Mauer folgte. In diesem Augenblick [...] wurde der Grund gelegt zur Sehnsucht nach einer selbstständigen Leistung. (22)

The "Fassadenkletterer" is an attractive role model precisely because he operates in solitude. The parallels with the life of the artist need no clarification. However, the narrator is disingenuous in his claim that this is the moment at which his decision is made. The longing for self-reliance, however unconscious, has always been a fundamental element of his identity. The "Fassadenkletterer"'s influence only confirms the narrator's recurrent longing for isolation (and roofs): "Mein Exil, das ich in der Gartenlaube gefunden hatte, setzte sich auf diesem Dachboden fort" (37). Like the text itself, the narrator's elevated self-exile in the attic is an opportunity for him to reconstruct the past. In isolation he informs himself about his parents' history by carefully examining the objects and letters in the attic, a process which, although motivated by a different form of self-interest, echoes his family's disputes over the parents' estate. In this way the narrator is able to create a "Bilderwelt meiner Mythologie" (41) through the interplay of examination and imagination. It is significant that the investigation of his "Herkunft" occurs in seclusion, without consulting his parents. Ironically, we can see the seeds of his artistic development in his confrontation with parents' past. The fact that his parents met during the war when his father was wounded inspires the narrator to improvise violent war scenes in his imagination. These images have their revenge: "Etwas Unfaßbares hatte sich in mir angebahnt. Ich suchte nach Befreiung. Doch abends kam das Unfaßbare und lähmte mich" (43). This not only recalls the exile's experience in "Laokoon", it also reflects the nightmarish imagery of Weiss's early prose narratives, Von Insel zu Insel and Der Fremde.

Liberation in some measure is provided by literature. It is in literature, through a characteristically self-reliant process of "Tasten und Suchen" (41&68), that the narrator discovers the self-confirmation which his parents are unable to supply: "hier fand ich mein eignes Wesen, hier im scheinbar Unorganisierten, in einer Welt, die den Gesetzen der äußeren Ordnung nicht entsprach" (61). This reflects what has been termed the novel's foundation upon "ein differenziertes, sich ständig veränderndes Scheitern an
It is perhaps inevitable that the narrator should be drawn to books that confirm his feelings of exclusion. The world of literature becomes a world opposed to external reality, a means of retreat. The process of self-realisation in the attic is extended via his identification with certain books, in which he discovers: "Das Grauenhafte war mein Bereich" (63). Readers of Das Duell or viewers of Marat/Sade are unlikely to dispute this observation. However the hermetic security offered by books and painting is shattered by the intrusion of external reality, exactly as it is in "Laokoon". The language of hatred confirms, indeed explains, the narrator's sense of isolation:

...es war ja kein Inhalt da, nur unerhörte Ausmaße von Leere, Leere mit Schreien gefüllt. [...] Und als Gottfried dann erklärte, daß mein Vater Jude sei, so war mir dies wie eine Bestätigung für etwas, das ich seit langem geahnt hatte. (73)

The "Leere" which has consistently threatened the childhood process of self-discovery is here given concrete linguistic form in the discourse of Nazism. When his (non-Jewish) step-brother identifies the life-threatening language of anti-Semitism, the narrator's reaction is revealing, if predictable. Suddenly he has an explanation for the persecution he has suffered from his school contemporaries. The revelation is a confirmation of minority identity, ironically inspired by exposure to the external reality his self-exile is designed to avoid. The "Leere" which has been characterised hitherto by the relatively benign indifference of his father's "Abwesenheit" (37) is here given tangible and threatening form.

However, the sudden death of the narrator's sister (with whom he has an incestuous relationship) before the family flees to England has a far greater impact on the narrator and his family as a whole than the need to escape future persecution. The horror of his sister's death marks the end of the "dumpfes Warten auf die Katastrofe" [sic] (116) which has characterised his life until that point. It also signals the beginning of the "Fahrt ins Ungewisse" (78) and heightens the narrator's own need to escape: "Mit dem Tod meiner Schwester begannen meine Versuche, mich aus meiner Vergangenheit zu befreien" (81-82). This liberation takes the form of artistic expression, which is a direct response to the emotional upheaval that follows the accident. The confirmation of his artistic vocation is allied to his new role (and title) after the accident as "der Verwalter
der Vergangenheit" (82). Of course, this is also the role he is filling as autobiographical narrator.

It is thus through art that the narrator attempts to counter the devastating effects of his sister’s death. It is in England that the narrator meets Jacques, the first companion with whom he can share his artistic ambitions. Jacques’s contribution to the narrator’s self-development is rivalled in the text only by that of his dead sister. The lack of response to the exhibition of the narrator’s paintings does not trouble him: "Es kam niemand. Das war gleichgültig" (112) The economy of his language reflects the confidence and self-assurance which he derives from the opportunity to show his work. The absence of viewers underlines the feelings of exclusivity which he derives from his isolation. In contrast, in "Screw oder 13 Londoner Tage", an account of the friendship with Jacques written in the 1930s, the exhibition attracts a few visitors and even a buyer. This reinforces the reader’s suspicion that Abschied’s narrator tends towards self-dramatisation. The fact that, in both versions, the friendship lasts only 13 days before Jacques leaves for Spain (where Die Ästhetik’s narrator meets him) is testament to its intensity.

Further support is provided by the positive response the narrator receives to his letter to Harry Haller, the character from Hermann Hesse’s Der Steppenwolf representing Hesse himself. Haller/Hesse becomes a new "Vorbild": "Das Lesen von Hallers Werken war wie ein Wühlen in meinem eigenen Schmerz. Hier war meine Situation gezeichnet, die Situation des Bürgers, der zum Revolutionär werden möchte und den die Gewichte alter Normen lähmen" (119). Although the notion of "Revolutionär" has only artistic implications, it is clear that Haller/Hesse’s response legitimises the narrator’s search for identity. The narrator certainly reads his letter in these terms: "Die Tatsache, daß jemand zu mir sprach, genügte mir" (120). The contact with Haller/Hesse reflects the reconstruction of the narrator’s identity which takes place in the face of the threat posed by Nazism in the final section of the text. As so often in autobiographical narrative, the narrator sees the process as one analogous to rebirth: "Das Ich, das ich mit mir schleppte, war verbraucht, zerstört, untauglich, es mußte untergehen. Ich mußte lernen, mit neuen Sinnen zu erleben" (119). However, in contrast to the similar process in Canetti’s texts, Weiss’s choice of language - "den Weg des Verwitters und Verwesens" (119) - indicates that the image is associated as much with decay as with birth. Through Haller/Hesse’s
contacts, the narrator is able to move to Prague to study art when his parents move to Czechoslovakia. This new freedom in the uneasy Central Europe of the late 1930s is seen in characteristically selfish and paradoxical terms:

Da hatte ich mich selbst, ganz für mich allein, und niemand beobachtete mich, und niemand hemmte meine Schritte, ich konnte mit meinem Tag machen was ich wollte, und das war das Unmögliche, mit mir selbst fertig zu werden, mir selbst ein Dasein zu schaffen. (124)

The verb "schaffen" suggests the conscious nature of self-creation, while the repetitions of "und" mime the tentativeness of this process. It reinforces once more the impression that, for Weiss, the autobiographical quest (which the passage could be said to represent) is one of "Selbstfindung". In this process there is always an unassimilable element which defies self-understanding and which remains beyond linguistic or intellectual categorisation. It is in the "Leere", the background against which the search is effected, that this inarticulable element is situated. The "Leere" is also external to the self, represented by the threats of interference from (parental) authority. Similarly, freedom in Prague prompts both hope and fear, exactly as it does in "Laokoon":

In Prag, an diesem ersten Ort, an dem ich meine Freiheit suchen wollte, fand ich nur Dunkelheit und Selbstzerstörung. Als meine Frist nach einem Jahr zuende ging, war auch der Druck nach Außenwelt gespenstisch angewachsen. (132)

The ghostly threat from outside is an intimation of the forthcoming "apokalyptischen Zeit" (133). Yet, paradoxically, it is not in terms of this threat that the narrator expresses his disorientating feelings of displacement. The overt politicisation of the narrator of Die Ästhetik has no parallels in Weiss's earlier prose, even as war threatens:

Meine Niederlage war nicht die Niederlage des Emigranten vor den Schwierigkeiten des Daseins im Exil, sondern die Niederlage dessen, der es nicht wagt, sich von seiner Gebundenheit zu befreien. Die Emigration hatte mich nichts gelehrt. Die Emigration war für mich nur die Bestätigung einer Unzugehörigkeit,
Thus the early war years, with their desperate return to his parents in exile in Sweden, are "eine Zeit des Schlafwandels" (143). Persecution and exile only confirm the narrator's pervasive feelings of alienation. His sense of exclusion is most succinctly indicated by his relation to language.

Throughout the text, the narrator's relationship with his parents is described in terms of communication breakdown. They are represented as a stifling force, repressing their son's sexuality and punishing him continuously. This is particularly true of the father, who is unable even to speak to his children (9). This communication gap ("Leere") is later extended to school, where the narrator is unable to understand his teacher (32). We have already seen how books "spoke" to him, in a way in which his parents could not. His paintings too are a form of expression in a language incomprehensible to his parents. Requested to work in his father's business, the narrator is struck dumb:

> Ich konnte nicht sprechen, konnte nichts erklären, die Stimme hatte sich in meiner Kehle gestockt. Ich konnte meinen Eltern nicht verständlich machen, daß das Malen und Schreiben eine Arbeit für mich war. (104)

The "Bilder" are associated with hallucinatory visions, recalling the depiction of self-imposed childhood nightmares early in the text (see 54), as well as external events. Such "Bilder" with their "Toben und Schreien" (*Fluchtpunkt* 46) are only comprehensible to the like-minded, Jacques and Peter Kien. Indeed, aspects of the section detailing the friendship with Jacques strikingly resemble "Laokoon". In both cases, Bilder express nightmarish visions, which seem unconsciously to reflect the upheavals of external reality:

> ... wir lauschten den vergehenden Tonlinien nach, begaben uns wieder in die Regionen der Worte und Bilder, lagen zwischen den Zeichnungen und bemalten Tafeln, zwischen den Manuskripten und Büchern, bis wir unsere Worte nicht mehr verstanden, und jeder in den Schacht seines Schlafes sank. (110-111)
The "Regionen der Worte und Bilder" precede sleep, which contains both the threatening "Leere" and the inspiration of dreams. This is reflected in Burkhardt Lindner's identification of the "halluzinatorischer Realismus" of Weiss's prose and Weiss's similar characterisation of modernity as "das Erlebnis von der Wirklichkeit als Halluzination".

It is noticeable that in Abschied there is little reference to the linguistic displacement which is a feature of exile and which is part of "Laokoon"'s complex depiction of alienation. The text is almost entirely concerned with language as a (failed) means of communication between people. Thus language is associated with the self rather than with national affiliation. This is neatly symbolised by the fact that the narrator, a Czech national, cannot speak a word of Czech.

At the end of the text the narrator has a dream in which he is threatened by a mysterious "Mann in Jägerkleidung" who turns out to be his Doppelgänger. The threat is internal: the narrator becomes both hunter and hunted just as his Jewishness made him both persecutor and persecuted at school. The narrator sees the "Traumbild" as a manifestation of his unconscious desire for escape. The dream contains traces of his parents' repressive authority which has haunted him since childhood: "Ich sah meine Spuren im Ufersand des Sees. Einen Augenblick lang füllte mich die Vision dieser Spuren, die mich von meiner Geburt an bis zu diesem Platz geführt hatten" (146). The language of this passage recalls "Laokoon" once again and the figure of the narrator adrift looks back to the ontological dislocation of the 1940s prose. His only solution is flight. The text ends on a note of optimism, not in the form of a statement of identity but with a confirmation of the necessity of the independent quest for the self with which the text has been concerned all along: "Ich war auf dem Weg, auf der Suche nach einem eigenen Leben" (146).

At first sight, it seems that the impression of muted optimism with which Abschied von den Eltern concludes endures into Fluchtpunkt. The sequel has a more mature and distanced tone which allows the narrator to broaden his focus to incorporate external events as well as internal difficulties. This shift is also indicated by the fact that the title lacks the narrow focus of Abschied. However, as I have already stated, one of the titles
which Weiss rejected for the text was "Horror Vacui" (N1 70), which suggests that the threat of the "Leere" is as central to Fluchtpunkt as to its predecessor.

The first sentence of Fluchtpunkt is deceptive. It does not open with "ich" like Abschied, but is more subtly constructed around the self: "Am 8. November 1940 kam ich in Stockholm an." The reference to both time and place is new, indicating the increased impact of history on the narrator, whom Weiss envisaged as "eine ganz bestimmte, zeittypische Figur" (PWG 30). Commentators have overlooked the fact that the date is the narrator's (and Weiss's) birthday (see Fluchtpunkt 16). This suggests that his arrival in Stockholm is an extension of Abschied's rebirth metaphor, which is so common to autobiographical narrative. The self remains central to the text, which is caught in permanent tension "zwischen Selbstonentblößung und Ichstilisierung". However, the purely personal disaster which Abschied's narrator constantly awaited is transformed in the sequel into the "gemeinsamen Katastrophe" (22) of history. Furthermore, the first page of the text is largely devoted to a description of another person, Max Berndorf, Abschied's "Max B.". The use of the full (but still inauthentic) surname indicates that Fluchtpunkt both extends and revises its predecessor's fictionalisation of experience. Max is a parallel figure to the narrator. He represents the kind of hopeless and despairing inertia that can result from the experience of exile. However, the similarities between the two figures are rather greater than the narrator realises. Max analyses the experience of exile: "Heute bist du ein anderer. Heute weißt du, auf welcher Seite du stehst. [...] Er mußte an eine Wiedergeburt glauben, denn gäbe es diese Wiedergeburt nicht, dann war die Emigration sinnlos" (13). This is the first time in the two texts that the notion of "Wiedergeburt" has been formally articulated. Here it is associated with the kind of politicisation which the self-absorbed narrator of Fluchtpunkt rejects throughout the text. The narrator seems at first sight to share this faith in "Wiedergeburt", only his rebirth remains apolitical:

Ich spürte keine Schuld, daß ich am Krieg nicht teilnahm und daß ich mit keiner Nation, keiner Rasse solidarisch war. Ich hatte versucht, mit meiner letzten Bindung zu brechen, und war aus dem Elternhaus abgereist, um mich mit meinen Aufgaben zu befassen. (15)

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This conclusion, which mirrors the hope expressed at the end of *Abschied*, is qualified on the previous page where the following more honest assessment of his acceptance in Sweden occurs: "Man ließ mich ein, weil ich mich auf das gesicherte Leben meiner Eltern berufen konnte" (14). Ironically it is the "gesicherte Leben" which he has rejected so resolutely that ensures his survival. The impression which pervades *Abschied* that the possibility of escape is as illusory as it is necessary is reaffirmed at the beginning of its sequel. If *Abschied* is the account of the creation of an artistic identity, *Fluchtpunkt* is the account of a generally flawed attempt to consolidate and assert that identity. Such assertion demands a new willingness to engage with the outside world, as well as Weiss's characteristic self-obsession. This is where the narrator's capacity for self-transformation, familiar from "Laokoon", proves so useful: "Alles was ich bisher getan hatte, schien nur Vorbereitung gewesen zu sein" (16). This underlines the narrator's partial dependence on the past he is rejecting, in much the same way as the birthday with which the text commences reflects both an awareness of the self's continuity and a rebirth. This double movement is of course characteristic of both Weiss's prose and the autobiographical enterprise in general.

By the beginning of *Fluchtpunkt* the tentativeness of the early attempts at artistic activity have been overcome: "Das Aufstellen der Bilder ringsum war eine Festigung und Sicherung des Daseins" (22). Not only has painting become an integral part of his identity, it has also rendered the narrator's conception of "Dasein" more tangible. The notions of "Festigung und Sicherung" have hitherto been associated exclusively with the stifling security of life with his parents. The change is reflected in a newly externalised conception of the self, in which human contact is valued as highly as artistic achievement:


One of the features of *Fluchtpunkt* is the gradual movement away from the dysfunctional sexuality, which dominated much of *Abschied*, to a position where the narrator is able to enjoy sexual relationships. The two major relationships with Else and Edna, which
temporarily interrupt the "unendlichen, formlosen Selbstgespräch" (41), are further
evidence of the shift in his values. However, with both women he avoids the
responsibility of parenthood; he is as unable as his own parents to provide the emotional
resources a child requires and evades his responsibility in characteristic fashion by running
away.

It is in the light of such evasions that we can interpret the narrator's discovery of
and identification with Kafka. It is characteristic of Kafka's writing that it seduces the
reader into believing that they are identifying with the text to an unprecedented degree:

So begann ich jetzt, beim Lesen des Prozesses, hellhörig zu werden für den
Prozeß, der mich selbst gefangenhiebt. [...] Was ich erfuhr, war nur die
Unmöglichkeit und Ausweglosigkeit, obgleich mir scheinbar jede Freiheit gegeben
war. (57)

This familiar categorisation of freedom as "Ausweglosigkeit" (cf. "Laokoon") is one to
which Weiss returns later in the text. At this stage it is important to recognise that the
obsession with Kafka is founded upon an identification with the extreme subjectivity that
is found in his writing. This positive reading of Kafka's hermeticism ignores its political
implications, which are central to Die Ästhetik's view of Das Schloß. Kafka is a role
model in Fluchtpunkt precisely because he can be read apolitically. At the beginning of
the text, the narrator makes a similar claim for his own work: "Von sozialen Argumenten
wußte ich nichts, in der Kunst fand ich die einzigen Waffen, mit denen ich angreifen und
mich verteidigen konnte" (10). The naivety of this argument, which fails to recognise
art's ideological implications, is obvious. Similarly, when the narrator praises painting's
concreteness: "Die Malerei ist greifbar, sie riecht" (16), he associates it not with ideology
but with dreams. Art is the means by which both the "erzählende" and "erzählte" selves make
sense of existence: "Mit dem Schreiben schaffe ich ein zweites, eingebildetes
Leben, in dem alles, was verschwommen und unbestimmt war, Deutlichkeit vorspiegelt"
(25). The choice of adjective ("eingebildetes") adds an element of presumption to this
description of the interplay of memory and imagination, which is fundamental to every
attempt to represent experience. It is part of the achievement of Fluchtpunkt that, like
the paintings of the 1940s, it does not exclude unsettling elements in favour of
retrospective clarity. The paintings form "eine Art von Inventuraufnahme" (67) which lacks an organisational perspective. The narrator recognises a similar deficiency in the figure of Hieronymus, who, like all the artist figures in the text, is a kind of reductio ad absurdum of elements of the narrator's character:

Die Bemühungen um einen Überblick und um eine Teilnahme an der Weltlage, die Probleme der Verantwortung, der großen Zusammengehörigkeit, dies alles war Gewäsch für ihn, nicht einmal eines Gedankens wert. (138)

The quest for the "Überblick" and the rejection of hermetic isolation are central aspects of both Fluchtpunkt and Die Ästhetik, where the issue is examined in greater detail. Here, the narrator is still torn between "die Möglichkeit einer totalen Kunst" (101) and the knowledge of its impossibility. Later he is informed that his attempt to see himself as "ein unteilbares Ganzes" (167), an aspiration which suggests both isolation and inflexibility, is a self-deception. This remark occurs during the course of a discussion of the nature of autobiographical writing, when the narrator rejects the creation of fictional characters in order to search for "tausend anderen Kostümierungen in mir selbst" (166). 

He obviously believes that he has the resources to sustain renewed fictional investigation. What is important to note here is the fact that the depiction of (and search for) the self is sited at the frontier of the fictional and the autobiographical. This conclusion stems from the revised view of Kafka, which precedes the discussion. The narrator rejects Kafka's intellectual fixation on the "mechanischen anonymen Vernichtungswelt" (164) and "das Unerreichbare, das Unmögliche" (165), descriptions which could be applied equally to Weiss's early prose and paintings. The motivation for the rejection of Kafka is the narrator's discovery of Henry Miller. He is attracted by Miller's transparency, a quality which he has previously only associated with visual art: "Alles war greifbar und möglich, und das Geschlechtliche, das bei Kafka in einem dumpfen Hintergrund lag, nahm tropische Üppigkeit an" (165). In other words, Miller's immediacy and capacity to respond to the moment overcome the dysfunction that is a feature of Kafka's (and Weiss's) writing. To Weiss's "verbrauchte, übermüdete Europäer", this seems like the intrusion of another (new) world. (He misses the irony that Miller's freedom is achieved in Europe.) However, this does not mean that the earlier identification with Kafka has
entirely lost its efficacy. The first enthusiastic description of Kafka’s effect can also be applied to Fluchtpunkt itself:

Doch ich mißtraute allen Bindungen, allem Aufgehen in gemeinsamen Ideen, ich konnte noch nicht nach weiten Perspektiven suchen und nach einer politischen Zugehörigkeit, ich mußte mich an die kleinen fragmentarischen Bilder halten, die meine eigenen Erfahrungen spiegelten. (60)

Such statements are repeated and varied so frequently that they come to fulfil an almost incantatory function. They resemble an attempt to justify the narrator’s self-absorption. His feelings of guilt, which increase as the text progresses, are an acknowledgement of his selfishness at a time when the choice for many was between flight or death.

