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Pure Violence on the Stage of Exception: Representations of Revolutions in Georg
Büchner, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Heiner Müller, and Elfriede Jelinek

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines pertinent issues of today's terrorism debate in frequently overlooked earlier representations of revolutionary and state violence. At the center of this debate is the state of exception through which the sovereign legitimizes the juridical order by suspending preexisting civil laws. As recent theorists have argued, this has become the paradigm for modern nation states. Walter Benjamin contends, however, that a permanent state of exception has existed since the Baroque and has subjected its victims to an empty eschaton, an end without messianic redemption and devoid of all meaning. As long as the order of the sovereign is based on the dialectical relationship between law-making and law-preserving violence, this state will persevere and the messianic promise will not come to fruition. Thus Benjamin conceives of another category of violence he

calls “pure violence,” which lies outside of the juridical order altogether. This type of violence also has the ability to reinstate history insofar as the inevitability of the state of exception has ceased any historical continuity. By looking at the revolutionary dramas of Georg Büchner, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Heiner Müller, and Elfriede Jelinek, this study examines the ways in which representations of revolutions in language reinscribe the state of exception. The history of revolutions in these dramas is comprised of nothing more than the disjointed pieces of intertextual relations and citations of a preexisting language. These pieces construct merely the appearance of a historical code and demonstrate what is at stake for Benjamin: an eternally fragmented history. This study is particularly interested in textual and theatrical moments outside of this code (and outside of representation) that expose the possibility of “pure violence” or a type of revolutionary violence, which would allow for the messianic.

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DEDICATION

for Jeannette Harris

Introduction

“To speak [*dire*] is, in this sense, always to ‘speak the law,’ *ius dicere*”

- Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*

In “Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen,” Walter Benjamin claims that history is not a progression in time, as we are lead to believe, but rather a series of reoccurring catastrophes.¹ Literary and theatrical representations of revolutions that respond to Benjamin’s concept of history are the focus of this study. It specifically examines the revolutionary potential of theater in Georg Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*, Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Der Turm*, Heiner Müller’s *Der Auftrag*, and Elfriede Jelinek’s *Bambiland*. While not all of these dramas depict a revolution necessarily, they are indeed revolutionary, insofar as they venture beyond the realms of normativity, of what Schiller called “sittliches Leben.”² Normativity, in this case, is not only moral, or “sittlich,” but also linguistic, which this study calls the language of the sovereign.³ Each text steps outside of morality and, simultaneously, outside of the order of a comprehensible

¹ In his ninth thesis, Benjamin mentions the “new” angel of history, *Angelus Novus*, taken from a Paul Klee painting. About the angel Benjamin writes: “Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert” (499). The angel sees history not as a chain of events that are neatly strung together, but as repetition of catastrophes. Benjamin’s interpretation of the angel can be applied to his philosophy of a reoccurring history, the state of exception, which he first mentions in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. This is something that will be detailed below.

² Below is a more detailed textual analysis of Schiller’s play, *Die Räuber*, in which “sittliches Leben” is contrasted with “entzetzliches Leben.”

³ As a concept that is borrowed from Giorgio Agamben, the language of the sovereign is always the law.

language. As opposed to the French Revolution that is depicted in *Dantons Tod*, these revolutionary moments do not clear a space for a new sovereign power as well as a new law, but rather abolish the juridical order altogether. With their capacity for absolute destruction and chaos, these moments exemplify what Benjamin calls “reine Gewalt,” a pure violence that does not establish or preserve the law, but violates the law.

Linguistically understood, pure violence “entsetzt,” or unhinges, what the sovereign has previously set, which is the “Gesetz.” More importantly, it has the capacity to interrupt the reoccurring history, the endless cycle, in which each sovereign substitutes old laws with new ones – what philosophers have referred to as a permanent state of exception.⁴ The contribution of my literary analysis is not simply to reiterate the ways in which each text depicts the state of exception, as others scholars have done, but also to look at how each text attempts to break its repetition.