It is in Hoderer (Hodann in Die Ästhetik) that we find the most active counter-figure to both the narrator and Kafka’s example. It is no accident that, resembling a medical Henry Miller, he is a specialist in sexual dysfunction, as well as a communist. At the beginning of the text, the narrator is still too immature to acknowledge that he feels guilt. Max is too weak to challenge such a position. In contrast, Hoderer brings the narrator’s apolitical solipsism into question. For Hoderer, political considerations outweigh all others. The narrator maintains his naive self-interest even in the 1940s: "Ich will nicht für die Zukunft leben, sagte ich. Ich lebe heute" (69). He comes to question his position only after Hoderer’s suicide, when he imagines the dead man’s taunts, by which time the war and the immediate danger are over:

Du tust, als habest du den Sieg gewonnen, sagte er spöttisch, doch mit einem Sieg hast du nichts zu tun. Es rinnt alles an dir ab, du bist ein Parasit, ein Mitläufer, andere haben für dich gekämpft, werden weiter für dich kämpfen, während du bequem an deinem Schreibtisch hockst und über das Unglück der Welt nachdenkst. (137)

These imaginary conversations indicate that the narrator’s views are beginning to shift towards the recognition of the impossibility of his apolitical stance. Earlier attempts at honest labour, such as the wood-felling episode, not only represent his flight from the
reality of war but are also calculated to increase his alienation; he deliberately chooses the work to which he is least suited in order to fail. Like his attempt at rebellion in the "Waldhütte", "Holzfällen" serves only to confirm in his mind his unsuitability for a life without art. Weiss's "Holzfällen" has none of Bernhard's association of the activity with the dignity of labour, although it must be pointed out that in Bernhard's Holzfällen the idea remains abstract and sentimental. Nevertheless, the security of the parental home always lies behind Fluchtpunkt's rebellion.

The imaginary conversation with Hoderer occurs soon after the narrator's kidney stone operation. His illness prompts a reassessment of his priorities. The text at this point (132-34) modulates into a series of feverish ruminations on birth and sexuality, which are common in Weiss's early prose. The implication is that his recovery from illness involves the kind of rebirth that was brought into doubt earlier in the text. The reassessment coincides with the end of the war:

Dann, im Frühjahr 1945, sah ich den Endpunkt der Entwicklung, in der ich aufgewachsen war. Auf der blendend hellen Bildfläche sah ich die Stätten, für die ich bestimmt gewesen war, die Gestalten, zu denen ich hätte gehören sollen.

(135)

His survival leads to the acknowledgement of guilt in the hallucinatory conversation with Hoderer, as well as the recognition of betrayal, of belonging "zu den Mördern und Henkern" (136). He is unable to feel solidarity because he has never experienced the feeling of community. From 1946, he begins to examine in detail the events of the past decade. At this stage, exile is still seen in negative terms akin to the experience of "Leere", as a "Monolog im Vakuum" (63). The provisional status of exile has to be abandoned: "ich war nicht mehr bedroht und verfolgt, und auch die Bedrohung und Verfolgung, die ich erlebt hatte, mußte revidiert werden" (161). It is this revision that the text as a whole represents, particularly in the final section in which the narrator moves towards a positive (if not entirely convincing) reassessment of the exile experience.

The account of the narrator's brief relationship with the actress, Cora, precedes this revision. The meeting is another rebirth, occurring on the narrator's thirtieth birthday. Its combination of self-fulfilment and irresponsibility has a central place in the
transformation of attitudes that is evident at the end of the text. The meetings with Cora have a dream-like quality, which lack even the limited engagement with reality that we have come to expect: "meine alte Welt war vergangen, es gab nur noch dieses Fliegen mit ihr" (181). Cora herself is a parallel figure to the narrator, the ghost-like "Schlafwandlerin" (181) to his "Schlafwandler". The affair progresses without language or communication, like the relationship with Else, in a kind of trance which once again recalls the child’s experience at the beginning of "Laokoon". However, when they meet again more than a decade later, in one of the text’s relatively few deviations from chronology, the encounter is described in characteristic terms of absence: "Unser Zusammensein war entdämonisiert, entdramatisiert. Der Rauschzustand war im Leeren verpufft" (186). Their inability to recapture their former intimacy reveals the proximity of fulfilment and emptiness. Amidst the uncertainties of the immediate post-war years, the narrator seems to have been open to the sort of sensual experience that became unattainable, or at least unrepeatable, in later years.

The difference between the two experiences with Cora inspires a long meditation on the pleasures and difficulties of recreating experience. This inspires a relatively rare discussion of one of the central problems of autobiographical narrative: "Immer liegt ein Zuspät im Aufzeichnen, ein Ersatz für etwas Verlorenes" (187). The act of recording experience is seen in terms of both loss and gain: "Meine Freiheit, diese Augenblicke nach meinen Eingebungen zu verändern, ist unbegrenzt" (187-88). An added dimension is lent to the discussion of the "Zeitlosigkeit" of recollection by the narrator’s renewed feeling of guilt, which derives from his memory of those who did not survive the war. In this respect, Fluchtpunkt anticipates Die Ästhetik’s tribute to the anti-fascist movement. Memory, particularly falsified memory, is a vital component of the (re)construction and re-presentation of identity (see 190-91). As several commentators have stated, Fluchtpunkt’s appearance of realism, which is heightened by the contrast with Abschied’s surrealistic flights of fancy, masks a radical and challenging subtext.29

Dieter Hensing has made the important assertion that 1947, the year which is the subject of the final part of the text, marks the "Wendepunkt" in Weiss’s pre-political artistic career.24 The fact that the text ends at this point supports this view. Two events occurred in this year, the return to Germany that is described in Die Besiegten and a visit to Paris which has the quality of an epiphany. The return to Germany receives little more
than a passing reference in the text - the impact of that journey being transferred entirely onto the visit to Paris. That visit effectively becomes the description of the rebirth rejected at the beginning of the text:

Die Sprache, die mich während der letzten Jahre umgeben hatte, verlor sich, ihre Worte entglitten mir, sie wurde hier, in diesem Schmelztiegel, weggewaschen, es zeigte sich, wie locker sie an mir hing, wie wenig sie mir bedeutete, alles, was nicht fest war, was nicht Teil von mir war, wurde weggeschwemmt... (193-94)

This passage represents the climax to the dynamic of dispossession which runs through both Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt. Stripped of unnecessary baggage, the self is laid bare, free of all affiliation. The narrator terms this the "Augenblick der Sprengung":

Jetzt konnte ich zeigen, wer ich war, was das für ein Ich war, das ich durch die Jahre der Flucht getragen hatte, das ich vor der Vernichtung auf dem Schlachtfeld und in der Gaskammer gerettet hatte... (194-95)

In this way, the narrating perspective comes to dominate. At this stage the unlimited freedom with which the "Ich" is faced is still seen in negative terms as "die Wahrnehmung des Urübels" (195). He is thus unable to speak or move - the two functions are associated as they are in Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden. The rebirth motif is skilfully adapted into a metaphor of premature abandonment. In a summarising image again reminiscent of "Laokoon", Von Insel zu Insel and Abschied's concluding dream, the self feels himself to be: "ein Säugling, zu früh von der Mutterbrust genommen und abgesetzt an einem Straßenrand" (195).

It is at this point that the epiphanic moment of reversal occurs in the Allee des Sygnes [sic]. The boundlessness of freedom is limited in the same way as it is at the end of "Laokoon":

Die Freiheit war noch vorhanden, doch ich hatte Boden in ihr gewonnen, sie war keine Leere mehr, in der ich im Alptraum der Anonymität lag und in der alle
This short passage succeeds in addressing most of the obsessive concerns of the autobiographical fictions. The narrator's newly-won freedom both separates him from the past and offers hope for the future. This is simultaneously inviting and threatening, siting him for the first time between "dem Pol des unbändigen Lebens und dem Pol des Vergehens" (196). Liberty empowers him with a new linguistic capacity - one of the objects which can be named and thereby neutralised is the ubiquitous "Leere". 

*Fluchtpunkt* traces the development of the narrator's sense of identity until he reaches a point where he can fill the "Leere" with language. He is able to use discourse to combat the absence which had threatened to reduce him to inarticulateness. He is also able to return, as in *Die Besiegten*, to his native language. However, language is associated not with nation but with self-expression; it becomes both what Jochen Vogt terms "den Kristillationspunkt einer neuen Identität"\(^\text{25}\) and the "Werkzeug" familiar from "Laokoon". The experience of exile is seen objectively (if perhaps over-optimistically) as a part of human experience. The final sentences of the text read like a further anticipation of "Laokoon" in their discussion of the difficulty of expressing deep-lying "Worte und Bilder". It seems as if the transformation desired at the end of *Abschied* is complete:


The avoidance of conventional syntax in the final clause mimes the narrator's paradoxical feeling of disconnected community. Its similarity to the conclusion of "Laokoon" is striking. Weiss seems to have overlooked his earlier claim: "Ich ging von meinen Zweifeln aus, von meinen Gegensätzen, dem ständigen Für und Wider" (101). Accordingly, Weiss has often expressed his dissatisfaction with the novel's conclusion.\(^\text{26}\) On the one hand, the ending appears to defy the crushing realities the narrator has experienced throughout the text. Kathleen A. Vance comments: "*Fluchtpunkt* is the record of the narrator's evasion of insights about the nature of the world, an evasion
which leads to the alienation from the self and the world. Alternatively, the "Unzugehörigkeit" apparently reconciled in the final sentence can also be read as evidence of his acceptance of uncertainty ("Leere") which has accompanied the narrator throughout the text. When the first draft of the text was rejected, Weiss thought of reverting to the earlier title, "Dinosaurus" (see N1 51 & 193). However, like the other rejected titles "Horror Vacui", "X" and "Der Verlorene" (N1 54 & 70), "Dinosaurus" suggests only the negative, isolating effects of the text's exile experience. The advantage of "Fluchtpunkt" is that it combines the muted optimism of the text's conclusion with the more complex ending of "Laokoon". The text becomes both a summary and a leave-taking of the concerns of previous texts, indeed their vanishing point. The title locates the text firmly as an extension of the "Flucht" motif central to Abschied. Its optical dimension suggests an end to exile, the possibility of either recuperation and destruction. In a letter, Weiss wrote: "Fluchtpunkt ist im geometrischen Sinn gemeint. Die Unendliche in der Perspektive. Weist auf Vergangenheit und Zukunft hin". This indicates the ambivalence, most evident at the novel's conclusion, that is enacted in the text's fluctuating and conflicting motifs of "Freiheit" and "Leere", elements which both facilitate and impede the linguistic representation of experience that is the foundation of autobiographical narrative.

3 Early Prose

I would like now to examine briefly how Weiss's early prose anticipates many of the issues central to Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt. It is important to note that of all his extended prose texts, only one, Das Duell, is written in the third person. As early as 1939 Weiss was advocating writing in the first person, claiming: "Aber ein schaffender Künstler muß ja schamlos sein" (Briefe an Goldschmidt/Jungk 72). In his Notizbücher Weiss reveals how difficult he found it to invent characters:

Frisch macht es z B anders: er erfindet Figuren, die ständig nach ihrer Identität suchen, oder diese wechseln. Auch eine Art von Autobiographie. Ich bin zu solchen Umschreibungen nicht fähig. Lebe mit dem Unausgesprochenen (N2 29)
Weiss's inability to invent characters causes him repeatedly to return to the events of his life in a series of "Umschreibungen" of a different kind, which culminate in Die Ästhetik. The texts which these later autobiographical narratives constantly revisit are the texts Weiss wrote in the 1940s.

Weiss published three prose texts privately in Swedish in the 1940s. Weiss described the first text, Von Insel zu Insel, composed in 1944, as a series of "Prosagedichte". It would merit attention only as a kind of "Vorstudie" to the later prose were it not for the fact that portions of the text occur almost verbatim in the autobiographical fiction of the 1960s. In addition to the recurrent "Insel" image, the descriptions of a failed visit to a prostitute, of the lingering emotional impact of the narrator's sister's death and of the alienating effect of factory work all reappear in the later texts. The "Jahrmarkt", one of the text's central images, also occurs frequently in both the early prose and in Weiss's paintings of the 1930s and 1940s. Understandably, few commentators can resist quoting from the first page of the text: "Ohne Wurzeln riß man mich aus dieser Erde [...] Alles was ich tat in diesem Leben: nach Symbolen suchen für diese Erde, die meine Erde, die meine Wurzeln hatte" (10). With its absolute rejection of the family, this passage could function as an epigraph to the autobiographical fiction. The narrative's associative and surrealistic imagery endures in muted form in the more conventionally realist 1960s texts, although without the element of sadism that is a striking feature of Von Insel zu Insel. Moreover, the concept of "Leere" is also present at this early stage in Weiss's writing career. Even literature, which has a relatively unchallenged status in later texts, fails to escape the negativity which dominates the text: "Bücher, die ihre Leere, hinter schönen Einbänden verbergen. [...] Selten entsteht eine Lücke. Die Lücke muß sofort geschlossen werden, denn jede Lücke öffnet sich zum Chaos" (21). It seems that this emptiness gradually penetrates the narrator, with disorientating results: "Wo war ich, von wo kam ich zurück?" (42). The ontological instability of later texts has its roots here. Towards the end of the text the narrator is pictured rowing between the islands, isolated and without destination. The text ends on a note of insecurity, its use of the second person only emphasising the narrator's self-alienation:

Das große Labyrinth nimmt dich auf [...] Rufst du um Hilfe, hörst du nur das
This silent acquiescence (Alfons Söllner situates these early texts "an der Grenze von Sprechen und Schweigen") anticipates the negative aspects of Die Ästhetik, as well as being reminiscent of "Laokoon"’s initial experience of exile. In this early text, Weiss has not yet reconciled himself to displacement. Like the reduction to a "Stein unter Steinen", the emblematic image of the self lost between islands emphasises the degree of the text’s surrender to the "Leere". The almost mythical salvation associated with the recurring figure of the "Insel" in Weiss’s letters of the late 1930s and early 1940s has been transformed into a far more sinister image in the fictional text. Von Insel zu Insel thus occupies a position midway between the romanticism of the letters and Fluchtpunkt’s hard-won insight: "dab es unmöglich war, sich auf einer isolierten, ausgestorbenen Insel zu äußern." (62) Interestingly this image also recalls the unpublished "Traktat von der ausgestorbenen Welt" from 1938/39 (contained in Der Maler Peter Weiss), in which the frustrations of solitude are overcome by the text’s underlying optimism. In that text isolation modulates at times into an almost religious feeling of joy, an element which is notably absent from the early published works.

Der Fremde, written in 1947 and published privately (and revealingly) as Dokument I in Swedish in 1949, is even more negative. The narrator acknowledges his isolation at the beginning of the text: "Die Leere meiner Hände ist mein einziger Besitz" (147). In this way, the twin themes of emptiness and dispossession are intertwined from the beginning of the narrative. The text follows the narrator, "Der Fremde" ("Der Vogelfreie" in the original title) as he arrives in a strange city to which he finds it impossible to adapt. Der Fremde’s violent "Traumrealismus" situates it between the associative form of Von Insel zu Insel and the later writing. Images of torture, which are extremely frequent in Weiss’s work, recur in the text, reflecting torture’s original function as some kind of perverted catalyst of (autobiographical) truth. The text gives no indication of place or time, although it is evident from similar descriptions of Prague and Sweden in the 1960s texts that Der Fremde’s descriptions derive from personal experience. It easy to see why Peter Suhrkamp rejected it in 1947 as "die Niederschrift
eines, der an Selbstgespräche gewöhnt ist".\textsuperscript{33} The narrator is unable to communicate; he is able to approach the city only sensually: "ich kann nur hören und sehen" (156). He is unable to order or interpret his impressions: "Stehend in meinem Kaleidoskop [...] suche [ich] nach einer Balance, suche nach einem festen Zeichen für das Unbeständige" (216). In short, he lacks the partial sense of "Überblick" that is gradually and tentatively gained in \textit{Abschied} and \textit{Fluchtpunkt}. He memorably articulates this loss when asked who he is: "Ein nichts. Namenlos. Eine Art Seismograph." (189) His progress is described as a kind of "Seiltanzen", anticipating the 1948 play \textit{Der Turm}. The image of the "Seiltänzer", so common in Bernhard's work, suggests both self-exposure and vulnerability, a figure suspended over the threatening void for the entertainment of others: "Hier am Rande des Abgrunds fühle ich die Wurzeln meines Lebens" (201). This repeated search for balance, which is one of the narrator's self-imposed tasks, is a quest for mental and physical well-being. It seems inevitable that, like the child cyclist at the beginning of Bernhard's \textit{Ein Kind}, the narrator of \textit{Der Fremde} will fall. This confirms the destructive isolation which he feels to be "das stärkste Zeichen meiner Wiederbelebung". (204). The association of failure with survival in both writers is revealing.

The importance of \textit{Der Fremde} to Weiss is evident in the fact that he republished it under a pseudonym and with the new title in 1980. The changes suggest an awareness of the distance he had travelled since writing "Der Vogelfreie". In \textit{Rekonvaleszenz} he professes himself to be satisfied only with the endings of \textit{Der Fremde} and \textit{Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers} out of all his work (183). The fact that the 1959 film \textit{Hägringen} was a direct reworking of "Der Vogelfreie" (as was the 1960s autobiographical fiction indirectly) indicates further the paradigmatic value of \textit{Dokument I}.

Of the 1940s publications, \textit{Die Besiegten}, published in Swedish in 1948, is the text most concretely founded in external reality. It is a reworking of the newspaper reports Weiss wrote during his return to Germany in 1947. The title is the first to refer to a community beyond the self, with which the narrator identifies. The epigraph to the text indicates a degree of objectivity inconceivable in previous texts: "Das Schicksal: das ist die Vergangenheit". This may indicate a growing maturity. The appeal to historicity extends into the description of the narrator's arrival in the city with its reference to: "Der freie Flug durch den Raum des Vergessens" (11). The narrator compares himself to a
"Fallschirmspringer" at several points in the text, an image which adds a destination to the precariousness of the "Seiltänzer". Unlike Der Fremde, this narrator offers a historical justification for his alienation. When he confidently states: "Meine Heimatlosigkeit gab mir Sicherheit" (13), we are reminded of the conclusions of Fluchtpunkt and "Laokoon". Indeed, mirroring these later texts, the notion of exile is universalised: "Aber mein Leben war Flucht" (34). The terms are familiar - his return to the scene of his childhood awakens unsettling memories, which lead the narrator to characterise himself as a "Schlafwandler". Guilt at his own survival is one of the most striking features of his attitude towards the past. The devastation caused by the war is echoed in more personal terms by the enduring psychological effects of his sister's early death. The fact that he refers to her "als Symbol für die ewige Erwartung" (32) indicates a kinship to the Dante project which led to Die Ermittlung and suggests that the play can be related to this preoccupation with his sister's death.

Survival in these circumstances resembles life in "einem Leerraum" (38). It only retains value for the narrator as the condition for the kind of "Selbstkonfrontation" (43) which is a direct result of the return to Germany. Self-examination leads to a familiar conclusion: "Alle sind wir Besiegte. Der Mensch ist besiegt von seiner Zeit" (87). Although the text began as journalism and its title indicates a defeated community, the fundamental motivation behind the text is characteristically personal: "Unter den Trümmern suche ich nach mir selbst" (120). Nevertheless, its combination of the personal and the historical brings Die Besiegten close to the autobiographical at times. Die Besiegten is a reworking of factual (if impressionistic) journalism, just as Fluchtpunkt is a fictionalisation of experience. The conclusion of the earlier text only underlines the fact that the text is concerned with the self. The figure of the "Fallschirmspringer" reappears, although this time it is associated with escape. The "Leere" over which he is suspended is internalised in a characteristic gesture: "Mit dem Fallschirm des freien Fluges sinke ich durch den weitoffenen Trichter der Wirklichkeit und werde in meinem innersten Raum an Land gesetzt" (121).

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The autobiographical impulse is much less directly evident in the two prose texts Weiss
produced in the 1950s. I would like to concentrate on Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers because, in common with Weiss himself and several commentators, I regard it as the most radical of Weiss's linguistic experiments and thus the most directly influential upon the autobiographical texts which I have already examined (see PWG 36). Its concern is with language rather than displaced identity and the narrative only superficially resembles the surreal and violent imagery of Das Duell, which preceded it in 1951. Kutscher also has a special status as Weiss's break-through text. It was written in 1952, the first work to result from his return to German, but rejected by a series of publishers until Suhrkamp published it in 1960. The fact that the "Mikro-Roman", as it is designated, has been seen both as a forerunner to the "nouveau roman" and as a rare German descendent of surrealism indicates how incongruous the text must have seemed in the context of the reconstructive literary realism of early 1950s Germany.

Kutscher is situated in the kind of northern European "Gasthof", which could have existed at any time between the medieval period and the 1950s. Although he has much in common with Weiss's autobiographical narrators, Kutscher's "Erzähler" represents one of Weiss's relatively rare attempts to create a more overtly fictional perspective. The text represents Weiss's most radical reckoning with "Leere" as a destructive force. The "Kutscher" of the title is eagerly awaited throughout the text. His absence until its conclusion is one of the foundations of the narrative: "Die Zirkel von Leere und Einengung wird dem Beobachter zur Bewegung der Sprache". If we see the text's concluding "Schattenspiel" as a (potentially self-satirising) summary of many of the thematics of the 1940s prose, then the "Kutscher" himself begins to resemble an incorporation of the "Leere".

Unlike the corresponding figures in the autobiographical fiction, the text's narrator is not motivated by the possibility of establishing an "Überblick". The text opens with the narrator's view "Durch die halboffene Tür" and partiality remains a feature of his narratorial perspective. Throughout the text he listens at doors, eavesdrops and overhears snatches of conversations as the text comes to resemble a parody of the eighteenth century novel. It has often been noted that Kutscher is dominated by verbs of perception; what its narrator lacks is any capacity to interpret what he perceives. (In his notebook Weiss writes of the effect of seeing Bunuel's L'âge d'or: "ich lernte das Sehen wie eine neue Sprache" (N2 418)). Paradoxically his curiosity has no emotional component. His
determination to record exactly what is before him threatens to destroy his extreme subjectivity and reduce it to a form of objectivity, the fear of which anticipates Fluchtpunkt (116). His description of the reading of (old) newspapers could equally be applied to the text itself: "vertieft man sich in kleine, durcheinandergewürfelte Bruchstücke der Zeit, in Ereignisse ohne Anfang und ohne Ende, oft auch in der Längsrichtung oder in der Quere geteilt" (11). Mirroring the collages which intersperse the text, the narrative is constructed from a series of seemingly random episodes without concern for narrative convention or chronology.

In an anticipation of Weiss's later autobiographical fiction, Kutschers narrator finds it difficult to engage with reality. In private moments he entertains himself by placing "Salzkörner" into his eyes to produce the kind of hallucinatory visions familiar from earlier texts:


It is important to notice that elements of the Schwarze ("Leere") which he is attempting to overcome insinuate their way into the visions. Their value lies in their capacity temporarily to transform reality into something more inspirational. However, when the narrator detects what he imagines to be the body of a naked woman, his attempts to reach out to her only emphasise the unreality and self-deception of the vision, which is destroyed as soon as he tries to treat it as a palpable entity.

It is Kutscher's use of language that sets it apart from its predecessors. The fact that the narrator records conversations exactly as he hears them, as a series of unconnected phrases or ambiguous sounds, suggests communicative failure far more potently and innovatively than the muted incomprehension of Der Fremde, for example. The narrator's depiction of language as a system of empty signifiers anticipates once more the beginning of "Laokoon". Yet proximity to "Leere" gives the text a threatening edge: "Das Banale ist gefährlich geworden". Language smothers syntax, the endless listing ensuring that the reader shares the discomfort the narrator experiences in ordering his
text. As Rose Zeller has pointed out: "Die unübersehbaren Wortreihen [...] sollen den Leser hindern, Atem zu schöpfen, sich im Überblicken etwa eine Distanz zu verschaffen". The exaggerated use of genitives, signalled by the text's title, underlines the absence of a more profound connection between the characters in the "Gasthof" and the objects with which they are associated. This is also reflected in Schnee's collections of stones and teeth, one of a series of meaningless activities with which the characters pass their time. Even the narrator's act of writing is implicitly associated with such pastimes. Objects are granted a "sinister autonomy", which only emphasises the characters' alienation and their inability to communicate. Clauses which are linked together by the repeated use of "und" (eg 38-39) in an artificial attempt to produce logical sequence only emphasise its absence. The narrator's act of writing is opposed to such confusion, which is taken even further in the farcical, almost slapstick sequences later in the text. In an interview, Weiss claimed that the text was conceived as "ganz und gar realistisch", adding: "Manches im Kutscher ist vielleicht ein bißchen überzogen und wird ein wenig fieberhaft gesehen" (PWG 35-36). In the light of the absurdity which is a fixture of life in the Gasthof, the narrator's text does indeed appear realistic. He merely records what he sees and hears, in all self-consciousness trying to overcome the "sich im Nichts verlierenden Anfang" (47) that continually threatens his (and by extension Weiss's) writing. His writes out of opposition to the "Tätigkeiten ohne Ergebnise und Nutzen" which fill his days:

Mit dem Bleistift die Geschehnisse vor meinen Augen nachzeichnend, um damit dem Gesehenen zu verdeutlichen, also das Sehen zu einer Beschäftigung machend, sitze ich neben dem Schuppen auf dem Holzstoß...

He writes, as he eats, "um das plötzlich aufsteigende Gefühl der Unendlichkeit dieses Morgens zu ersticken." (67)

The "Kutscher" does not actually arrive until the final section of the text. He assumes the last place at the meal table, which has been empty from the beginning of the narrative. Intriguingly our first view is of his silhouette, associating him immediately with darkness and "Undeutlichkeit" (92). As such the "Kutscher" becomes part of the threat of emptiness which the narrator's writing is designed to counter. At first it seems
that the "Kutscher" represents the narrative closure that the text has been awaiting. However, it soon becomes clear that no satisfactory conclusion will ensue. When the narrator asks the Kutscher why the amount of coal unloaded from the coach seems far greater than the quantity it could reasonably have contained, he denies the discrepancy, later calling it a "Täuschung". Prior to this point the narrator has shown absolutely no inclination to question anything. When he does appeal for an explanation, he has no choice but to accept the unsatisfactory conclusions he is given: "Doch auch dies genügte mir, selbst wenn sowohl die Worte des Kutschers wie auch die Worte des Hausknechts einiges enthielten das der Wahrheit entsprechen mochte, nicht als Erklärung" (96).

The silhouette returns in the final scene of the text, which depicts the shadow-play of the "Kutscher" and the "Haushälterin". The description of their shadows’ copulation binds clauses and phrases together in a frantic and pedantic objectivisation of their activity. Suddenly, as genitals and genitives combine in a parody of the generative act, language develops a clarity inconceivable in Weiss’s earlier texts. The objectivity of the account is called into question, however, by its resemblance to the earlier "Salzkörner" visions. The concentration on their shadows confirms both the characters’ disassociation from their surroundings and the "Kutscher"’s connection with the disembodied "Leere". The fact that the shadows are involved in a bizarre, emotionless distortion of the sexual act reflects the self-alienation endemic in the text as a whole. In Weiss’s autobiographical narratives the narrator’s sexual impotence is a symbol of his inability to engage with human reality. _Kutscher’s_ conclusion is a bizarre mockery of that reality. When the coach leaves that same evening, still shrouded in darkness and mystery, the narrator experiences a rare feeling of emotional identification with the horse, who has been unable to recuperate sufficiently. The ceaseless activity of the horse (the conveyor of meaning?) thus parallels the relentlessness of the narration. The text breaks off at this point without punctuation, the narrator’s exhaustion finally overcoming his search for meaning.

After the apparently conventional autobiographical narratives, Weiss seemed to return to surrealism with _Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden_. However, the first references in Weiss’s _Notizbücher_ are to "Das Gespräch eines Gehenden mit sich selbst" (N1 73). The addition of two extra characters made little difference to the text, which consists of a number of unconnected "Blöcke" whose narratorial voice remains unified. The text is an exercise in pure discourse, lacking the contextual limitations against which Weiss
occasionally strains in the autobiographical texts. (Much has been made of the affinity between *Das Gespräch* and Beckett. However, there are even greater similarities with Bernhard’s autonomous monologists - I am thinking particularly of *Frost* and *Gehen*, and their association of walking with obsessive narration.) Despite Weiss’s intention to write a sequel, *Das Gespräch* seems ultimately to have represented as much of a dead end as *Kutscher*. It is perhaps sufficient to note here that *Das Gespräch* continues the autobiographical texts’ attempts to personalise the all-threatening "Leere" and counter it with language.

4 Resisting *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*

After *Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden*, Weiss concentrated on theatre. His conversion to Marxism was reflected in the development of documentary theatre and the overt politicisation of his work. His failure to dramatise the *Divina Commedia* in the late 1960s caused Weiss to attempt a prose version in 1969 (N1 665). Moreover, in a 1968 interview, he states:


(PWG 130)

*Die Ästhetik* developed from these combined motives. The Dante project became the third autobiographical text, "Das Buch eine Suche nach *mir selbst*" (N2 539), which synthesises the search for identity that is the centre of *Abschied* and *Fluchtpunkt* with the more objective, documentary impulse of the plays which succeeded *Marat/Sade*. Karl Heinz Bohrer’s paraphrase of Weiss’s explanation of his politicisation is revealing in this context: "er habe seine ursprüngliche Betroffenheit, die Suche nach Identität, nach Selbstverwirklichung in einen größeren Zusammenhang gestellt". Rather than simply forming the third part of an "autobiographische Trilogie", as some commentators have suggested, the book represents "ein ganz neuer Ansatz". It embodies the rediscovery and reaffirmation of Weiss’s artistic identity, the development of which is described in the
autobiographical texts of the 1960s.

*Die Ästhetik* is consequently both very similar to and very different from its predecessors. While the earlier texts could be (and have been) regarded "simply" as autobiographical narratives, *Die Ästhetik* is self-evidently much more besides. In an interview which preceded the publication of the first volume, Weiss described the text as a "Wunschautobiographie" (PWG 217). Although he later withdrew this characterisation, it was understandably seized upon by early commentators and has endured in criticism. However, in a letter to Manfred Haiduk written just before his death in 1982, Weiss claimed:

> Denn heute sehe ich es ja fast so, dass ich das Leben, das ich als ein Ich-Leben in der *Ästhetik* beschreibe, so gut wie "erlebt" habe, damals zumindest halb bewusst - ich sehe es immer wieder aus Briefstellen, Tagebuchaufzeichnungen, Skizzen, auch aus den gemalten Bildern - es lief irgendwo so ab, aber eben auf einer anderen Ebene. Diese andere Ebene ist es, die für den Roman hervorgehoben wurde.\(^{43}\)

Both views are somewhat disingenuous. The claim made to Haiduk, although it echoes Weiss's pre-Marxist view of exile as a universal experience, has no parallel in *Abschied* or *Fluchtpunkt*. In addition, every autobiographical fiction is by its very nature a "Wunschautobiographie" to some degree, shaped by the perspective of the "erzählendes Ich". What seems more important to me is the fact that *Die Ästhetik* represents an ideologically-motivated revision of Weiss's earlier autobiographical texts and it is as such that I wish to examine it. I intend to read *Die Ästhetik* as a self-resisting text, one which defies and undermines its own premises throughout, just as Weiss's categorisation unwittingly subverts his own intentions. This makes it particularly appropriate that the disputed "Wunschautobiographie" characterisation was self-created. The fact that, as its title indicates, the text is founded on the interplay of art and politics ensures that the tension between rebellion and orthodoxy, personal and political is central to the narrative. This double movement is characterised by the emblematic "und doch" which Peter Hannenberg derives from the text\(^{44}\) and which is most clearly demonstrated by the narrative's concluding "Konjunktiv" section. As this section indicates, *Die Ästhetik*
represents an attempt to write the all-encompassing narrative of the declining Left. In doing so, it tries to deny the indeterminacy which pervades Weiss’s pre-political prose. I wish to read *Die Ästhetik* as the ultimately unsuccessful attempt to write these self-subversive undercurrents into submission. The text resists its author. As Milan Kundera puts it, slightly flippantly: "Novelists who are more intelligent than their books should go into another line of work".45

In the first volume of *Die Ästhetik*, the narrator’s friend, Heilmann, makes the following emblematic comment:

> Wollen wir uns der Kunst, der Literatur annehmen, so müssen wir sie gegen den Strich behandeln, das heißt, wir müssten alle Vorrechte, die damit verbunden sind, ausschalten und unsre eignen Ansprüche in sie hineinlegen. (I 41)

The significance of this statement does not derive from its originality - its derivation from Benjamin (crude elements of whose thought are reflected in Heilmann’s ideas throughout the text) is clear - but from the fact that it is the foundation of the entire novel. The exhortation to approach everything "gegen den Strich" unites the poles of politics and art and transforms the process of reclaiming art into an act of resistance. However, *Die Ästhetik* occupies a strange area between ideological orthodoxy and artistic freedom, which ensures that Weiss is not always able to live up to his intentions. He attempts to inject a post-1960s pluralism into pre-war communism, often with uneasy results. With its grandiose structures and imposing "Blöcke" of prose, *Die Ästhetik* seems to be an attempt to deny the "Leere" which pervades and threatens Weiss’s pre-political prose. I hope to demonstrate that, despite these efforts, the despair and indeterminacy associated with the image of "Leere" endure into *Die Ästhetik*, where they destabilise and humanise the narrative. In effect, *Die Ästhetik* resists its own (insufficiently pluralised) orthodoxy.

*Die Ästhetik* opens with the now famous, lengthy description of the "Pergamonfries". This looks backwards as well as forwards. At the beginning of *Fluchtpunkt* we read:

> Ich erinnerte mich an die Begeisterung, die Uli vor dem Pergamonfries in Berliner Museum gezeigt hatte, und bei einem Besuch in London vor dem Dogenkopf
Thus, from its opening Die Ästhetik constitutes a revision of earlier values. The later work judges art according to its usefulness in the class war; its narrator’s views are diametrically opposed to those of his predecessor in Fluchtpunkt. Similarly, Die Ästhetik does not open with the "ich" of the earlier texts, but with an unspecified community, indicated by the opening words "Rings um uns". It is not until halfway through the second page of the text (and these are large pages) that we are given any indication of who is signified by the "uns". Indeed, at the beginning of the text it is impossible to distinguish the hands and arms of the observers from the limbs of the figures in the "Fries" they are observing. This indicates the centrality to the text of the interaction between art and its viewer or reader. From the beginning certain characteristics of the "Pergamonfries" are emphasised: its interacting figures, its "leere Fläche" and the interplay of part and whole. The reader is reminded of Hieronymus in Fluchtpunkt, who creates an "Universalphbuch" out of "gefundenen Bruchstücken" (139). In Die Ästhetik, the "Fries" is described in the following terms: "Jede Einzelheit ihren Ausdruck bewahrend, mürbe Bruchstücke, aus denen die Ganzheit sich ablesen ließ, rauhe Stümpfe neben geschliffner Glätte, belebt vom Spiel der Muskeln und Sehnen" (I 7). Thus the "Fries" mirrors the novel, which is pervaded by self-contradiction, fragmentation and uncertainty, despite Weiss’s determination to elevate political discourse to the status of an indisputable meta-language.

Die Ästhetik’s narrator is a peculiarly muted presence in the opening description of the "Pergamonfries". He is both individual and symbol, functioning as a recording machine, an intermediary between his friends - Coppi, the authentic, orthodox worker and Heilmann, the precocious middle class intellectual. At the beginning of the text, the date is given as the 22nd September 1937, when Heilmann is only fifteen years old. The precision of the historical reference and the use of real figures forms part of the complex interplay of the fictional, the autobiographical and the historical in the text, as Weiss’s notebook entry, which recalls Bernhard’s defence in the Holzfällen controversy, indicates: "Ich benutze die authentischen Namen im Roman als Chiffren" (N2 117). In contrast to earlier Weiss texts, the narrator derives existential security from rooting his identity in
ideological conviction. The interest of the opening "Pergamonfries" section lies in the fact that it describes a (dialectical) group reaction, rather than the individual response of previous texts. The novel begins with the "Fries" because it paradigmatically demonstrates the irrevocable interconnection between art and resistance, aesthetics and politics. When, at the end of the section, Heilmann points out the reversal inherent in displaying the Fries in a museum ("Außenflächen zu Innenwänden wurden" (I 15)), this reinforces the reader's parallel impression that the novel is founded on a dialectic of assertion and subversion and is thus repeatedly turned inside out. Heilmann goes on to relate rather precariously the theory of relativity to the fascist threat, both of which demand "eine Umstellung unserer Orientierung, eine neue Positionsangabe" (I 15). The remainder of the novel concerns itself with such re-orientations, just as the novel as a whole represents a revision of Weiss's preceding fictions.

Before the narrator leaves for Spain, the three friends become almost a single figure, a group narrator; their experiences and opinions merge into a single statement. This is in fact a technique used throughout the novel. The absence of speech marks, the dominance of reported speech, the monologues which are only gradually attributed and the imposing "Blöcke" of prose combine radically to reduce demarcations between speakers. In this sense the novel is the work of a composite communist narrator. Indeed the opening description of the viewers' response to the "Fries" implies "den Typus des kollektiven Lesers". Although the narrator develops and increases in confidence, particularly in the second volume, he remains an emotionless, largely sexless figure, "ein unbeschriebenes Blatt" (I 305). The novel's characterisation of the Kafkan hero could be applied equally to the narrator himself:

Sein Held war anonym, eine Chiffre, nur die Gedanken waren es, die ihre Bilder entwickelten, die sich foltern ließen von den Grenzen, die ihnen gestellt waren, und die nichts andres wollten, als diese Grenzen zu erweitern, zu sprengen.

(I 182)

The narrator's admiration is an early indication of his potential resistance to the stifling claims of established procedure. Despite this implicit exhortation to overcome limitations and unlike Weiss's earlier texts, Die Ästhetik offers few opportunities for the expression
of individuality. Although the text revels in detail - Weiss refers to it as a "Katalog" in his notebook (N2 554) - information is almost exclusively related to the history of resistance and revolution. The novel's "formale Askese" is reflected in the deadly seriousness of the narrator and his companions; they do not eat, love or laugh. Despite the early notebook reminder: "in allen Dingen das Komische sehen" (N2 20), Karl-Heinz Götz Ke much more accurately categorises Die Ästhetik as "der am wenigsten ironische unter den großen Romanen des 20. Jahrhunderts". This high seriousness is one of the novel's major deficiencies. Unlike Fluchtpunkt, in which artistic activity is associated with both enjoyment and despair, in Die Ästhetik the reader gains little sense of the potential pleasure involved in revolutionary activity. It seems that Weiss is more concerned with creating the kind of inspirational artefact which its narrator discovers in the work of Géricault or Kafka.

Art and ideology

Towards the end of the second volume of Die Ästhetik, Brecht explains his attraction to Kafka's writing:

Mit dem Prozeß und dem Roman Amerika in der Hand, [...] sagte er, daß eigentlich nur das Fragment die Prägung von Echtheit habe, weil es der innersten Funktion des Produzierens am nächsten käme, nämlich einem Produzieren, daß dem Atmen, dem bloßen Dasein entspreche, und einer flüchtigen, eben durchlebten Bewußtseinsperiode Ausdruck gäbe. (II 314)

This description, which recalls the early characterisation of the "Fries", reflects the fact that, by this stage of the novel, artistic activity has become as necessary as breathing to the narrator. However, at first sight the monolithic structure of Die Ästhetik appears to be opposed to Brecht's endorsement of the fragment. It is the subcurrent of "Leere", which repeatedly threatens to undermine the text and its insights, that supplies the narrative's self-resisting fragmentation. Art becomes the basis for a new class identity: "Unser Studieren war von Anfang an Auflehnung. Wir sammelten Material zu unserer Verteidigung und zur Vorbereitung einer Eroberung" (I 53). As John Milfull argued with
reference to the "10 Arbeitspunkte", ideological commitment confirms rather than undermines the artist's sense of vocation: "what has changed is not so much the conviction as the necessity of the artist." The novel itself was written partly as a result of the life-threatening illness described with such rage in Rekonvaleszenz, a text it also resembles in its refusal to submit to "Selbstzerstörung" (II 325). I would like now to examine in greater detail the view of art which is established in the first part of the text.

It cannot be emphasised too often that the novel's approach to art is founded on re-evaluation. As we have seen, this is made clear as early as the opening description of the "Pergamonfries". The description, with its long, interrelated sentences which mime the content of the "Fries", could equally be applied to the novel itself (Weiss's "Universalbuch"). The reader is confronted simultaneously with the complexity of both the "Fries" and the prose describing it, challenged immediately to make sense of the impressions hurtling out of the text. Like everything else in the novel, art is created out of a series of "Gegensatzpaaren" (I 40). Historical parallels are drawn between the ancient work of art, the moment of observation, the moment of narration (which is not made explicit until the end of the third volume) and the later perspective of the reader. The process in which the art of antiquity is opened out and reinvigorated by its confrontation with modernity has obvious parallels with "Laokoon". Art attains both contemporary and historical relevance:

In mythischer Verkleidung erschienen historische Ereignisse, ungeheuer greifbar, Schrecken, Bewunderung erregend, doch verständlich nicht als von Menschen hervorgerufen, sondern hinnehmbar als überpersönliche Macht, die Geknechtete, Versklavte wollte... (I 9)

In Die Ästhetik, art is always depicted as arising from a dialectic of interpretation and reinterpretation. By reading into the "Fries" a historical depiction of social inequality (which also applies to modernity), it gains renewed significance for its viewers and highlights what T.S. Eliot calls "the present moment of the past" in "Tradition and the Individual Talent". Echoing Weiss's early paintings and "Laokoon", the "Fries" becomes an object capable of evoking horror as well as admiration in a "Metamorphose der Qual" (I 8). It encourages resistance and self-questioning. In Heilmann's words:
"die einzige Freiheit, die es gäbe, sei die Freiheit der Kunst" (I 20). Once we realise that it is largely Heilmann's interpretation of the "Fries" which we are reading, we also recognise that his account focuses on one particular feature: Herakles's absence. In this way the "Leere" asserts itself from the beginning of the narrative. It is significant that the only mortal figure is missing: "Coppi nannte es ein Omen, daß grade er, der unsresgleichen war, fehlte, und daß wir uns nun selbst ein Bild dieses Fürsprachers des Handelns zu machen hatten" (I 11). Coppi’s ideological association of Herakles with action and change (an identification with which Heilmann would no doubt concur) contains none of Heilmann’s intellectual mysticism. The mythical figure is associated with both action and "Gerechtigkeit" (I 25), recalling the messianic aura that surrounds Weiss’s Marat. The three young communists see their future as a form of vocation: "unsre Hauptaufgabe sahn wir in der politischen Aktivität" (I 17). They regard their antifascism as an attempt to restore Herakles, the symbol of action, to his former position, i.e. to fill the "Leerstelle". Thus, even the threat of the void which pervades all of Weiss’s work is reinterpreted ideologically. We should also read this task in the light of their later attempts to adapt and develop "Urteilsfähigkeit". In a note which stems from the planning of the novel, Weiss writes: "Ich gehe vom Fehlenden aus und versuche, Zusammenhänge herzustellen" (N2 51). In fact, Herakles’s absence becomes one of the central motifs of the text and an important element of the "Fries"s capacity to inspire:

Alles, was seit der Begegnung mit dem Altar von Pergamon besprochen worden war, verdichtete sich zu einem Grundbild, zu einer These, zu einer Lebenshaltung, aus der sich die bevorstehenden Schritte ableiten ließen. (I 169)

Like everything else in the novel, art is always viewed in political terms. At the beginning of the text, the political has precedence: "Unser Weg heraus aus der geistigen Unterdrückung war ein politischer." (I 56) However, the narrator’s view of what is politically acceptable is much more flexible than official communist party policy. As the narrator’s political and artistic certainty develops, he becomes confident enough to incorporate Dante and such modernist artists as Klee and Kafka into the revolutionary canon. In fact, he uses what we have already seen to be one of Weiss’s favourite metaphors to equate the Divina Commedia with Joyce’s Ulysses, "den wir erst
bruchstückhaft, als eine Art Rebus, kennengelernt hatten" (I 79), a characterisation which also implicitly aligns Die Ästhetik itself (which of course derived from Weiss’s Dante project) with the avant-garde novel. Tellingly, few of the artists whose influence on the narrator is emphasised in the novel directly share his political convictions. It has been claimed that young proletarian communists in Germany in the late 1930s would not have had access to the works of many of the avant-garde artists to whom the narrator refers. This overlooks the composite and representative nature of the novel’s narrative voice(s) and Weiss’s concern to create a more subversive and open version of Marxism. It is clear that the narrator’s identification of art with social change is both naive and perceptive:

Die vorläufige Vereinzelung der Revolution [...] zwang auch die Kunst in eine Position, in der es drum ging, jedes Werk als soziale Waffe zu gebrauchen, jede Aussage genau auf unmittelbare Nützlichkeit in Abwehr und Produktion zu untersuchen.