Realizing that pure violence cannot be represented through intelligible language, this study is interested in the revolutionary moments that are communicated not through words, but rather non-verbally on the stage. Any attempt, therefore, to understand and to verbalize these moments is an impossible task, if they are to remain incoherent. Nonetheless, this study is forced to communicate the language of the sovereign to expose the revolutionary potential on the German stage. While the language that subjects us to the state of exception may be unavoidable, imagining the potential for pure violence – a moment that exists outside of representation – remains an indispensable task. Finding ways to expose these nonrepresentable moments is an objective that Büchner,

⁴ Although the political theorist, Carl Schmitt, defines the sovereign by its ability to declare a state of exception, I am more interested in Benjamin and Agamben’s reading of the concept. The notion of the state of exception is detailed later in the introduction.

Hofmannsthal, Müller, and Jelinek's texts share. The dramatists turn to the potential of theater to stage a revolution. Although each performance of their piece remains unique, they depend on their characters to perform what cannot be expressed through words. Without delving into performance theory, this study asks a number of open-ended questions that help guide the analysis: Exactly how does the stage become a place where communication is disrupted? How can it represent what cannot be represented in intelligible language?

The current terrorism debate in the media has prompted Slavoj Žižek to write about a desire for moments that exists outside of representation, moments that are inherently violent. His 2002 book, *Welcome to the Dessert of Real*, underscores the relevance of my study across interdisciplinary fields today. What Žižek calls the "Real," a term he appropriates from Jacques Lacan, is a revolutionary moment, a pure violence that remains unrepresentable. Drawing on psychoanalytical theories, he contends that there has been a "passion for the Real," which found its advent in the 20th century. The passion is an urge to "return to the Real," a desire for an unmediated reality – the reality that exists before it is represented, before it enters language (19). This desire, Žižek argues, became especially prevalent after the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Most people experienced the World Trade Center collapse as an event on television, as a virtual reality (11). The event was experienced like a blockbuster Hollywood movie. Hence, it could not be described as a real event, in the sense that it existed outside of representation, Žižek writes, but it was only real insofar as it was mediated:

We should therefore invert the standard reading according to which the WTC explosions were the intrusion of the Real which shattered our illusory Sphere:

quite the reverse – it was before the WTC collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen – and what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality (16).

As soon as the events of September 11th were mediated through television, they became part of a virtual reality, the social reality in which we live. Despite the fact that the traumatic images of the WTC destruction became part our reality, the events no longer belonged to the Real, according to Žižek. Instead, they were assimilated into representation, into something that could be understood, even if it was traumatic. In this regard, they did not shatter our illusion, but rather became part of the illusion.

While the focus of this study is not on media or psychoanalysis, it is interested in the loss of the Real and the urge to return to a prelinguistic time, a utopia that precedes signification. This utopia can only be experienced, Žižek points out, as a “nightmarish apparition,” due to its traumatic and excessive characteristics (19). However, this place also has messianic potential, as Benjamin already pointed out. In his book, Žižek acknowledges Benjamin, who “defined the Messianic moment as that of *Dialektik im Stillstand*, dialectics at a standstill: In the expectation of a Messianic Event, life comes to a standstill” (7). The moment where life comes to a standstill is also a moment in which human language ceases to exist. In the context of my study, the messianic event is defined by moments that are experienced onstage. Because they cannot be understood in language, these experiences are often violent and disturbing, but they also have the capacity to interrupt the state of exception.