(I 67)

This indicates how far we have travelled from the apolitical position adopted at the beginning of Fluchtpunkt.

It is Die Ästhetik’s treatment of Kafka’s influence which most succinctly demonstrates Weiss’s development since Fluchtpunkt. The text’s discussion of Das Schloß occurs in the context of one of the many debates about the avant garde, in which the primacy of scepticism and "Ungewißheit" (I 171) is asserted. The fact that Kafka is used once again as a paradigm of the modernist novel underlines the fact that the impact of Das Schloß in Die Ästhetik is as intense as that of Der Prozeß on Fluchtpunkt’s narrator. However, the interpretative framework within which that impact occurs is completely different:

Das Dorf, in das der Landvermesser kam, war der Wohnplatz derer, die nichts in Frage stellten. [...] Sie alle, die hier unten im Dorf lebten, auch der hinzugereiste Landvermesser, nahmen den aufgezwungenen Abstand zwischen ihrer Welt und der Welt der Herren als etwas Unverbrüchliches hin.

(I 175)

The narrator depicts Das Schloß as a portrait of a community in denial, whereas,
significantly, in Fluchtpunkt the attraction is to Der Prozeß, with its concentration on the alienated individual. However, Die Ästhetik's reading of Kafka is nevertheless predicated on the necessity of the (individual) reader's input. The reader has to question, to supply the counter-argument in order to overcome the text's resistance to interpretation. In this respect it is a model for Die Ästhetik, which is torn between the need to impose a political interpretation upon events and the desire for artistic autonomy. The reader is positioned between the two impulses. Weiss's narrator emphasises Kafka's implicit advocacy of self-(re)assessment in the reader: "Was in Kafkas Buch zu lesen war, versetzte mich nicht in Hoffnungslosigkeit, sondern beschämte mich" (I 177). Kafka's depiction of subservience is a spur to (re)action. The fact that, like Weiss's overtly anti-capitalist theatrical adaptations of Der Prozeß, this is only a partial reading of Kafka's work is related to Die Ästhetik's acknowledgement of the inevitability of interpretative partiality. Weiss's praise of Kafka stands in opposition to the conventional Marxist condemnation of his work for its "decadence" in the 1930s realism debate. The narrator's attempts to balance his constant exposure to such inflexibility and to acknowledge Kafka's "gesteigerten Wirklichkeitsbild" (I 177) and multiplicity mirrors the text's broader attempt to encompass both orthodoxy and radicalism. Like Weiss's own early prose, elements of which endure into Die Ästhetik, Kafka's writing contains "eine Kraft von jener Art, in der real Erlebtes übergeht in die Bilder eines Traums" (I 180). This gives it particular relevance in the 1930s: "Das Labyrinthische und auch das Gleichnishaft waren uns ebenso nah wie die Auseinandersetzung mit dem, was sich unmittelbar spürbar vor uns befand" (I 182). It is unlikely that such (Nietzschean) faith in "das Gleichnishaft" and outspoken criticism of the tenets of socialist realism would prove popular in the circles in which the narrator is beginning to move in 1937. Such criticism makes clear that the "gewöhnlichen Denkbehinderungen" (I 184) which frustrate the narrator do not derive purely from his exposure to the mendacity of fascism.

The tensions within Die Ästhetik's retrospective view of the inflexibility of the 1930s, which Weiss attempts to identify with "das Thema der Ambivalenz, der Kontroverse, des Widerspruchs, unter dem wir lebten." (I 184), demonstrate the underlying idiosyncrasy of his version of collectivity. The special attention which the narrator gives to art in the novel is part of his self-discovery, a quest familiar from the other texts I have examined. Engagement with art is part of the "Wißbegierde" (I 183)
which colours his and his friends’ attitudes. In the first part of the first volume of the novel in particular, they are concerned with the (artistic) evaluation of truth:

Beim Suchen nach Ausdruck mußte erst das Zerschlagne, Zertrennte, mit dem wir behaftet waren, überwunden werden. Wir fragten uns, was das Wahre in der Kunst sei, und fanden, es müsse das Material sein, das durch die eignen Sinne und Nerven gegangen war. (I 183)

This claim contradicts the awareness of multiplicity emphasised in the passage quoted above. The fluctuating search for the authoritative stance, the "Überblick", is as problematic and central to Die Ästhetik as it is to the earlier texts. We should note in particular the association of truth with the accuracy of personal, sensuous perception - the method that dominates Kutscher so ambivalently.

Visual art is at least as important as literature to the narrator. His interpretation of Picasso’s Guernica concludes both the first volume and the narrator’s account of his experience during the Spanish civil wars. Guernica echoes the "Pergamonfries" and Géricault’s Das Floß der Medusa, which also has a formative impact in both Canetti’s and Leiris’s autobiographical narratives, in its depiction of "Zerschmettrung und Erneurung, Verzweiflung und Hoffnung" (I 332). These elements indicate the deeply divided nature of the text, in which political certainties are perpetually under threat from the prevailing "Leere". This is underlined when the narrator indicates a striking parallel between Guernica and the "Pergamonfries":

An die eindringlichen Zeichnungen des Pegasus denkend, fragten wir uns, ob nicht grade durch das Fehlende, durch die erschreckende Aushöhlung, auf ein Hauptmotiv des Gemäldes hingewiesen werden sollte. (I 334)

Viewing the picture with Jacques Ayschmann, who left Abschied for Spain, the narrator accepts the critics’ view of the "Unschaubarkeit und Geschlossenheit" of the picture. However, this opposes the notion of the inarticulable "Fehlende", which is such an important element of the picture’s fascination. He regards the painting, which indicates Picasso’s faith in the truthfulness and immortality of art (see I 335), as a challenge to the
viewer. This accords with the hard-won conception of literature as "Notwendigkeit" which marks the narrator's childhood. The impact of Guernica is related to its "fehlende Sicherheit", which, in contrast to the immediacy of its effect of the viewer and like Kafka's Das Schloß, "gab den Ausschlag für ein Denken, das mit der spätbürgerlichen Gesellschaft untergehn würde" (I 340). Conversely, the reader might relate the absence of security to the text’s underlying and self-resisting uncertainty. The narrator’s optimism is constantly offered to the reader, as if in invitation to be read "gegen den Strich". For the narrator, like Spain, communism and indeed the novel itself, Guernica’s significance lies in its potentiality: "Guernica stand am Anfang einer Reihe, deren Ende noch nicht abzusehn war" (I 348). This echoes the narrator’s attraction to Géricault: "Was vital in Géricault war, stand auf der Seite der Erneurung" (II 23). Picasso’s painting is associated with the loss of Spain. This necessitates a new beginning and a new realism: "hier wurden wir nicht mehr gebraucht" (I 360) which reflects the novel’s self-revising dynamic. Nevertheless, the narrator’s experience of exile intensifies in the remainder of the text.

The threat of exile

The move to Spain in the second part of the first volume of Die Ästhetik introduces the theme of exile, so familiar from Weiss’s early prose. Where in Abschied and Fluchtpunkt, Weiss’s narrators are able to limit the potentially alienating effect of exile by regarding it as an extension and confirmation of their internal feelings of self-displacement, in Die Ästhetik the experience of exile is justified by being motivated by political conviction. Although the volume opens with a characteristically impressionistic description of Gaudi’s cathedral in Barcelona, the intensity of the experience of war means that the aesthetic is generally subsumed by the political. The desperate confrontation with reality introduces a different kind of truth: "Wir kämpfen um die Wahrheit, um eine bessere Zukunft, sagte Gomez" (I 244). The narratorial voice absorbs such views with characteristic equanimity. The truth is now identified completely with the struggle, part of the peculiar spell cast by the Spanish civil war in the 1930s. The concentration on the future and the determination "to build the Just City" indicate how inextricably hopes and aspirations were bound up in the conflict. Weiss often referred
to Spain as his generation’s Vietnam. It is part of the peculiarity of his political rewriting of his life that his intense engagement with the injustice of the Vietnamese war is transferred retrospectively into a response to the Spanish conflict, a conflict which had little interest for Weiss at the time.

The narrator’s political certainty enables him to experience a feeling of community and continuity unavailable to the previous narrators of Weiss’s prose: "Unsre Zugehörigkeit hatten wir in der politischen Entscheidung gefunden, dieses Handlungsfeld, dieses taktische Bild" (I 267). This is countered by Hodann’s more considered and familiar conception of the difference between political and non-political exile:

Der Unterschied zwischen einem Emigranten und einem politischen Verbannten ist, sagte er, daß der eine sich in eine Fremdheit, in ein Vakuum versetzt fühlt, daß ihm das Gewohnte und Heimatliche auf eine schmerzliche Art fehlt, […] während der andre nie sein Ausgestoßensein akzeptiert, stets die Gründe seiner Vertreibung im Auge behält und um die Veränderung kämpft, die ihm die Rückkehr einmal ermöglichen soll. (I 273)

This passage illuminates the fundamental difference between Fluchtpunkt and Die Ästhetik. The apolitical exile of the earlier prose is identified characteristically with "Fremdheit", "Vakuum" and later "Funktionslosigkeit", all of which suggest the familiar emptiness of the experience of exile. In order to neutralise this threat, the narrator has constantly to remind himself of the political beliefs which motivate it. This is possible as long as the exile is associated with the Spanish cause. Once the narrator is forced by the threat of Nazism to flee in the second volume to Sweden, where political activity is illegal and less directly effective, he is caught between the two definitions of exile. The disillusionment which results from the failure in Spain repeatedly threatens to mutate into the "Vakuum" which they are trying to deny.

Hodann’s balanced assessment indicates that he represents much more of a "Vorbild" than he was in Fluchtpunkt. In that text, Hoderer represents morality; his political affiliations directly challenge the narrator’s apolitical solipsism. In Die Ästhetik their shared commitment enables Hodann to become a kind of Vergil to the narrator’s Dante, particularly during their time in Spain. It is part of the novel’s complex rewriting.
of history and biography that Weiss distorts his (already fictionalised) friendship with the real Hodann, whom he met in Sweden, by pre-dating it to Spain. In Fluchtpunkt Hoderer is associated with orthodox communism. In Die Ästhetik Weiss’s broader understanding of politics ensures that Hodann’s political views are more heterodox, part of the revised form of Marxism that the novel proposes so uneasily. It is his friendship with Hodann that enables the narrator quickly to come to terms with the situation in Spain. Hodann is committed to communism, but not at the expense of truth:

Er wandte sich an Diaz und sagte, daß der Macht des Dogmatismus verschärfte historische, wissenschaftliche, philosophische Bildung entgegengestellt werden müsse, grade in einer zugespitzten Situation sei die Meinungsausserung unumgänglich. (I 225)

This is very much indicative of the general thrust of the novel as a whole. Hodann’s maturity, his political commitment and background in psychoanalysis (with its parallels to the self-examination central to autobiographical narrative) give him an emblematic authority during the extended process of self-discovery which marks the narrator’s exile experience. However, for the narrator, his emphasis on complexity and contradiction can be discouraging and confusing. At times the alienation of exile leads to self-doubt:

Eine Leere war angewachsen zur Besinnungslosigkeit, die innre Not all derer, die nicht fähig gewesen waren, ihre Lage zu erkennen und einzugreifen kraft einer politischen Entscheidung, fand Ersatz, Trost, alles, was jetzt gelesen und ausgesprochen wurde, war ein Zeugnis umfassender Selbsttäuschung. (I 301)

The proximity of "Leere" to "Selbsttäuschung" is one of the constants of Weiss’s early autobiographical narratives, but it is relatively rare for the narrator to articulate it so directly in Die Ästhetik. It is surely evidence of the disillusionment that persists into the second volume’s description of the disorientating retreat to Paris which follows the disappointments of Spain. When the narrator is forced to flee to Sweden, the setting for most of the remainder of the text, exile has become a political necessity, rather than an act of choice. It begins to threaten the narrator more directly: "das politische Exil hatte
etwas weggefressen in mir" (II 202). Conversely, however, he gains more of a distinct presence in this second volume, as he begins to contribute to the kind of exchanges he previously only recorded. His arrival in Paris has some of the epiphanic impact of the parallel event in *Fluchtpunkt*:

Fast alle, die dazu beigetragen hatten, mein Denken zu formen, waren hier wohnhaft gewesen, daß sie das, was ich sah, mir ihrem Blick geprüft, daß sie diese Straße überschritten hatten, konnte mir einen Augenblick lang Forderungen auferlegen, die kaum tragbar waren, ermutigte mich dann aber, denn auch von ihnen war keiner im Flug über seinen Anfang hinausgelangt, und gerade sie, die mir am nächsten waren, hatten Zeugnisse ihrer Mühen und Entbehrungen hinterlassen. (1120-21)

The reference to his heroes' "Zeugnisse" is an early intimation of the desire to record his experience, a longing realised during the Brecht section of the second part of the volume. It becomes important to the narrator not only to produce a document of his "Mühen und Entbehrungen" but also to record the difficulties of those involved in the anti-fascist struggle, who did not survive to tell the tale. In this way the guilt of the survivor, which so pervades the pre-political writing begins to be overcome.

Exile's destabilising effects are countered by the narrator's experience in the Swedish factory in which he works, where identity is seen as a function of community: "Über das betäubende Dröhnen, über alles, was uns niederbrechen wollte, hatten wir uns hinwegzusetzen, um zu uns selbst zu finden" (II 94). Such a claim would have been unthinkable in an earlier text. It is only with the support of others that the narrator gains the capacity to avoid the kind of "Selbsteinschränkung" (II 107) which restricted development in his father's generation. However, the threat of failure remains constant. Katz's image of the "Schnür [...] an denen wir hängen" (II 65) recalls the precarious and ambiguous conclusion of Weiss's early play, *Der Turm*. Whereas at times, for example in his conversations with Rosalinde, the narrator is able to establish an identity separate from the group, elsewhere a certain vulnerability shows through: "Meine Herkunft hing mir wieder, wie bei jedem Versuch, zu mir selbst zu finden, wie ein Gewicht an, immer stieß ich auf diese Grundbedingung, entrechtet, stimmlos zu sein" (II 173). This
reinforces the impression that the novel functions as much as a text of self-discovery as any of Weiss's preceding fictions. The narrator struggles to develop from his origins (like his predecessors), caught between group and individual identity. When for example he emphasises the interrelation of dreams and revolution, he is straying beyond orthodoxy:

... bei unserer Bemühung, eine neue Lebensform zu finden, stießen wir auf jene, die verlangten, daß die kommende Revolution total zu sein hatte, daß der ganze Mensch, von den Impulsen des Traums bis in die praktischen Handlungen, davon ergriffen werden müsse. (II 55)

This insistence on the totality of revolution is perhaps misleading, but in its combination of external and internal it combines the pre-political and the Marxist Weiss in the kind of partial reconciliation that is one of the goals of the novel. The discussion of surrealism, which forms the context for these remarks, considerably broadens the tenets of socialist realism once again. It is clear that Weiss's sympathies are on the side of Münzenberg's claim: "daß der Revolutionär die Fähigkeit zum Träumen besitzen müsse." (II 62) Dreams are both aspirations and representations of the irrational. Münzenberg is a parallel figure to Hodann in his effect on the narrator. Both commit suicide.

The second part of the second volume is devoted to the narrator's association with Brecht. Exaggerating Weiss's life experience, the narrator is introduced to Brecht by Hodann and becomes one of the many "Mitarbeiter" who work on the projected "Engelbrecht" play. Brecht is also associated with an idiosyncratic version of Marxism. His overbearing authority, his ability to exploit those around him, his charm and his egotism simultaneously seduce and repel the narrator. There is no doubt, however, that the "ungebundne Phantasie" (II 256) of Brecht's circle contributes to the development towards his "neue Tätigkeit als ein Chronist, der gemeinsames Denken widergab" (II 306). This demonstrates Weiss's uneasy attempt to reconcile the solitariness of the writer with the collective goals of political commitment. Despite the narrator's suspicions that intellectual labour may lack the authenticity of manual work, it is clear that Weiss's interest is predominantly in the artist. Although the novel repeatedly offers detailed descriptions of political uprisings and tedious histories of workers' movements, the prose
comes most alive in its lengthy interpretations of paintings and books. There are no accounts of factory life. It is the narrator's intellectual engagement with the figure of Engelbrecht which has the most profound life-enhancing impact on the narrator.

I do not want to examine the Engelbrecht drama in detail, rather its effect on the narrator and his self-image. Before he meets Brecht, the narrator offers a picture of the linguistic confusion which characterises displacement, echoing "Laokoon" once again:

\[
\text{Und da vernahm ich etwas von dem Schwall der Geräusche, die, in wenigen Versen gebannt, alle Verlorenheit, alles Exil enthielten. In Paris schon war dieses Tönen auf mich zu gekommen, ohne daß ich noch dessen Herkunft zu bestimmen vermochte...} \quad (\text{II 123})
\]

This sense of disorientation is heightened by its place in a reverie in which the narrator imagines a conversation with Heilmann and Coppi. As long as he works in the factory, although his Swedish improves, he continues to lack an inner connection with the language. In contrast, the intense engagement with the Engelbrecht material, as well as mirroring the events of the 1940s, has two interrelated effects on the narrator. Firstly, his intense engagement with the history of resistance to oppression in Sweden gives the narrator an insight into Sweden's past:

\[
\text{Während der Beschäftigung mit dem Engelbrektstück war etwas wie Zugehörigkeit zu diesem Land in mir entstanden, ich sah mich ansässig werden in Schweden, Deutschland hatte mit meiner Herkunft nichts mehr zu tun...} \quad (\text{II 255})
\]

This sudden, positive re-evaluation of exile in terms of non-national "Zugehörigkeit" is reminiscent of the conclusion of \textit{Fluchtpunkt}. Secondly, the reinterpretation in turn leads to a revision of his attitude towards language. The work on the "Engelbrechtstück" is done in German; his day to day existence is Swedish. Thus, different internal and external languages are finally able to coexist to a degree which remains an aspiration in "Laokoon":

\[
\text{Nur die Sprache, die ich mit mir ins Exil getragen hatte, diese Sprache, die beim}
\]

179
When Brecht abandons the Engelbrecht project, the narrator decides to complete it himself. His account, his fictionalisation of history, takes up much of the remainder of the second volume. In this way, he takes the first steps towards becoming the narrator of the novel we are reading. Significantly, his self-reinvention as writer parallels his overcoming of the linguistic confusion of exile, as it does in the earlier prose (although both "Laokoon" and Fluchtpunkt are complicated by the opposing notion of the "Bild").

The process of self-realisation is effected in familiar terms, as language becomes "ein Instrument, zugehörig einer Weltwissenschaft" (II 306).

Gegen-Archiv

Burkhardt Lindner's characterisation of Die Ästhetik as a "Gegen-Archiv zu einer Geschichte, die die Sieger auf dem Rücken der Besiegten geschrieben haben" captures both the novel's self-resisting dynamic and its function as a record of the forgotten heroes of anti-fascism. This is most clearly demonstrated in the third volume of the novel, which largely depicts the contribution of women. In this way the narrator is able to concentrate on the "mythischen Unheil[s]" (III 27), which has been a subtext of the novel from the beginning. Having overcome the threat associated with exile to some extent by transforming himself into a "Chronist", the narrator is able to return to the background of the text.

In the first volume of the novel the narrator's mother has a subservient role, which contrasts with her husband's political involvement and his laborious accounts of the 1918 uprisings. However, she displays a sensitivity that is unequal to the horrors of war. After the occasionally clumsy emotional manipulation of Die Ermittlung, Weiss discovers in the figure of the narrator's mother a more subtle method of addressing the horrors of the Holocaust. The narrator of Die Ästhetik shares neither the middle class nor the half-Jewish origin of Weiss's previous narrators or indeed of Weiss himself. Nevertheless,
his mother comes to identify herself with the fate of the Jews. The process begins in the first volume. Symbolically banished from the garden by their landlady, who assumes from their appearance that they are Jews, his mother does not dispute the assumption. This is the first indication of the text's enduring association of Jewishness with injustice and sacrifice. The threat is highlighted by the calm description that follows of the murder of a harmless Jewish tramp. It is interesting to note that the narrator of Weiss's last novel is much more self-reliant (due to his involvement in politics) than his predecessors. His family is no longer seen only in terms of personal alienation but in the broader context of history.

The shaping event of the third volume occurs when the narrator's mother is imprisoned as a Jew and almost sent to a concentration camp. The experience destroys her mental and emotional equilibrium. She comes to represent the irrationality which is an irrepressible element of existence, particularly in times of war, and which resists Marxism's synthesising explication. The beginning of the volume is depicted from the mother's perspective. She is unable to decide whether she is kneeling in snow or sand, such is her loss of balance. Her face is "leer und stumpf" (III 7) - the adjectives reflecting "Leere"'s association with the inexpressible in "Laokoon". Accordingly, the mother loses the ability to speak. In Die Ästhetik loss of language is associated not with internal alienation or exile, as it is in Weiss's earlier prose, but with the deadly impact of historical events. In fact, like all of Weiss's prose, we can read Die Ästhetik as the embodiment of the struggle to overcome the threat of silence ("Leere") with language. Later, Hodann suggests that she has returned to a pre-lingual state, a dream language of "wenige Worte, fast nur Bilder" (III 149), which she cannot articulate. The terms of this description and the following passage are familiar: "Was meine Mutter am Leben hielt, das war dieses Einverständnis, dieses stillschweigende Akzeptieren ihrer Abwesenheit, ihres Verweilens im Abgrund" (III 19). The description of her as a "Seherin, doch nicht im Sinn von Begnadung, sondern von furchtbarer Verdamnis" (III 25) indicates further that, like Wolf's Kassandra, she has access to insight which is linguistically inexpressible. It is this insight which slowly destroys her. The process recalls the "Traumrealismus" of the early prose in which Alfons Söllner detects an opposition to the "naturwüchsigen Neigung zur Verdrängung traumatischer Erfahrungen". When the narrator meets the writer Karin Boye soon afterwards, she identifies with and recognises his mother's
extraordinary sensitivity in a way which is not available to the narrator's father, who is limited by language and rationality. The first description of Boye associates her with the mother: "Die innre Leere, von der sie sprach, der Zusammenbruch, von dem sie erfaßt worden war, verstand ich nicht als Zeichen des Todesverlangens, sondern als Folge der geistigen Anspannung" (III 22). However, it becomes more and more difficult to live with this kind of insight. The "Leere" eats away inside her, as exile had inside the narrator. It also affects Boye's work. Writing for Boye is, as it is for the narrator, a "Suche nach Wahrheit" (III 38), an attempt to come to terms with the horror of events. Unlike him, she fails. Her suicide confirms that it is not only her life as a writer that is destroyed as a consequence. In contrast, for the narrator writing is opposed to the kind of uncertainty which is an inescapable element of exile. Writing is both self-confirmation and self-creation:

Als einer, dem nie gehörte, was er produzierte, sah ich beim Schreiben den ersten eignen Wert entstehn, doch gleichzeitig war auch eine Unsicherheit in mir aufgekommen, die Boye zu den Grundeigenschaften der schöpferischen Arbeit rechnen wollte, ich hingegen sah sie bedingt durch die ständig drohende ökonomische Notlage. (III 29)

The beginning of its final volume submits to the "Unsicherheit" which has been so defiantly (if unsuccessfully) resisted hitherto. Unfortunately, like the narrator's mother, Boye is simply unable to come to terms with the war:

Die Schuld, die sie in sich trug, bezog sich weniger auf die sexuellen Konflikte als darauf, beteiligt zu sein am Unvermögen der Menschen, der Entwicklung des Staats zum Mordinstrument hin Einhalt zu gebieten. (III 38)

This could also apply to Die Ästhetik, which operates in opposition to the unquestioning acceptance of history, as we have seen. When the narrator states: "ich rekonstruierte ihre Person" (III 36), he is not only overcoming the "Leere" that caused her depression and the absence which results from her death. He is also articulating the method of the novel as a whole, in which both history and orthodox Marxism are resisted and undermined by
the subcurrent of uncertainty and undecidability. It is Hodann who is able as ever to assist the narrator in making sense of this indeterminacy. He situates art in the realm of uncertainty between openness and closure:

Die Grenze zwischen dem sich Verschließen und dem sich Öffnen, was eine Heilung verspreche, sei in der Kunst stets vorhanden und spiegle sich in der Neigung zur Melencolia. Fast sei es so, daß uns in einem Kunstwerk mehr als der Aufschwung dieses Versinken im Unbenennbaren ergreife. (III 132)

Art is granted autonomy, it "setze dort ein, wo alle Philosophien und Ideologien aufhören." (III 134) Hodann extends the link between artistic activity and the insight of the narrator’s mother by stressing the interrelationship between art and memory, for it is the inability to escape the horror of memory that causes his mother’s breakdown and death. In his notebook Weiss claims: "Die Gesamtkunst ist unser Erinnern (Mnemosyne)" (N2 223). As autobiographical narrative, Die Ästhetik itself is constructed out of a combination of Weiss’s own fictionalised memories and the forgotten experiences of the survivors of the events it depicts:

Die Mneme, beschützt von der Gottin Mnemosyne, leite uns zu den künstlerischen Handlungen an, und je mehr wir von den Erscheinungen der Welt in uns aufgenommen hätten, zu desto reichern Kombinationen könnten wir sie bringen, zu der Vielfalt eben, aus der sich der Stand unserer Kultur ablesen lasse. (III 134)

The distance we have travelled from Fluchtpunkt’s association of "Vielfalt" with "die Möglichkeit einer totalen Kunst" (101) is obvious.

Lotte Bischoff is a counter-figure to these portraits of defeated women. Her allegiance to the communist cause, for which she has sacrificed the relationship with her daughter, is strong enough to resist the upheavals and displacements associated with the anti-fascist struggle. She shares the other women’s insight into the self-deception inherent in "Visionen und Utopien" (III 85) but differs in that she is able to find a source of balance (see III 89) which enables her to survive. The fact that Bischoff survives Coppi
and Heilmann, with whom she is working, is testimony to her resilience and enables her to provide the source for the account of the "Hadeswanderung" which takes up most of the final section of the novel.

The description of the "Hadeswanderung" with its harrowing execution of most of its protagonists, including Coppi and Heilmann, is intimately related to the "Tortur" motif which pervades Weiss's work. Although the suffering of the mother and Boye, as well as Stahlmann's account of his experiences in South-East Asia, prepare the reader for the horrific executions, the neutrality of its narrative tone carries great emotional power. This section of the text begins with a re-evaluation of the Herakles legend with which the novel began. Coppi is characteristically blunt: "wir brauchen die Mythen nicht, die uns verkleinern wollen, wir genügen uns selbst. Und Heilmann darauf, wir können nicht leben, ohne uns ein Bild von uns zu machen" (III 169). Herakles has become a tragic hero "der ins Ungreifbare wolle". His exemplary status endures because he invites interpretation. Coppi is still able to regard him as a figure of action, whereas Heilmann sees him as more of an artist, as a forerunner to Rimbaud and Hölderlin, with whom Heilmann is associated in his precocious intellectualism. Each reads himself into Herakles' absence. It takes Bischoff to point out that Herakles is a figure, "den es nur im Exil geben könne" (III 170).

The theme is taken up with characteristic precision in the "Heilmann an Unbekannt" section. This final letter before his execution is unique in the text in being unfiltered by the narrator. It is clear from the letter's opening reference to the visit to the "Fries" that the narrator is the "Unbekannt" addressed in the hope that he will be able to reconstruct what has been destroyed. Faced with his own destruction, Heilmann sees himself defeated by the irrationality against which he has no defence: "Alles, was greifbar war, wurde wesenlos, was bestand, war einzig das Unfaßbare, in dem wir uns selbst überwunden hatten" (202). His proximity to death offers him a depth of insight which recalls the narrator's mother: "nur im Traum erhältst du Einblick in die Genauigkeit des Aufbewahrten" (206). Throughout Weiss's work, as we have seen, there are references to the closeness of art and dreams. Heilmann adds a further dimension:

Wir sprachen einst, es war auf dem Friedhof der Hedwigs Gemeinde, darüber, daß Träume sich nur ertragen lassen, weil wir uns beim Schlafen in einer
Anästhesie befinden. [...] Wir haben uns bemüht, das Unkenntliche faßbar zu machen. Im Traum war ich ein Körper, der sich abquälte, das Denken zu lernen.

(III 207)

This recalls Heilmann’s earlier claim: "Die Anästhesie gehöre auch zur äußerst beteiligten, Stellung beziehenden Kunst" (I 83) and thus the preference for the "Formlosen, Unbewußten, Traumhaften" (Rekonvalteszenz 183) that pervades Weiss’s writing. Dreams allow insight into the inexpressible ("Leere") and the horrific without the responsibility of having to react. In contrast, the waking state lacks access "zu unsern innersten Wahrheiten" (III 208). Die Ästhetik’s engagement with the inexpressible suggests that the text has obtained some limited access to the truth. One of Weiss’s notebook entries is revealing in this context: "ich kann nicht mehr trennen zw. Erfundenem u Authentischem - es ist alles authentisch (wie im Traum alles authentisch ist)" (N2 873). Perhaps we can read Heilmann’s concluding remark: "Ich hätte alles anders schreiben wollen" (III 210) in the light of this acknowledgement of the inseparableness of autobiography and fiction.

After the description of the executions of the "rote Kapelle" members and the end of the war, the novel concludes with an extended "Konjunktiv" section which knowingly describes the post-war years as if they have not yet happened. In this respect, it resembles an extended enactment of Christa Wolf’s "Erinnerte Zukunft" or Walter Benjamin’s "Jetztzeit", calling history into question by constantly asserting that it could have been different. Thus, like Fluchtpunkt, Die Ästhetik ends on note of optimism qualified by "Resignation" (PWG 286). Hope and doubt merge in the use of the "Konjunktiv", as the narrator arrives at the moment of narrating, which, like all autobiographical narrative, is sited on the border between past, present and future. Burkhardt Lindner has written: "Der Konjunktiv Futur I legt das Imaginäre bloß, das aus der Differenz zwischen dem dokumentarisch-objektivierenden Interesse und der realen Uneinholbarkeit des Vergangenen entspringt". Of course the novel as a whole is a rewriting of the past, the "Konjunktiv" section being a fitting conclusion to the notion of "Wunschautobiographie" with which Weiss began. The final section, with its tributes to those who have been forgotten and its muted description of the Cold War, reads like an extension of Heilmann’s letter: "Indem wir offen sind für die Vergangenen, würdigen wir
auch die, die nach uns kommen." (III 206) Genia Schulz sees in the final "Block" the recognition that reality is merely "ein Effekt, der sich aus Mutmaßungen über Vergangenes und Hoffnung auf Zukünftiges ergibt." Indeed, the final section prompts unprecedented self-reflection:

Der Sinn meines langen Wartens aber würde ja sein, von den künftigen Einsichten her das Frühre zu klären, und vielleicht wäre es dann nicht einmal so wichtig, das damalige Ich zu verstehen, sondern dem, der sich besinnt, näher zu sein, denn dies ist ja das Wesen der Zeit, daß wir uns fortwährend entwerfen, aus den Augen verlieren, auf neue Art wiederfinden...

(III 261)

These last words describe the process of Weiss’s writing in general. Writing becomes the means of filling in the gaps in history’s understanding of the past. Reflecting the novel’s thematics, the final section affirms both the necessity of hope and Utopian longing and "Der Drang zum Widerspruch, zur Gegenwehr" (III 265). With a circularity which emphasises art’s capacity to survive, the narrator concludes, as he began, before the Fries:

... und es würde kein Kenntlicher kommen, den leeren Platz zu füllen, sie müßten selber mächtig werden dieses einzigen Griffes, dieser weit aushollenden und schwingenden Bewegung, mit der sie den furchtbaren Druck, der auf ihnen lastete, endlich hinwegfegen könnten.

(III 268)

Although the exclamation "O Herakles" at the end of Heilmann’s letter suggests that at the end of his life he saw the narrator as a modern Herakles, the conclusion of the text reveals that the "leeren Platz" endures. Recalling Kutscher, the text’s conclusion avoids narrative closure and leaves the final act of interpretation to the reader. It functions as a spur to investigation and self-examination, as a combination of "Leere" and "Lehre". Despite the text’s attempt to fill and come to an understanding of this "Leere", an attempt which goes back to Weiss’s earliest work, it resists, remaining necessarily elusive.
The final "Konjunktiv" section of the novel emphasises the double movement on which the text is founded. Countless commentators have pointed out that the novel exists in permanent tension between the fictional and the factual, the direct and the indirect, the individual and the collective. Evidence of this is provided by the fact that critics have been able to assert that Weiss is both irretrievably dialectical and totally opposed to synthesis. As ever, the truth lies somewhere between the two positions. The text is constructed out of what Genia Schulz has termed "eine Art Sicherheit des Zweifels", a phrase which emphasises the centrality of contradiction to the novel. Developing the "beiden Wege" that the young Marx advocates at the end of Hölderlin, the title of Die Ästhetik unites the opposing concepts of aesthetics and resistance, conscious of what the narrator refers to as: "der Widerspruch zwischen der Neigung zum stoischen Reflektieren und dem Verlangen nach uneingeschränktem Handeln (III 65). The text demonstrates the interrelationship of the two positions. Despite its obsessive quest for detail and completeness, the futility of which was apparent to Weiss as early as 1939, the narrative’s accumulation of detail serves only to underline the impossibility of achieving an "Überblick", "umlagert von gegensätzlichen Impulsen" (II 15). This self-contradicting mechanism is built into the text so profoundly that it even undoes its author. In an interview, Weiss defends the "Stilprinzip" of the use of the monolithic blocks of text:

Es gibt da nicht Fragmentarisches, es bleibt dem Ich kein Ausweg, sich irgendwohin zu flüchten, sondern man steht ständig mitten im Gedränge der Ereignisse und der Fragen und der Probleme;

However the concluding section of the text demonstrates that the "Ich" can exist inside and outside the text simultaneously. Similarly, the text disintegrates as it strives for totality, reflecting its attempts simultaneously to value both unity and diversity. When Heinrich Vormweg calls Die Ästhetik "eine Probe auf die Dialektik von Kontinuität und Bruch", he comes much closer than Weiss to identifying the fragmentation which underlies its monolithic form. In Klaus R. Scherpe’s words: "The novel permanently frustrates explanations and glib determinations, including those it introduces itself. It
feeds on the positing of difference, on the gesture of contradiction that must ever be executed anew". In so characterising the novel, Scherpe is approaching the territory of de Man's Blindness and Insight, with its identification of:

an unstated principle that leads [the critic's] language away from its asserted stand, perverting and dissolving his stated commitment to the point where it becomes emptied of substance, as if the very possibility of assertion had been put into question.

At times, Weiss's text looks likely to disappear into its own self-contradictions. Perhaps accordingly, Die Ästhetik has been termed the "Agent Provocateur der Postmoderne". Indeed we could relate the concluding "Konjunktiv" section to Lyotard's claim that: "Post Modern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future(post) perfect(modal)". Yet Die Ästhetik occupies a characteristically paradoxical position, both supporting and undermining Marxism, one of the "grands récits" which Lyotard claims postmodernity has rendered obsolete. Although its humourless ideological conviction makes the novel appear anachronistic, its insistence on self-contradiction, fragmentation and linguistic uncertainty ensures its relation to (post)modern fiction, as Genia Schulz's study has shown so admirably. In her speech in receipt of Weiss's Büchner prize, Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss emphasises the duality that is fundamental to the text, in referring to her husband's: "Sensibilität für jedes einzelne Wort, für jede Nuance. Jedes Wort galt es zu wählen. Schreiben bedeutete Widerstand zu überwinden und zugleich zu leisten, ästhetischen Widerstand".

I began by emphasising Weiss's concentration on the depiction of the self. It is clear that his prose is dominantly and relentlessly autobiographical. His interest in the interplay of the fictional and the autobiographical ensured that he produced no formal autobiography, but a series of autobiographical novels. In publishing Abschied von den Eltern and Fluchtpunkt in the early 1960s, Weiss anticipated the personal confrontation with the past associated with "Neue Subjektivität". In effect, Die Ästhetik fuses the political concerns of German literature in the 1960s with the autobiographical turn of the next decade: "the personal and the political become actualized and integrated for him in a way that eluded many of the writers of the seventies". Interestingly, in a discussion
of German autobiographical writing of the latter period, David Bronsen writes: "Und gleichgültig wie man über sich schreibt - es kommt zu keiner wirklichen Konfrontation mit sich selbst: man stößt immer wieder ins Leere". As we have seen, Weiss's representation of the self takes place in the face of this perpetual threat of nothingness. "Leere" pervades Weiss's prose, whether in the form of an existential threat or viewed as the more prosaic challenge to the writer of "ein weißes Blatt Papier, dessen Leere sich völlig ausfüllen ließ mit Worten" (Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden 108). Critics have been slow to identify this aspect of his work. Irene Heidelberger-Leonard has suggested that: "Die Leerstelle für Herakles steht auch Modell für das jüdische Bewuβtsein von Peter Weiss". I would like to take this further and suggest that the "Leere" motif in Weiss's work as a whole is not only connected with Weiss's complex relation to his Jewish background, but that it also has its origin in the life-threatening experience of displacement. Time and time again in Weiss's prose, "Leere" is associated with internal alienation and the devastating events of the 1930s and 1940s. It is seen in opposition to the overriding concern with "Selbstfindung", which is so easily reduced to self-indulgence, as Weiss confesses in a letter of 1941: "ich werde oft krank in diesem verdammten Für-sich-sein" (Briefe an Goldschmidt/Jungk 164). Although Die Ästhetik attempts to resist this potential solipsism through its adoption of collectivity, its attempt to tolerate and exploit the void is ultimately unsuccessful. In Die Ästhetik, "Leere" endures as a representation of the irrationality that is necessary and inescapable precisely because it resists integration into the kind of ideological or intellectual system which the text paradoxically represents. Like Bernhard, Weiss attempts to fill the "Leere" with language. In repeatedly rewriting his life, Weiss was trying to resist and revise himself. His texts repeatedly attempt to "write out" the void which constantly threatens his existence. Fittingly, in her Büchner prize speech Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss recalls her final conversation with her husband, in which, facing death (the ultimate exile), he acknowledges the interdependence of resistance, reconstruction and irrationality:

Um dieses schwarzes Loch, diese Leere zu überwinden, müssen wir sie ständig besiegen. [...] Und er vermochte das Dunkel zu verwandeln in eine konstruktive Kraft, mit der er überleben konnte.
CONCLUSION
CHRISTA WOLF: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PARADIGM

1 Kindheitsmuster: Autobiographical narrative as theory

I want to preface my concluding remarks about Weiss, Canetti and Bernhard with a brief examination of the work of Christa Wolf, whose writing is centrally concerned with issues of self-representation. Her Kindheitsmuster is particularly relevant to my examination of the interplay of autobiographical and fictional discourses because it so much resembles a fictional treatment of the theoretical consensus on autobiography that has become prevalent in recent years. The text's division into three narrative levels and self-conscious examination of its own "Hilfskonstruktionen" (222), allied to its direct confrontation with the problems involved in the translation of history and personal experience into narrative, make it a particularly appropriate intertext.

Kindheitsmuster is remarkably open, "wie eine Wunde". This is reflected in the fact that the text is designated a "Roman" on its cover, like so many modern autobiographical narratives. However, it is clear from its subject matter and concentration on self-investigation that the novel is autobiographical. It represents both an act of "Ichbewältigung" and of "Bewältigung der Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart". This is peculiarly intense for Wolf's generation, which grew up under Hitler only to reach maturity amidst the disorientating confusion of the end of the war. The narrative's interpenetrating levels of "erzählende" and "erzählte" selves, which combine to form what has been characterised as a "Gerichtsverfahren mit sich selbst" and condemned as "Ich-Faszination", constitute a radical investigation of the possibility of self-representation: "Form als Möglichkeit, Abstand zu gewinnen" (222). Resembling an extension of the "ich schreibe, suchend" technique of Nachdenken über Christa T., the text echoes recent autobiography theory in its self-conscious interplay of second and third person voices. Robert Smith has written: "autobiography begins with self-colloquy. The autobiographer is not simply writing about the self [...] but writing to the self in an internal vocative mode". More radically than most autobiographical narratives, Wolf's text repeatedly draws attention to the interdependence of past and present. The emphasis on the present suggests that the reader's perspective is also vital, particularly after the watershed of 190
1989, which I shall also address in the context of a brief discussion of *Was bleibt*, a text I believe should be read as an appendix to *Kindheitsmuster*.

From its opening sentence, *Kindheitsmuster* seems to call into question the autobiographical enterprise: "Das Vergangene ist nicht tot; es ist nicht einmal vergangen. Wir trennen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd" (11). This dislocating, unattributed quotation from Faulkner immediately indicates that the text is centrally concerned with the potential problems of using memory as a foundation for narration. After the opening quotation's appeal to community, which echoes the epigraph from Neruda, the text switches to the second person: "Ein erneuter Versuch, dich zu verschanzen." The choice of verb here seems curious: what kind of narrative is it in which the (unknown) self requires such protection? The text continues mysteriously and indirectly:

Allmählich, über Monate hin, stellte sich das Dilemma heraus: sprachlos bleiben oder in der dritten Person leben, das scheint zur Wahl zu stehen. Das eine unmöglich, unheimlich das andere. (11)

Thrust without warning into the "Entstehungsgeschichte" of the text, the reader experiences at first hand the narrator's stark choice between self-estrangement and silence. The exasperated "Wer spricht?" which frames the text of *Kein Ort. Nirgends* would not be inappropriate in this context. However, indeterminacy is overcome to some extent when the next sentence gives a historical reference, which refers not to the birth-date of the classical autobiographical narrative, but to the time of writing. The narrator's primary concern is not to inform but to express the difficulty of beginning the narrative. The reader comes to realise that the "du" already referred to is in fact the narrator and that the displaced self is to be the subject of the text. The difficulties of writing the narrative are bound up with "Sprachstörung": "eine fatale Veränderung der grammatischen Bezüge. Ich, du, sie, in Gedanken ineinanderschwimmend, sollen im ausgesprochenen Satz einander entfremdet werden" (11). The explicit reference to "grammatischen Bezüge" immediately associates the crisis of the subject with linguistic disruption. The alienation from the "ich" recalls its characterisation as "grammatical fiction" in Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. In Koestler's novel, the use of the first person singular is presented as an act of rebellion against the prevailing and mendacious "wir" of communist ideology. Wolf's
use of clashing second and third person forms draws attention to her avoidance of the "ich", which becomes the text's unifying goal, and suggests that the division of the narrating self continues and radicalises the rejection of the GDR’s aesthetic orthodoxy begun in Christa T. Certainty is replaced by: "ein Verfahren, dem Riß, der durch die Zeit geht, die Achtung zu zollen, die er verdient." The "Riß" is one of the central figures of the text, which is formed out of disruption, dislocation and displacement. Thus the text’s opening page begins with the elision of temporal distinctions and concludes in discontinuity. This indicates the open parameters of a text in which the very notion of boundaries is constantly questioned: "Falls es strafbar ist, die Grenzen zu verwischen..." (100).

The opening Faulkner quotation emphasises the fact that the narrative centres around a literal return to the past, the narrator’s 1971 visit to her home town of Gorzow, formerly Landsberg, for the first time since fleeing west with her family at the end of the war. The alienating and displacing function of the narrator’s confrontation with the past is heightened by the fact that the town has been renamed and is now part of a different nation. As the division between narrating self and narrated child most clearly demonstrates, the present is divided from the past, but leaves a connecting thread. I would like now to examine more closely Kindheitsmuster’s view of the self, before going on to look at its use of language and memory.

To facilitate self-examination, the narrator becomes a "Paläontologe" (207), addressing the self which revisits Landsberg/Gorzow retrospectively in the second person. Chapter nine’s title "Wie sind wir so geworden, wie wir heute sind?" indicates the fundamental motivation behind the narrative. Echoing the complex self-reflecting interplay which takes place between narrator and Christa T., Kindheitsmuster’s narrator refers to her childhood self in the third person, as Nelly. This division clearly (and rather artificially) distinguishes the text’s different narrative levels. In an interview, Wolf clarifies the structure in terms which recall Canetti:

Als ob ich mich und den Leser täuschen würde, wenn ich zu diesem Wesen "ich" sagte... Und gerade das wollte ich mit der dritten Person ausdrücken, weil das auch ein Ergebnis dieser mehrmals gebrochenen Biographie ist, daß mehrere Personen in uns herumgeistern.
This characterisation of the narrator's self-alienation is also reflected by the disclaimer which precedes the text, which emphasises its fictionality and generic hybridity, and the Neruda epigraph. In addition, the presence of the narrator's daughter, Lenka, on the trip provides a contemporary counterpoint to Nelly and adds a further humanising element to the text's potential abstractness. Echoing Christa T., Wolf revels in "die Freiheit, über den Stoff zu verfügen." (37). The division of the self allows for a relatively unrestricted form of self-investigation: "Wenn es den Kitzel der Selbstzerstörung gab, gab es doch auch die Wonne der Selbsterschaffung" (121). The disorientation which characterises Nelly's childhood is in part a consequence of history. Nelly was born (like Wolf) in 1929; her formative years took place against the background of the establishment of Nazism. Thus the text focuses on ordinary people who tacitly accept indoctrination out of fear rather than enthusiasm. In this way a lineage is opened up to Wolf's later texts, which are increasingly dominated by "Angst". The consequences of Nelly's family's silent complicity cause Lenka much confusion:

Sie will nicht - noch nicht - erklärt haben, wie man zugleich abwesend und nicht dabeigewesen sein kann, das schauerliche Geheimnis der Menschen dieses Jahrhunderts. (60)

Although one might take issue with the final clause's exemplification of the German experience, it is important to note that Kindheitsmuster, as the title suggests, depicts a representative life. The text is aware of the centrality of the presence-absence dialectic indicated in the quotation to autobiographical narrative: "Das Gebot ist: Sich verlassen, in des Wortes Doppelsinn" (241). It is important to note the ambiguity. Much of the tension in the text is derived from the "Riß" which opens up between different senses of a word, between remembering and forgetting, observing and overlooking. The narrator's research into contemporary newspaper reports indicates just how much information was available at the time and ignored by those overpowered by established dogma. Indeed it is part of the function of the text to reinstate presence where willed absence was (and in the GDR remained to some extent) more characteristic of the witnesses.

The recognition of the multiplicity of the self goes back to childhood, when Nelly was aware "daß sie in mehrere Kinder zerfällt, zum Beispiel in ein Vormittags- und ein
Nachmittagskind" (144). These two elements of her personality are related to good and bad behaviour. This could be regarded as typical of a child were it not for the fact that it anticipates more ominous behaviour later in the text. Again Nelly is divided:

... die eine der beiden spielt harmlos mit allen zusammen "Der Jude hat ein Schwein geschlacht', was willste davon haben!", die andere aber beobachtet sie alle und sich selbst von der Zimmerecke her und durchschaut alles. (181)

Nelly’s split attitude to this game with its relatively unknowing but nevertheless corrupting racist implications prefigures her occasional ability to detach herself from the prevailing orthodoxy, a capacity which comes under strain as Nazism (with its more virulent form of anti-Semitism) takes stronger hold. This dilemma is most apparent when Nelly witnesses the burning of a synagogue on Kristallnacht. Drawn by curiosity, she is torn between a natural response and the mixture of fear and hatred with which she has been indoctrinated: "Um ein Haar wäre Nelly eine unpassende Empfindung unterlaufen: Mitgefühl" (219). The fact that received wisdom has designated this reaction "unpassend" is an indication of its grip by this stage: Nelly is only nine years old. Thus the question which opens chapter seven "Was heißt: sich verändern?" refers not only to the narrator’s distance from Nelly but also to Nelly’s difference from her (former) self. In an essay on women’s autobiography, Shoshana Felman writes:

I will suggest that none of us, as women, has, as yet, precisely, an autobiography. Trained to see ourselves as objects and to be positioned as the Other, estranged to ourselves, we have a story that by definition cannot be self-present to us, a story that, in other words, is not a story, but must become a story.10

In Kindheitsmuster Nelly’s otherness from the narrator is enduringly associated with the alienating aspects of Nazi ideology, which augment more common forms of gender discrimination to increase the self’s feelings of self-estrangement. The more overt feminism which is associated with Wolf’s later work is reflected in particular in the figure of Nelly’s teacher, Julia, who is so restricted by the limitations imposed upon her sex. The artificiality of Wolf’s division of the self emphasises that hers is an extreme version
of Felman's view. Indeed I believe that we can read the interaction of the various elements of the narrator's identity as the narrative progresses in terms of the "becoming" of a story.

Nelly becomes a representative victim of the Nazification process. Lacking the pre-formed perspective of adults, Nelly anticipates Lenka's disorientation and the disillusionment of Wolf's later fiction: "Sie nimmt sich jede Möglichkeit zu zweifeln, vor allem an sich selbst" (264). Faced with the perverted demands of a corrupt ideology, childhood's perpetual conflict between desire and accepted behaviour endures into adolescence and beyond. Nelly's independence from some elements of indoctrination, indicated in the passage above, is made evident during a demonstration of hypnosis. The incident teaches Nelly something about herself:

Zugleich wußte sie: Das war ihre Sache nicht. Ihre Sache war, die eine zu beobachten und ein wenig zu beneiden, den anderen zu durchschauen. Und alles - die geheime Sehnsucht, den Neid, das Gefühl von Überlegenheit - vor jedermann zu verbergen. (365)

This passage echoes very closely the tone and vocabulary of the earlier characterisation of Nelly at school, adding the element of secrecy, of clandestinely running counter to prevailing views. It is interesting that Nelly is caught between the two positions - finding herself to be the outsider/observer but longing (the choice of noun is telling) to participate. This inability (or disinclination) to act according to her instincts is related to a broader denial of "natural" impulses during the Nazi period, which makes Nelly's youthful complicity representative. The most devastating indictment of this process occurs in a passage relating to the death camps:


This stating of the unutterable, the confrontation with all aspects of the past (which recalls
the concluding section of *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands*) is one of the foundational achievements of the text. Crucially, this passage also emphasizes the silent complicity between the "Ich" and the appalling consequences of Nazi ideology. Similarly, Nelly's identification with the Nazi state is so complete that when the impossible occurs and the Russians threaten to invade, Nelly's disorientation manifests itself in illness - the "Zusammenbruch" (377) which mirrors "den bevorstehenden vollständigen Zusammenbruch der deutschen Kriegswirtschaft" (380). In contrast, Lenka's reaction, during a discussion of I.G. Farben's contribution to the war-time economy and the construction of the camps, is as simple as it is irrefutable: "Ganz schön irre, das Ganze, sagte Lenka. Oder findet ihr nicht?" (415). As a counter-figure to Nelly, Lenka represents the future.

The opening question of chapter 15 captures Nelly's predicament: "Was machen wir mit dem, was sich uns eingeprägt hat?" (415). The question is not limited to the past self; one of the lessons of the narrative is that indoctrination and influence endure, despite the individual's attempts to reject them. At the end of the war Nelly becomes even more estranged from herself:

Nelly ist sich selbst uninteressant geworden. Da die Verbindung mit ihr selbst abgebrochen ist, überzieht alles, was ihr begegnet, ein Glanz unheimlicher Fremdheit. Sie, unbewegter Beobachter, wirft einen undurchdringlichen Schatten auf sich… (428)

The observer loses interest in her own development, veering between the extremes of self-obsession and the "Selbstzensur" (307), which anticipates a central concern of *Was bleibt*. Her attitude is associated with the "Angst" which increases as almost all of the values of Nelly's adolescence, particularly those she associates with Julia, her role model, are rendered utterly invalid at the end of the war:

Eine Angst, die sich damals in einem durchdringenden, andauernden Gefühl von Selbstfremdheit zu erkennen gab und deren Spur eben darin besteht, daß sie die Spuren löscht [...]. Der entsetzliche Wille zur Selbstaufgabe läßt das Selbst nicht aufkommen. (314)
This demonstrates how the "Selbstaufgabe", which remains a temptation in chapter 10, pervades the text with its ambiguous and emblematic suggestions of both self-abnegation and self-(re)creation. Nelly's subsequent attempts to distance herself from her former identity reflect the interdependence of construction and destruction: "Rücksichts-los sein (ohne Sicht zurück) als eine der Überlebensbedingungen" (447). Of course, the narrative as a whole stands in opposition to this exhortation. Eventually, writing comes to be seen as a means of overcoming "Angst", a process of "Selbstbetätigung" (478) which in turn implies the increased possibility of "Selbstbestätigung".

From the opening page's recognition of the danger of "Sprach-Ekel" (11), the text is scrupulous in its examination of language as a means of relating experience. In a letter which stems from the period in which she was beginning to write the text, Wolf writes:

Gerade habe ich in meinem Manuskript darüber meditiert, daß es das Ziel des Schreibens wäre, Sprache zu finden für die Veränderungen der inneren Landschaft, die man in dem Augenblick ertappt, da sie vor sich gehen und ehe sie noch an Sprache gebunden sind.11

The difficulty of reconciling oneself to the past, and to the past self, is seen to be a linguistic predicament. On a simple level this is reflected in the fact that, with Prussian Landsberg having become Polish Gorzow, names of once-familiar places have changed. The questioning of language, which is radicalised in Wolf's later texts, is also part of the text's self-conscious examination of the possibilities of narrative. The text is full of instances of self-doubt, where the narrator loses confidence in language's capacity effectively to render experience. Such self-questioning is inscribed in the novel's title, which is subjected to the kind of etymological examination that is common in the text:

"Muster" kommt vom lateinischen "monstrum", was ursprünglich "Probestück" geheißen hat und dir nur recht sein kann. Doch werden auch Monstren im heutigen Wortsinn auftreten. (55)

The title is also associated with the common phrases "Grund-Muster" and "Verhaltens-Muster", implying that these are also potential models for the text. "Kindheitsmuster"
suggests both personal and representative (historical) relevance, in the manner of classical autobiographical writing. The text is also an experimental "Probestück", increasingly populated by the "Monstren" of 1930s Germany. However, as Lothar Baier has indicated, the text is predominantly the story of a childhood, which happens to have taken place against the background of Nazism. Many of Nelly’s experiences are common to childhood in general; the exposure to totalitarianism leads to a horrified intensification of the self-questioning that is part of the maturing process. Prefiguring Was bleibt, Nelly’s confusion is repeatedly seen in linguistic terms:

Die tiefe Spur, die Schuld und Verschweigen, welche sich unaufloslich und für immer ineinander verfilzten, in Nellys Gemüt zogen, ist mit Glitzerworten besetzt.

Den Erwachsenen, die sie aussprachen, begannen die Augen zu glitzern. (83)

It is important to notice that, from very early in her life, Nelly associates language, at least in part, with guilt and suggestion. She learns to differentiate between literal and implied meaning by recourse to a non-linguistic "Augenspiel" and discovers the complexity of linguistic signification. The reference to "Augenspiel" reinforces the impression that the "Glitzerwörter" are endowed with some of the talismanic significance which we have associated with Canetti’s view of language. They become part of Nelly’s pattern of (self) deceptive behaviour, which I have already indicated and which anticipates the alienating tenets of Nazism.

In this way language becomes a symbol of the child’s inevitable questioning of received patterns of behaviour, particularly those required by her parents. A further and potentially damaging example of this occurs after a man exposes himself to Nelly:

Nelly sagte nichts, weil sie ihr Erlebnis - das sie wirklich nicht verstand, sondern als bildhaften Vorgang aufbewahrte, den sie viel später erst zu deuten wuße - sofort unter diejenigen Vorfälle einordnete, über die strenges, unverbrüchliches Stillschweigen zu bewahren war. (186)

Significantly, Nelly goes on to categorise the experience as one only to be communicated through the eyes. The tragedy is that, although her mother realises that something is
wrong, she is unable to (re)act as long as Nelly refuses to articulate her experience. This pattern of deferring self-explication is of course one of the constants of the text (and anticipates Was bleibt). The text consistently emphasises the dependence of "Ichbewältigung" upon distance. The return to the scene of childhood on which the text is founded both underlines and destroys this distance.

Wolf is enduringly aware that identity is dependent on discourse as a means of expression: "Wie schnell wird Sprachlosigkeit zu Ich-losigkeit?" This question from the first Kassandra lecture could be applied to Wolf's writing in general. The fact that Nazism's corruption of the individual was effected and reflected linguistically gives a very concrete sense to Kindheitsmuster's emphasis on the loss of childhood and innocence. The language of the 1930s and 1940s is associated with "Terror", tarnishing Nelly's vocabulary and rendering words unusable. This is indicated by the different "Garnitur von Wörtern" available to Lenka; words which used to be "harmlos, unbefangen" (370) are no longer available because of their associations. Thus, the narrator is condemned to exist in the indeterminate regions to which I have already referred: "Zwischen Echos leben, zwischen Echos von Echos..." (371). This is itself echoed later in the text:

Heute weißt du, daß es im Zeitalter des Argwohns das aufrichtige Wort nicht gibt, weil der aufrichtige Sprecher auf den angewiesen ist, der aufrichtig zuhören wollte [...] Das Echo, auf das er rechnen muß, schwingt dann als Vorhall in seinem aufrichtigsten Wort. So können wir nicht mehr genau sagen, was wir erfahren haben. (484)

The text's central conception of "Aufrichtigkeit" is bound up with the individual's subordination to authority. The narrator regards "Aufrichtigkeit" as one of those facets of experience which is as necessary as it is unattainable: "Aufrichtigkeit nicht als einmaliger Kraftakt, sondern als Ziel, als Prozeß" (504). This aspiration operates as one of the text's parameters to self-fulfilment. However, repeated references to "den Doppelsinn der Wörter" only serve to emphasise the narrator's lack of faith in language's power to reflect "Aufrichtigkeit" or accurately to convey meaning. As early as the first chapter, the narrator speaks of the choice between the hesitant narrative voice and the option "romanhaft lügen" (18). Like Was bleibt, the text is torn between the two
discourses, between truthfulness and the urge to fictionalise: "der eigenen
Verschleierungstaktik" (206), which is also characteristic of Christa T. Wolf is constantly
aware of the precariousness of her attempt to re-present experience. The threat
throughout is that of detection: "Daß die Dokumente nicht zu übertreffen sind und den
Erzähler überflüssig machen" (99). It is in the light of such reflections that we must read
the weariness of the occasional lists of words, which, recalling Christa T.'s emphasis on
linguistic ambiguity, function as a kind of self-exposing etymologisation without context:
"Überhören, übersehen, vernachlässigen, verleugnen, verlernen, verschwitzen, vergessen"
(204).

The texts I have discussed have repeatedly demonstrated that "Vergessen" is vital
to autobiographical narrative. In fact the two elements of the novel which I have been
examining thus far - the representation of the self and the use of language as a means of
rendering experience - are dependent on both remembering and forgetting. The visit to
Gorzow, which functions as the ultimate memory-stirring "Medaillon",15 underlines the
fact that the past which has been lost retains the power profoundly to affect the present
and the future. In fact we can read Kindheitsmuster in the light of the thematic "Erinnerte
Zukunft"16 with which Wolf ends her essay "Lesen und Schreiben". The text's literal
return to origins represents a particularly self-conscious version of the interplay of
memory and history which is one of the foundations of autobiographical narrative. The
fact that, in Wolf's text, this is extended into an examination of the clash between
memory and ideology, the experience of which is so central to Germans of her generation
(particularly perhaps in the GDR), makes it a radically representative text.

Kindheitsmuster both resists and succumbs to "Vergessen" and "Verdrängung". In
the first chapter, Wolf suggests the universal nature of this process in a list which
juxtaposes the text's "erzählende" and "erzählte" selves:

Das Kind ist ja auch von dir verlassen worden [...] [Der Erwachsene] hat es hinter
sich gelassen, beiseite geschoben, hat es vergessen, verdrängt, verleugnet,
umgeformt, verfälscht, verzärtelt und vernachlässigt, hat sich seiner geschämt
und hat sich seiner gerühmt, hat es falsch geliebt und hat es falsch gehäßt. (16)

The self-exposing honesty of this recognition seems particularly ironic in the light of the
revelations which arose out of the publication of Wolf’s Stasi documents. In a 1971 letter to Brigitte Reimann, Wolf refers to Kindheitsmuster as "eine Art Psychoanalyse, da schwemmt eine Menge mit gutem Grund Verdrängtes wieder hoch".17 This attempt to reconstruct a "Topographie" (12) of the past from memory (an attempt which is inevitably only partially successful) is accompanied by a thorough consideration and examination of the process of remembering. Memory is "Kein Organ also, sondern eine Tätigkeit" (20) and one which requires indulgence. Throughout the text (and recalling Bernhard’s Auslöschung), the narrator regards photographs as historical evidence to stimulate the memory. The consultation of photographic evidence (which is made problematic by the fact that few photographs exist) has much the same impact as the stimulus provided by the return to the physical landscape of childhood. However, the process of remembering is also threatening. The question which opens the fourth chapter: "Brauchen wir Schutz vor den Abgründen der Erinnerung?" (99) uncovers the profoundly disorientating potential of repressed memory. Wolf insists throughout her text on the interrelationship of past, present and future; Heinrich Mohr’s description of Christa T. as "ein zukunftssüchtiger Erinnerungsroman"** could be applied equally to its successor. Memory unsettles precisely because it affects the present and the future, rather as Cassandra’s predictions threaten the established order: "Sie 'sieht' die Zukunft, weil sie den Mut hat, die wirklichen Verhältnisse der Gegenwart zu sehen".19 Memory contributes to the self-alienation that Nelly experiences throughout her childhood and which separates the narrator from her childhood self: "Es ist der Mensch, der sich erinnert - nicht das Gedächtnis. Der Mensch, der es gelernt hat, sich selber nicht als ein Ich, sondern als ein Du zu nehmen" (163). The narrator has to remind herself that memory is not autonomous, but a formative element in the creation of her identity. At one point she tries to oppose remembering to the process of fictionalisation, suggesting "daß es [...] um so vieles leichter ist, Vergangenheit zu erfinden als sich zu erinnern" (209), but the text as a whole suggests that, with its distorting function or "Verstellung" (144f)), recollection resembles the latter process quite closely. This is reflected in the recognition that forgetting is a vital component of the memory process, particularly in the profoundly unsettling context of the immediate post-war years:

Jahre, in denen das Mißtrauen gegen die sinnliche Erfahrung um sich greift.

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Heinrich Böll has characterised this tendency in the following epigrammatic terms: "Sie wollen Amn..." Kindheitsmuster is expressly designed to counter this process, to insist after the Dali painting the narrator sees in the U.S., on "The Persistance of Memory" [sic], although Böll's words become ironic in the light of the revelations of 1993. The haunting words of the camp survivor "Wo habt ihr bloß alle gelebt?", which Böll adopts for the title of his discussion of Wolf's book, resonate through the final section of the text. The starkness of the survivor's question highlights and implicitly condemns the individual's capacity to adapt - the "Anpassung" which Christa T finds so difficult and which becomes a central concern of all of Wolf's writing. It is in this context that we should register Nelly's post-war bewilderment: "Nelly erfuhr, sie habe zwölf Jahre lang, anscheinend ohne es zu merken, in einer 'Diktatur' gelebt" (530). The devastation, which follows the experience of having to flee their home, is directly related to the gradual recognition of this self-deception. In the text, references to "Heimweh" or "verlorene Heimat" tend to be rejected or discussed in muted and dismissive terms. It is left to the reader to conclude that the very concept of "Heimat" has been irrevocably tarnished by the inevitable association of life in East Prussia with the indoctrination of Nazism. On several occasions, not least in the aftermath of the 1993 "Akteneinsicht", Wolf has testified to the existential gap left by the defeat of the Nazi ideology. Kindheitsmuster is designed to highlight the price that was paid. Wolf regards her generation's subsequent vulnerability (which resulted from the "Spätreife" which she associates with the experience of growing up under Nazism) as having stimulated the relatively unquestioning adoption of Marxism in the GDR. This notion of renewed self-deception is reflected in the motif of the "blinde Flecken" which occurs so frequently in Wolf's late prose and reflects the disillusionment which dominates Was bleibt. Before looking at that novel, I would like briefly to examine Kindheitsmuster's conception of truth.

Kindheitsmuster is explicit in its recognition of the illusory nature of autobiographical truth, especially when applied to the self: "Die Linien - Lebenslinien, Arbeitslinien -werden sich nicht kreuzen in dem Punkt, der altmodisch 'Wahrheit' heißt"
Wolf also quotes Kazimierz Brandys, who comes as close to a moral authority as any figure in the text: "Die Wahrheit über sich selbst nicht wissen zu wollen, behauptet der Pole Brandys, sei der zeitgenössische Zustand der Sünde" (262-263). In general, Wolf values more highly the "Realitätssinn" (100) which Nelly finds so difficult to achieve and which opposes the distortions of Nazi ideology. It is the reconciliation of the displaced self, rather than truth, which is the ultimate goal of the text. As David Dollenmayer has written: "The text is not an indictment, but an act of mourning for a lost childhood". The invitation: "die Fakten zu verwirren, um die Tatsachen näherzukommen" (81), which parallels the rather vague concept of "subjektive Authentizität" that Wolf coined contemporaneously to characterise her approach to (autobiographical) fiction, emphasises how firmly the text is founded on the interdependence of the fictional and the objective.

Similarly, the brief appearance of Christa T. in the narrative reinforces the "phantastische Genauigkeit" which is also identified as one of the text’s programmatic concerns (365). In contrast, Lenka’s self-reproaching classification of so much as "Pseudo", is evidence of her resistant cynicism: "Ich meine, daß ich mich zu gewöhnen anfange. - Woran? - Daran, daß alles Pseudo ist, am Ende auch ich selbst. Pseudo-Menschen. Pseudo-Leben" (301). Later, this becomes part of a rather stark choice for the narrator which echoes the similar alternatives offered at the beginning of the text: "Gibt es nur die Alternative zwischen Schweigen und dem, was Ruth und Lenka "Pseudo" nennen (falsch, unecht, unaufrichtig, unwahr)?" (504). Her daughters’ self-accusations implicate her too, prompting the recognition of her own "Pseudohandlungen" and "Pseudoreden", which become central concerns in *Was bleibt*. *Kindheitsmuster’s* emblematic question: "Wie zwingt man festgelegtes Verhalten zu spontanem Ausdruck?" (312) echoes *Christa T.’s" Wie man es erzählen kann, so ist es nicht gewesen" (73) in its reflection of the distorting impact of narration. The association of spontaneity with coercion seems paradoxical until the reader recognises that it is fundamental to autobiographical narrative. This is also indicated by the narrator’s claim in *Christa T.:* "Wenn ich sie erfinden müßte - verändern würde ich sie nicht" (194), with its echoes of both *Kindheitsmuster* and Bernhard’s *Der Keller*. By consistently and self-consciously drawing attention to its structures and method, *Kindheitsmuster* challenges pre-conceived notions of truth, identity, community and, most importantly, autobiographical narrative’s central illusion of verifiability. Like the stories in "Unter den Linden", its function is "Stören". However, this radical
incorporation of the theoretical into the narrative is finally overcome at the end of the text, when the narrator is able to recognise and acknowledge Nelly in herself.

For a long time as the text moves towards its conclusion, it seems that its governing sense of division (or "Riß") will prevent the expected Proustian merger of Nelly and narrator from occurring. The aspiration inherent in the characterisation of the text as: "Ein Spiel in und mit der zweiten und dritten Person, zum Zwecke ihrer Vereinigung" (216) is called into question as Nelly approaches maturity (the text ends in 1946). Initially she moves away from the narrator and this goal: "Dieses Mädchen, das immer noch Nelly heißt, entfernt sich, anstatt allmählich näher heranzukommen." (546)

Yet at the end of the text the two selves do come together, if reluctantly. This both confirms and undermines the narrator's conviction that identity is a dynamic process, rather than a fixed goal:

Das Kind, das in mir verkrochen war - ist es hervorgekommen? [...] Und die Vergangenheit, die noch Sprachregelungen verfügen, die erste Person in eine zweite und dritte spalten konnte - ist ihre Vormacht gebrochen? Werden die Stimmen sich beruhigen?
Ich weiß es nicht. (549)

Like *Sommerstück*, the text overcomes "die Schwierigkeit, 'ich' zu sagen" (*Christa T.* 187) and concludes with a tentative acceptance of "die Grenzen des Sagbaren";⁵ which it has been challenging all along. Earlier in the text, such resolution is explicitly associated with inauthenticity, with forgetting the self: "Denn nur, wenn man sich selbst vergißt, schließt sich für kurze Zeit der Riß zwischen dem, was zu sein man sich zwingt, und dem, was man ist" (307). Unlike Beckett's *Company*, which characteristically maintains its division of its narrative into second and third person forms of address in order to demonstrate both the radical indeterminacy of autobiographical narrative and the internal disunity of the self, the last vestiges of narratorial authority prompt Wolf to resolve the uncertainty in a concluding act of narrative closure. With the ending of *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf goes some way towards compromise with the traditionalist aesthetic demands of the GDR literary hierarchy, although it is important to note that both *Christa T.* and *Kindheitsmuster*, radical texts in any context, were relatively
unprecedented in the GDR. In succumbing to the temptation of unity, Wolf in effect replaces the self. It is this position which the texts which follow *Kindheitsmuster*, particularly *Was bleibt*, go on to problematise.

2 *Was bleibt*: the remains of the subject

Towards the end of *Kindheitsmuster*, the narrator comments: "Was bleibt: Wenn nicht ungeschoren, wenn nicht mit heiler Haut, so doch überhaupt, irgendwie aus dieser Sache herauskommen" (520). Like so many of the programmatic statements that occur during the narrative, this comment goes to the heart of Wolf's concerns in writing *Kindheitsmuster*. The text traces the enduring effect of the experience of the Nazi period on the identity of the individual. A parallel process is followed in Wolf's later text, *Was bleibt*, the fictional account of her experience of Stasi surveillance. I have indicated above that reading *Kindheitsmuster* after the watershed of 1989 is a different matter to reading it before the "Wende", not least because of the controversy which surrounded the publication of *Was bleibt* and the revelations of Wolf's unconscious suppression of her former Stasi links. It is clear from the writings collected in *Auf dem Weg nach Tabou* that, following the demise of the GDR and despite her increasing disillusionment with that state, Wolf experienced something akin to the "Zusammenbruch" which in *Kindheitsmuster* is associated with the end of the war. The fact that Wolf did in fact publish *Was bleibt* as soon as possible in 1990 suggests that it should also be read as a response to the "Vakuum" which followed (and to some extent preceded) the collapse of the GDR.

The hysteria which greeted the publication of *Was bleibt* has had an enduring impact. The text's appearance in the wake of the collapse of the GDR and Wolf's resistance to reunification ensured that the text was read (when it was read at all) not as an "Erzählung", but in purely political and autobiographical terms. Early critics condemned Wolf for cowardice in not having published *Was bleibt* before the GDR's demise and for revising it in 1989 before publication. However, the fact that she chose to admit to having revised the text was also ignored. I would like to suggest that the unspecified revisions are a crucial element of the text. The published text combines the
first version, written in 1979, and the second version, written during the historical upheavals of November 1989, without identifying the extent to which the versions overlap. This is the first indication of the text’s pervasive sense of indeterminacy. The characterisation of East Berlin as a "Nicht-Ort" (35) is thereby also extended to the temporal location of the text, which is sited between two important historical moments. Was bleibt is a divided narrative, founded on a series of oppositions - inner and outer, individual and society, autobiographical and fictional - between which it oscillates. By concentrating on the text itself, I hope to demonstrate that Wolf’s unknowable revisions, far from suggesting its inadequacy, in fact reflect the text’s governing sense of uncertainty, which they challenge the reader to recognise. I would like to look at just two aspects of Wolf’s text, its approach to language and to self-representation, to see how it differs from Kindheitsmuster, before proceeding to examine what light these texts can shed on the work of Weiss, Canetti and Bernhard.

Where Kindheitsmuster’s grammatical division of the narrator between second person and third person directly demonstrates the internal dislocation of the self, Was bleibt treats the split linguistically. The text is founded on its distinction between the tainted discourse of the narrative’s present and the narrator’s optimistic aspirations for a future language. Between Was bleibt and its autobiographical predecessor came the disillusioning expulsion of Wolf Biermann from the GDR in 1976. Consequently, Was bleibt is both an extension of Kindheitsmuster’s autobiographical project and a re-evaluation of it in the light first of the Biermann affair, then of the events of 1989. Wolf’s post-Kindheitsmuster fiction locates the self in a series of stages of "Angst", which manifests itself in the texts’ repeated questioning of the role and efficacy of language in narrative. Was bleibt is as much a confrontation with the effects of "Angst" as Kassandra is: the texts share the themes of suppression and imprisonment, although Was bleibt lacks the mythical resonance which gave Kassandra such allegorical power and facilitated its publication in the GDR. Was bleibt is, however, representative: its concentration on a single day is intended actively to work against the "Strom des Vergessens" (9) in much the same way as Kindheitsmuster’s return to the scene of childhood does:

In heller Angst, in panischer Angst wollte ich mich jetzt an einen dieser dem Untergang geweihten Tage klammern und ihn festhalten, egal, was ich zu fassen

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The final clause recalls Václav Havel’s description of totalitarian art as the "aesthetics of banality" and suggests that Wolf’s text is an attempt to transform the bland into the meaningful. The means for this transformation is linguistic.

The text begins by identifying its overwhelmingly monologic form and two of its thematic concerns, language and fear:


As the previous quotation demonstrates, the first three words do not offer the reassurance which is sought. Herbert Lehnert, who produced the first detailed textual analysis of Was bleibt, has identified two interdependent forms of Angst in the text: the concrete fear which stems from being under surveillance and "die Angst vor dem Verstummen". The latter form is succinctly conveyed by the division between "Ohr" and "Zunge". These opening remarks convey a general sense of unease, which results from the experience of being watched but which is also associated immediately with a concomitant sense of linguistic breakdown. The narrator’s reliance on language as a means of expression has become contaminated by the fear of being overheard. It is important to note that the hope for an improved discourse is deferred until an unknown future date. The "heute" of the quoted passage resonates ambiguously through the narrative, which contains no specific historical references. This underlines the fact that the text’s representative single day refers both to the first composition period and to the revision of 1989. This undecidability is reinforced ironically when the narrator goes on to speculate "wie ich in zehn, zwanzig Jahren an diesen noch frischen, noch nicht abgelebten Tag zurückdenken würde". Such self-conscious reflections on the process of memory serve to maintain Was bleibt’s connections to Kindheitsmuster and further blur its historical location.

Language is repeatedly seen in terms of this opposition between its present form and its future potentiality. This new, improved discourse is designed to oppose the
narrator's recurrent fears by recourse to a "neuen Sprache, die härter sein würde als die, in der ich immer noch denken mußte" (10-11). Its challenging hardness contrasts with the "Luxus! Luxus!" (13) of her current existence and the negativity of the words she is compelled ("mußte") to use habitually, a discourse made up of "Überzeugungen, Vorurteilen, Eitelkeit, Zorn, Enttäuschung und Selbstmitleid" (11). Although the gap between the two discourses seems unbridgeable, the subject exerts a peculiar hold over her. Echoing the text's opening words, she continues:

Keine Angst. Meine andere Sprache, [...] würde gelassen das Sichtbare dem Unsichtbaren opfern; würde aufhören, die Gegenstände durch ihr Aussehen zu beschreiben [...] und würde, mehr und mehr, das unsichtbare Wesentliche aufscheinen lassen. (14-15)

This aspiration to penetrate externality in the pursuit of pure essence is soon undermined by the recognition that it is one of the series of self-deceptions which dominate the opening section of the narrative. These are a means of combating the depression which results from the regime's repressiveness. The narrator's later identification of politicians' "rücksichtslose Augenblicksvorteil" (35) reflects society's linguistic obscurity. Criticism of her use of the phrase overlooks the fact that it is emblematic of the compromise and contamination inherent in the "present" language of the text, elements which the narrator's language of the future aspires to overcome. Her hope for this language: "Niemandem würde sie weh tun als mir selbst" (15) is as utopian as it is inconceivable and indicates the self-accusatory character of the text.

The narrator goes on to echo the final words of Kindheitsmuster, when she writes:

Jeden Tag sagte ich mir, ein bevorzugtes Leben wie das meine liebe sich nur durch den Versuch rechtfertigen, hin und wieder die Grenzen des Sagbaren zu überschreiten, der Tatsache eingedenk, daß Grenzverletzungen aller Art geahndet werden. (22)

Where Kindheitsmuster concludes with unity and compromise, Was bleibt is committed to challenging and overcoming the linguistic frontier. This aspiration is maintained
despite an awareness that such transgressions will be punished, a notion which has particularly literal connotations in the context of the GDR. Yet the text is concerned not with overcoming boundaries, but with blurring them. The narrator’s desperate need to convey and combat her anxiety linguistically is underlined (and undermined) by the fact that she has no choice but to use her current language, which both reflects and augments her feelings of "Angst". Unlike the two young writers with whom she comes into contact in the text, the narrator has lost the capacity to take risks, to react spontaneously to events: "Für spontane Briefe war ich verdorben" (62). These young writers appear in the text as self-reproaching reminders of the narrator’s former values. Her astonished evaluation of the young woman’s manuscript: "Jeder Satz sei wahr" (76) is also an implicit condemnation of the narrator’s own work. It contrasts with the coded language of the earlier telephone conversations: "So sprachen wir immer, am wahren Text vorbei" (25). The polarisation of discourse into infected present and potential future forms is again reflected in the narrator’s judgement of the young woman’s writing, which comes much closer to her conception of the future language than her own work: "daß noch in zehn Jahren Menschen Sätze würden lesen wollen, wie sie sie schrieb" (77). This also reinforces the text’s historical indeterminacy, as both the woman’s and the narrator’s sentences may have endured for ten years already. It is significant that the first internal citation of the text’s title (79) comes as a result of the self-confrontation which follows the woman’s visit, although it is made explicit that the latter would not have concerned herself with such questions of historicity. In a gesture characteristic of Wolf, the flexibility of German syntax also makes it uncertain whether the title refers to the present or the future. The fact that the title of the text lacks a question mark leaves the reader unable to tell whether the text is a statement or a questioning of "what remains". Reflecting the text’s governing sense of indeterminacy, it is similarly impossible to decide whether the narrator writes any parts of Was bleibt in the new "härter" language to which she aspires or whether she retains throughout her old, compromised discourse.

The division which characterises her use of language is reflected in the narrator’s self-representation. The text is largely structured as an "Innerer Dialog" (52). The addressee is the "innere[n] Zensor", whose existence parallels her compromised present discourse and indicates the regime’s success in imposing its values. In a repressive state such as the GDR (or indeed Nazi Germany), interior dialogue expresses what cannot
otherwise be articulated: self-censorship becomes a necessary means of survival. However, the narrator is aware of the potentially self-indulgent nature of excessive internalisation: "Fast nichts konnte ich mehr denken oder sagen, ohne meinen Zensor gegen mich aufzubringen. Wenn du mit diesem selbstmitleidigen Geflenne nicht aufhörst..." (65). Torn between the (deferred) longing for transparency and the recognition of the potential danger of such spontaneity, the narrator becomes alienated from herself.

Such instances of self-doubt contribute further to the sense of uncertainty which guides the reader's response to the text. In his book *Filz: Gedanken über das neueste Deutschland*, Stephan Heym writes: "Scharen von Menschen im Osten des wiedervereinigten Vaterlandes sind plötzlich Opfer eines Beichtsyndroms geworden".\(^\text{30}\) I believe we should read *Was bleibt* and the text's frequent use of religious imagery in this light of Heym's remark. Early in the text, the narrator claims: "Aber mit simplen Selbstbezichtigungen würde ich diesmal nicht davonkommen. Ich setze Wasser auf. Das mea culpa überlassen wir mal den Katholiken" (12). Yet "Selbstbe Zeigung" (fused with typical Wolf "Selbstbesichtigung" perhaps) is one of the driving forces behind the narrative. It contributes to the complex mixture of relief and apprehension which must have accompanied the writing of the text and its eventual publication. When the book was published, many of the highly personal attacks on its author derived from the view that the "Erzählung" portrayed her as a victim of the state, rather than as privileged "Staatsdichterin". However, there is little evidence to support this view in the text itself. As we have seen, the narrator repeatedly and self-reproachingly refers to her privileged position and associates it with the disillusionment which dominates the narrative. However, self-interest and the last vestiges of her loyalty to the regime prevent her from renouncing her privileged position. The dream image of the damaged "Geburtshülle eines Embryos" (71) suggests profound feelings of guilt and anticipates Wolf's later aspiration to use the controversy which followed the "Akteneinsicht" to become "hautlos, sehr empfindlich".\(^\text{31}\) An implicit parallel is drawn between the confessional aspect of the text and the bizarre earlier "Selbstbekenntnis" (46) of the narrator's former friend, Jürgen M., who she suspects (without evidence) may control the surveillance operation. His apparent sense of guilt, which derives from his willingness to be "nützlich" to the regime (the euphemism hiding a multitude of sins), is explicitly linked to the narrator's own
complicity: "Wie ich selbst, auf meinem Platz." (49) Like much of the text this statement is ambiguous, both self-pitying and perceptive. 32

To speak of the confessional is to return to the origins of autobiographical narrative. This aspect of Kindheitsmuster is clear: Wolf has often claimed that the earlier book represented an essential act of "Vergangenheitsbewältigung", which confronted the experience of Nazism in a way which had previously been impossible in the GDR. Was bleibt follows Kindheitsmuster in merging the historical with the fictional and in viewing the self as a plurality: "Ich selbst. Über die zwei Worte kam ich lange nicht hinweg. Ich selbst. Wer war das. Welches der multiplen Wesen, aus denen 'ich selbst' mich zusammensetze" (57). The instability of the narrator's sense of identity again reflects the uncertainty and fragility which pervade the text. She veers between absolutes, as the authority of a state, which she formerly supported with such enthusiasm, is repeatedly undermined, even as its power remains relatively undiminished. However, as Herbert Lehnert has indicated, the controversy which surrounds the narrator's public reading in the final section of the text demonstrates that she is not as isolated as she believes. Only there can we find any sense of the "Wir" which Anna K. Kuhn finds to be absent from the text. 33 Like everything in the text, this is disputed and limited. One person's "Brüderlichkeit" (96) is another's naivety. Such characterisations emphasise the fact that Was bleibt is an intensely moral text, written in a society (and by extension a world) which no longer possesses the authority to define the parameters of moral behaviour: "Wer aber sagte uns, was Würde sei?" (53). We might recall how even "Aufrichtigkeit" becomes a "Luxus" in Kindheitsmuster (371). In Was bleibt, material luxury is regarded as part of the corrupting process which alienates the narrator from herself. It contributes to the creation of the overwhelming "Angst", which combines with confession and the suspicion of language to form the kind of self-investigation which is so common in the Wolf's writing. When the narrator deliberately avoids Jürgen M., she realises that her instinct to greet a friend has been contaminated, rather as Nelly's natural impulses are undermined by Nazi indoctrination in Kindheitsmuster. Caution becomes paranoia and leads her to suspect everything and everyone: "Wie oft mußt du 'Zufall' gedacht haben, bis du bereit bist, 'Absicht' zu denken?" (41). Throughout Was bleibt the narrator oscillates between these two positions, as Jürgen M.'s image of her life as "Traumtänzerin [...] auf dem Seil" (48) suggests. Such precariousness is a feature of the text as a whole,
indeed of life in the GDR in general: "Die Fremdheit, die mich von der Menge trennte, glaubte ich, trennte die Menge auch von sich selbst" (72).

The disillusionment inherent in such remarks causes the reader to question the feasibility of Was bleibt's deferred hope for linguistic renewal. What optimism there is remains vague and recalls the insistence elsewhere on the proximity of "Täuschung" and "Hoffnung" (Christa T. p.201). Nevertheless the vestiges of former utopianism seem to endure tentatively, as they do at the end of Sommerstück, in the midst of despair. In fact, Was bleibt rejects the present entirely: "Es ging um die Zukunft, wissen Sie. Was bleibt" (103). The deferral of hopes and actions to an unspecified future is a common feature of Wolf's later writing. For example, her 1994 lecture, "Abschied von Phantomen - Zur Sache Deutschland", concludes by calling into question both past and future without recourse to the ambiguous temporal implications inherent in Was bleibt's title: "Was war? Was bleibt? Was wird?". In a similar way, the concluding words of Was bleibt tentatively indicate the "innere Befreiung", the development of which Wolf sees as the goal of her writing: "Daß es kein Unglück gibt außer dem, nicht zu leben. Und am Ende keine Verzweiflung außer der, nicht gelebt zu haben" (108). The transparent simplicity of this aspiration emphasises the confessional nature of Wolf's undertaking. The narrator also returns to the central theme of language at the end of the text:


The new language, which also has a central place in Wolf's contemporaneous Büchner prize speech, remains a potential force for liberation. The fact that the goal seems to be unattainable does not necessarily invalidate the quest, which is a necessary means of countering disillusionment. The optimism of "nicht immer zu früh" endures despite the fact that Wolf comes to no conclusions.

Was bleibt is a consistently open text; the loss of focus which its narrator associates with the decline of the GDR is reflected in the uncertainty which becomes a foundational element of both her sense of identity and the text. Her early question,
"Wie viel Zeit wollte ich mir eigentlich noch geben?" (23) echoes through the text with suggestions beyond its original context. The question of time - how much has been wasted, how much is left - becomes increasingly urgent in the context of 1989. In the light of the break-up of the GDR and the controversy which has surrounded Wolf ever since, Was bleibt's title comes to seem despairingly resonant and ironic. A text, which in 1990 appeared to reflect "astonishing political naivety", appears increasingly (if unconsciously) to have anticipated both the hysteria of its reception and the uncertainties of reunification. Read in the light of Kindheitsmuster, Was bleibt can be seen to extend and reflect the earlier text's radical examination of the possibilities of autobiographical narrative.

3 "Die Niederschrift von Träumen"

In a diary entry, Kafka writes:

Dann aber wäre das Schreiben der Selbstbiographie eine große Freude, da es so leicht vor sich ginge, wie die Niederschrift von Träumen und doch ein ganz anders, großes, mich für immer beeinflussendes Ergebnis hätte, das auch dem Verständnis und Gefühl eines jeden andern zugänglich wäre.  

The autobiographical texts which I have examined are founded on the interplay of autobiographical and fictional discourse. As such, they are as liberating and representative as Kafka wished his unwriteable "Selbstbiographie" to be. Yet they resemble the "Niederschrift" not of dreams, but of the nightmares which modernism could only represent through fiction. It is no coincidence that the "autobiographical turn" in German language literature in the 1970s took place as an attempt to come to terms with the devastating events of twentieth century European history. Of the writers I examine, only Canetti narrates from the position of the traditional autobiographer, at the end of a life. Historical events seem to have had such an enduring effect that writers felt compelled to fuse their fictional responses with direct representations of personal experience, creating autobiographical novels grounded in the illusion of truth.
Kindheitsmuster is a useful intertext with which to bring together the other autobiographical narratives I have examined because it so much more firmly rooted in external reality than the other texts. Wolf’s depiction of the disorientation of identity is affected directly by historical events; it draws attention to Canetti’s aloofness and Bernhard’s rejection of society by contrast. Her exposure to Nazism in childhood led directly to the ideological commitment which Weiss also adopted much later in a more pluralistic form. (It is ironic that Kindheitsmuster was criticised by the stultifyingly orthodox Annemarie Auer for not resembling Die Ästhetik closely enough.) In contrast, Canetti’s rejection of ideological and national affiliation is reflected in both Masse und Macht and his emblematic notion of “Plurinationalismus”. Bernhard similarly avoided political commitment, as his emotional “Haßliebe” for Austria demonstrates so ambiguously. All of the texts I have examined underline the fact that displacement is a characteristic feature of twentieth century European history. This dominant awareness of dislocation is evident both in the exile which Canetti and Weiss chose to maintain all their lives and the internal dislocation which permeates Bernhard’s writing. In each of these cases, the experience of displacement led to a profound questioning of language, both as a reflection of cultural identity and as a means of rendering experience.

Wolf tends to see language in terms of its corruption by ideology. The narrator’s discourse is called into question chiefly because it retains some of the elements of Nelly’s childhood indoctrination. Some of the Utopianism of Wolf’s early work remains in Kindheitsmuster, as comparison with Was bleibt’s portrayal of the inadequacy of narratorial discourse indicates. Wolf had no choice but to write in German. For Canetti and Weiss, the enduring use of German in exile becomes an act of restoration in defiance of the linguistic remnants of Nazism. Canetti’s apparent transparency and concern with linguistic purity are undermined by his "Aufzeichnungen": they supply the "Sprachskепsis", which also dominates Weiss’s early work. Indeed it is surprising how closely the monomania of the characters in Canetti’s Die Blendung and the seemingly unstoppable narration in Weiss’s Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden resemble aspects of Bernhard’s writing. For Bernhard, the use of German is bound up with his complex relation to Austria (and in turn that nation’s relation to the German language). Form is part of his relentless self-stylisation and constitutes a radical examination of language’s potential adequately to re-present anything external to it. For all four writers, language
has a tendency to become a listing, an insecure groping for unattainable meanings and truths.

All of the writers I have examined are aware of the necessary partiality of their undertaking. They share modern literary autobiography's suspicion of the notion of verifiability. For them, it is "Dichtung" not "Wahrheit" which is pre-eminent, which is why I have discussed the autobiographical texts in the light of their more overtly fictional counterparts in the three main chapters. It could be said that all the autobiographical texts operate in sight of a "Fluchtpunkt", which is both a fixed position and a prelude to escape. For all of the writers, the search for self-knowledge becomes a central issue. This search is predicated on an awareness of the effect of historical, societal and ontological upheavals on the development of the self.

Canetti and Weiss, who are Jewish and belong to a different generation from Bernhard and Wolf, experience displacement and exile from early childhood. The increasing anti-Semitism of the 1930s serves only to heighten their awareness of difference: their experience of displacement is resistant to the kind of dislocation which so violently disturbs Nelly at the end of the war. For Bernhard, belonging stems from a complex process of acknowledgement and denial - captured by his pervasive "Gleichgültigkeit" image - which stands in opposition to Kindheitsmuster's carefully delineated patterns of character formation. Wolf's division of the self into three persons appears rather more radical at first sight than is actually the case. In the context of Kindheitsmuster's self-conscious return to origins, Wolf offers a particularly literal transformation of the distancing that is a necessary component of autobiographical writing. Ultimately her version of the self remains curiously integrated. The reader is not faced with the sense of unbalance or mutability which colours Die Ursache and Fluchtpunkt, for example. The tentative unity of Wolf's narrator's various selves at the end of the text highlights what I have previously termed Bernhard's characteristic "Selbsterfindung" and the predominant "Selbstfindung" of Weiss's early prose (which endures against the grain of Die Ästhetik). Neither Bernhard nor Weiss envisages an end to their self-development: in contrast, the conclusion of Wolf's text suggests the cessation of identity formation. Canetti is a more ambiguous case: the serene and sovereign narrator of the "Lebensgeschichte" seems to encounter few of the uncertainties or self-divisions which dominate the other texts, until the reader encounters Das Geheimherz der
What unites the autobiographical texts of the writers I have examined is their common acknowledgement of modernity’s displacement of the subject. In order to bring together their varying methods of reconciling themselves to this displacement, I want to return to Kafka’s association of autobiographical narrative with dreams. Gayatri Spivak has written in an essay on displacement:

The displacement of the subject that is the theme of deconstruction relates rather to the dream-work in general; the dream as a whole displaces the text of the latent content into the text of the manifest content. Freud calls this Entstellung (literally "displacement", more usually translated as "distortion").

The displacement of the subject is not only the theme of deconstruction, it is also the theme of modern autobiographical narrative. Freud’s formulation is strikingly similar to terms which the writers I have examined apply to the condition of displacement. In Der Keller, the text which is the turning point in his autobiographical series, Bernhard writes: "Mein Charakter ist alle Charaktere zusammen, meine Wünsche sind alle Wünsche zusammen, meine Hoffnungen, Verzweiflungen, Entschütterungen. Nur die Verstellung rettet mich zeitweise und dann wieder das Gegenteil der Verstellung" (112). The shift from "Entstellung" to "Verstellung", from distortion to disguise, sites the process within the self, transforming it into a partially willed response to uncertainty. Characteristically, Bernhard has it both ways - his self-fictionalising "Verstellung" is qualified by a simultaneous fidelity to autobiographical self-representation. Wolf, who is repeatedly troubled by the difficulties of "Anpassung", tends to associate "Verstellung" with "Verdrängung", which is a self-alienating means of survival for the narrators of Kindheitsmuster and Was bleibt. However, in the latter text, "Anpassung" is increasingly associated with guilt and the narrator’s choice between the language of compromise and the discourse of rebellion indicates the fundamental split in her identity. In addition, in the former GDR "Verstellung" and "Anpassung" were often necessary means of survival. Canetti has a similarly ambiguous view of "Verstellung", which he sees as an "Übergangsform" (MM 425) on the way to "Verwandlung". His governing notion of "Verwandlung" both results from and attempts to resolve the dislocation of the self. Once
he renounces the negativity which is characteristic of Die Blendung, "Verwandlung" enables him to maintain both narratorial restraint and narrative freedom. Only Weiss makes no reference to "Verstellung". Instead, his texts repeatedly focus on self-adaptation and revision. This is most clearly demonstrated by the recurring image of "Wiedergeburt", which is also central to Canetti’s and Bernhard’s texts and which is designed to resist the ontological threat of the "Leere". It is no coincidence that all these images of displacement come into sharpest focus in autobiographical narrative, where the self is repeatedly dislocated and reinterpreted. This process of self-transformation is captured by Stuart Hall’s definition of translation as "a continuous process of re-articulation and re-conceptualization, without any notion of a primary origin". It is via an analogous process of rebirth or revision that the writers I have examined make sense of the displacement of identity. In Susan Handelman’s words: "Displacement is both the condition and answer to exile". It is autobiographical narrative, with its hybridity and indeterminacy, which offers the opportunity both to examine and to exhibit the displaced self.
NOTES

Notes to the introduction

17. Paul de Man, Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche,


**Notes to chapter one**

Canetti: Primary texts and abbreviations used.
All references are to the following editions, which are published by Fischer in Frankfurt am Main unless stated otherwise:

B  *Die Blendung* (1985)
D  *Dramen. Hochzeit, Komödie der Eitelkeit, Die Befristeten* (1979)
G  *Die gerettete Zunge. Geschichte einer Jugend* (1979)
MM *Masse und Macht* (Hamburg: Claassen 1971)
SM "Die Stimmen von Marrakesch. Aufzeichnungen nach einer Reise" (1980)


14. The phrase comes from Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism (London: Chatto & Windus 1993) p. 35f. Said uses the phrase to describe the gap between the experience of colonisers and colonised; I am using it to apply to Die Blendung’s depiction of communicative breakdown in modernity.


17. David Darby, Structures of Disintegration (Riverside, California: Ariadne 1993) p. 82f.


20. Nicola Riedner, Canettis Fischerle. Eine Figur zwischen Masse, Macht und
See Darby, *Structures of Disintegration* p. 103f for a discussion of "Das Kleine" as Novelle.

See for example Russell, "The Vision of Man" p. 33.


See, for example, *Die Provinz des Menschen* 237.


Eigler, *Das autobiographische Werk* p. 85.

Roberts, *Kopf und Welt* p. 117.

See Alfred Doppler, "Der Hüter der Verwandlungen": Canettis Bestimmung des Dichters", in Aspetsberger & Stieg (Hg.), *Elias Canetti: Blendung als Lebensform* (Königstein/Ts: Athenäum 1985) p. 48 and *Die Provinz des Menschen* pp. 132-134.

Rudolf Hartung, "Gespräch mit Elias Canetti" p. 35.

Magris, "Der Schriftsteller der sich versteckt" p. 190.


Joachim Günther, "Die Stimmen von Marrakesch", in Durzak (Hg.), *Zu Elias Canetti* p. 117.

Göpfert "Zu den Stimmen von Marrakesch", in Kaszynski (Hg.), *Elias Canettis Anthropologie und Poetik* p. 144.

Eigler, *Das autobiographische Werk* p. 144.


It is interesting to note a parallel incident in the first part of Maya Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (London: Virago 1984), where threat becomes reality. When the narrator, still a child, identifies the man who raped her, a mob murders him in retribution. The victim believes herself and her words to be responsible and responds by denying language itself, choosing to remain mute in the presence of adults for the following seven years.


Peter Alter, "The Rhetoric of the Nation-State and the Fall of Empires", *Austrian


52. "Gespräch mit Joachim Schickel" p. 111.


54. It is interesting to note that Canetti was in Paris in May 1968. However such is his requirement for distance that he commented in 1980 that the events "m'occupent encore actuellement. Mais c'est justement la raison pour laquelle je ne les mentionne pas", Gerald Stieg, "Questions à Elias Canetti", *Austriaca* 11 (1980) p. 20.


57. Magris, "Ein Schriftsteller, der aus vielen Personen besteht" p. 265.

58. See Schneider, "Die Krüppel und ihr symbolischer Leib".


61. "Ich hatte seit meinem zehnten Lebensjahr das Gefühl, aus vielen Figuren zu bestehen" (F 182). Cf. *Die Provinz des Menschen* p. 54.


63. See, for example, Joachim Schickel, "Gespräch mit Elias Canetti" p. 107-111.


69. Jean Améry, "Wieviel Heimat braucht der Mensch", in his *Jenseits von Schuld*


70. Eigler, *Das autobiographische Werk* p. 113 quoting from Adorno, "Der Essay als Form".
73. Eigler, *Das autobiographische Werk* p. 105.
74. "Gespräch mit Horst Bienek", in *Die gespaltene Zukunft* p. 93.
75. See Bartsch & Melzer (Hg.), *Experte der Macht*.
77. Franz Schuh, "Der Dichter als Vorbild und Konkurrent", in *Hüter der Verwandlung* p. 74.

**Notes to chapter two**

Bernhard: Primary texts
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*Amras* (1987)
*Verstörung* (1988)
*Ungenach* (1968)
*Ereignisse* (Berlin: Literarisches Colloquim 1969)
*Das Kalkwerk* (1970)
*Der Italiener* (Salzburg: Residenz 1971)
*Gehen* (1971)
*Erzählungen* (1986)
*Der Kulterer. Eine Filmgeschichte* (1976)
*Die Salzburger Stücke* (1975) contains *Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige* and *Die Macht der Gewohnheit*
*Die Ursache. Eine Andeutung* (Salzburg: Residenz 1975)
*Korrektur* (1988)
*Die Berühmten* (1976)
*Der Keller. Eine Entziehung* (München: dtv 1979)
Ja (1988)
Der Stimmenimitator (1978)
Der Weltverbesserer (1979)
Die Billigesser (1988)
Ein Kind (München: dtv 1985)
Beton (1982)
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Thomas Bernhard: Ein Lesebuch (1993)

"Grand Hotel Imperial - Dubrovnik. Liebe, verehrte Doktor Spiel", in Dittmar (Hg.), Thomas Bernhard Werkgeschichte pp. 131-2

18. Cf. Frost p. 217 where the equivalence is taken to extremes: "Der Anfang sei das Ende, von diesem Satz gehe ihm alles aus, und: 'ein Tisch ist auch ein Fenster, und ein Fenster ist auch eine Frau...'
19. See for example Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Thomas Bernhard p. 49.
22. See Martin Huber, "Romanfigur klagt den Autor: Zur Rezeption von Thomas Bernhards Die Ursache. Eine Andeutung", in Schmidt-Dengler & Huber (Hg.), Statt Bernhard.
25. Quoted in Huber, "Romanfigur klagt den Autor" p. 89.
32. See Gerhard Vom Hofe, "Ecce Lazarus: Autor-Existenz und 'Privat'-Metaphysik


35. See *Der Atem* p. 50: "Es sei die Frage, ob es überhaupt tatsächliche Krankheiten gebe, ob nicht alle Krankheiten erfundene Krankheiten seien, weil die Krankheit an sich eine Erfindung sei."


40. See Höller, *Thomas Bernhard* pp. 26-33 for details of the discrepancies between fact and fiction.

41. Gerald Vom Hofe, "Ecce Lazarus" p. 35.


44. Cf. *Amras* p. 78: "Das Bewußtsein, daß du nichts bist als Fragmente, daß kurze und längere und längste Zeiten nichts als Fragmenten sind."


48. It is interesting that Bernhard never takes an epigraph from Wittgenstein despite the extent of his influence, particularly on Korrektur.


53. Schmidt-Dengler, "Elf Thesen zum Werk Thomas Bernhards", *Der


58. Intriguingly, there is a reference to Bernhard himself winning three Papierrosen at a fair and giving them to friends in Maria Fialik, *Der Charismatiker Thomas Bernhard und die Freunde von ein* (Wien: Löcker 1992) p. 78.


60. Marquardt, *Gegenrichtung* p. 184.


64. Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* p. 177.


68. See especially the exploration of the notion of "Karikatur" in *Alte Meister* p. 117f.


72. See *Der Keller* p. 30. Konrad also describes himself as his wife's "Stürenfried", *Das Kalkwerk* p. 159.


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75. August Obermeyer, "Der Locus terribilis in Thomas Bernhards Prosa", in Manfred Jurgensen (Hg.), Bernhard: Annäherungen (Bern: Francke 1981).
76. See the discussions of the use of the term "Mitteleuropa" in the essays in George Schöpflin & Nancy Wood (eds.), In Search of Central Europe (Cambridge: Polity Press 1989).
78. Marquardt, Gegenrichtung p. 65.
79. See the discussion of the role of the idyll in Bernhard & Jean Paul in Tismar, Gestörte Idyllen.
80. See Die Ursache p. 28 & Ein Kind p. 105. In the latter text the following emblematic self-description occurs: "Ich selbst genoß meinen Bericht so, als würde er von einem ganz anderen erzählt" p. 35.
85. Fleischmann, Thomas Bernhard - Eine Begegnung p. 257.
86. See "Monologe auf Mallorca", in Fleischmann, Thomas Bernhard - Eine Begegnung (1991) pp. 7-158.
88. See especially Der Atem p. 48 & Wittgensteins Neffe p. 80.
89. Fleischmann, Thomas Bernhard - Eine Begegnung p. 58.
93. Asta Scheib, "Von einer Katastrophe in die andere" in Dreissinger (Hg.), Von einer Katastrophe p. 139.
95. Mittermayer, Ich-Werden p. 129.


98. Nichola Casanova, "Ich fülle die Leere mit Sätzen aus", in Dreissinger (Hg.), Von einer Katastrophe p. 64.

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Fluchtpunkt (1965)
Das Gespräch der drei Gehenden (1963)
Rapporte (1968)
Rapporte II (1971)
Stücke I & II (1977)
Die Ästhetik des Widerstands (1983)
Rekonvaleszenz (1991)

Der Maler Peter Weiss. Bilder Zeichnungen Collagen Filme (Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann 1982)
Peter Weiss im Gespräch, Rainer Gerlach & Matthias Richter (Hg.) (1986)

Abbreviations

Notizbücher 1960-1971 is referred to as N1.
Notizbücher 1971-1980 is referred to as N2.
Peter Weiss im Gespräch is referred to as PWG.

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3. Alfons Söllner, Peter Weiss und die Deutschen (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag) p. 29.


12. "'Der Kampf um meine Existenz als Maler': Peter Weiss im Gespräch mit Peter Roos", Der Maler Peter Weiss p. 40.

13. There are countless examples of this in the early letters in Briefe an Goldschmidt/Jungk.


15. Peter Spielmann, "Das große Welttheater: Bemerkungen zum Maler Peter Weiss" in Der Maler Peter Weiss p. 70.


17. Ilsabe Dagmar Arnold-Dielewicz, "Isolation als Selbstbefreiung" in Arnold (Hg.), Text und Kritik 37 (1973) p. 4.


22. Cf. the beginning of the discussion of the early prose below.
31. See the early *Briefe an Goldschmidl/Jungk*, especially p. 87.
32. See Bohrer, "Die Tortur".
35. Helmut J. Schneider, "Der Verlorene Sohn und die Sprache: Zu Der Schatten des Körpers des Kutschers", in Canaris (Hg.), *Über Peter Weiss* p. 36.
36. Ror Wolf, "Die Poesie der kleinsten Stücke", in Canaris (Hg.), *Über Peter Weiss* p. 27.
40. See Vogt, *Peter Weiss* p. 68 for a discussion of whether Kutscher is an example of "Sprachskepsis" or a "Sackgasse".
41. Bohrer, "Die Tortur" p. 182. The paraphrase refers to "Die Bundesrepublik ist ein Morast", an interview which appeared in *Der Spiegel* 18.3.68.
42. "... ein ständiges Auseinandersetzen mit den Fehlern und mit den Mißgriffen...": Heinz-Ludwig Arnold im Gespräch mit Peter Weiss", in Stephan (Hg.), *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* p. 33.
44. Peter Hannenberg, *Peter Weiss: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Schreiben* p. 212: "Die Struktur des 'und doch' durchzieht Weiss' Werk wie ein roter Faden".
58. Burkhardt Lindner, "Ich Konjunktiv Futur I oder die Wiederkehr des Exils", in Götze & Scherpe (Hg.), *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands Lesen* p. 94.
64. Arnold, "ein ständiges Auseinandersetzen" p. 50.
68. Norbert Krenzlin, "Im Horizont der Postmoderne", in Dwars et al (Hg.), Widerstand Wahrnehmen p. 297.
74. Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss, "Peter Weiss im Spannungsfeld" p. 94.

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Was bleibt. Erzählung (Frankfurt a.M: Luchterhand 1990)
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20. Heinrich Böll, "Wo habt ihr bloß gelebt?", in Drescher (Hg.), *Christa Wolf. Ein Arbeitsbuch* p. 92.


24. "Subjektive Authentizität" p. 801: "Sie sollten uns aber stören - wiederum in der Zuversicht gesagt, daß wir ändern können, was uns stört."


29. Herbert Lehnert, "Fiktionalität und autobiographische Motive. Zur Christa Wolfs


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**Chapter one: Canetti**

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Chapter two: Bernhard

Primary texts

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