From Agamben to Benjamin (via Schmitt)

As Žižek notes, it is necessary to revisit Benjamin's notion that history has ceased to exist in the state of exception – a topic that has become especially prevalent in today's debate on state violence and terrorism. At the forefront of this debate is Giorgio Agamben, whose reading of Benjamin and Carl Schmitt, have brought the concept of the state of exception into the limelight. Commonly seen as the sovereign's ability to suspend existing civil laws, this state has also suspended the progression of history, according to Benjamin. Before being able to comprehend Benjamin's (as well as Agamben's) complex argument, however, it is necessary to briefly look at Schmitt's political theory. Published in 1922, *Politische Theologie* defines the sovereign by its unconditional capacity to declare the "Ausnahmezustand" at any given time (12). Existing both inside and outside of the law, the sovereign suspends the rights of its subjects to eliminate any threat and to preserve its order (19). Although Schmitt already argues that the sovereign always resides over to the decision to suspend its law, it is not until more recently that scholars started to talk about a permanent state of exception. Agamben argues that a worldwide state of exception has existed since Nazi Germany. Drawing on the works of Schmitt and Benjamin, he makes the bold claim that the state of exception has become the paradigm for all modern nation states.⁵ In light of the continuing "war on terrorism," the debate over whether sovereign has the right to infringe on individual liberties rages on. Measures, such as the U.S. Patriot Act or detainment

⁵ See Agamben's *State of Exception*.

camps at Guantánamo Bay, have bypassed and, in some cases, even suspended previously existing civil laws.

Agamben's work not only underscores the relevance of Schmitt and Benjamin's philosophies, but also helps elucidate the relationship between language, law, and the sovereign. Influenced by Benjamin in particular, Agamben points out that the sovereign power is in control of human language, which is the law; thus it determines what is included and excluded into the order of the law. As something that is revisited more extensively in *The State of Exception*, Agamben argues in *Homo Sacer* (1995) that the sovereign does not exclude its subjects from the law in the state of exception, but actively removes them from the law. He notes that, "The state of exception is thus not the chaos that precedes order, but rather the situation that results from its suspension. In this sense, the exception is truly, according to its etymological roots, *taken outside (ex-capere)*, and not simply excluded" (18). Subjects of the sovereign who endure the state of exception are always included into, while simultaneously being excluded from, the law, an inclusive exclusion or exclusive inclusion, so to speak (21). Agamben expands on this argument later in his book, when he highlights the inextricable bond between language and sovereign:

Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself. The particular structure of law has its foundation in this presuppositional structure of human language. It expresses the bond of inclusive exclusion to which a thing is subject because of the fact of being in language, of being named (21).

The notion that nothing is outside of language is significant: an object that cannot be named always already presupposes its naming. In its absence, any object or idea is still present in language – a type of absent presence that post-structuralist thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida, already explored.⁶ Agamben maintains that, as soon as it is communicated through language, the law of the sovereign automatically includes everything that it also excludes. To speak, he points out, is to speak the law (21). If one is (and always has been) subject to the sovereign's law, then can one even talk about historical progression?

With the same question in mind, Benjamin realized that a new concept of history must be conceived in response to what he calls the “wirkliche Ausnahmezustand.” Having existed since the Baroque, this state does not only inclusively exclude us from the law, but also keeps us from attaining messianic fulfillment. In the eighth thesis of his “Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen,” Benjamin writes: “Die Tradition der Unterdrückten belehrt uns darüber, dass der ‘Ausnahmezustand,’ in dem wir leben, die Regel ist. Wir müssen zu einem Begriff der Geschichte kommen, der dem entspricht” (498). If we have not yet entered into a new history, as Benjamin believes, it is assumed that we are kept in a state in which the sovereign denies us access to a new epoch. He examines the relationship between history and the state of exception more closely in one of his earliest works, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (1928), which received much criticism after it was originally written as his “Habilitation.” He writes that the sovereign, who is in control of language, also controls history: “Der Souverän repräsentiert die Geschichte” (182). Reiterating what Schmitt already mentioned, he contends that the sovereign

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the absent present and the “trace,” refer to Derrida's *Writing and Difference* and *Of Grammatology*.

legitimizes its rule through the state of exception. “Wer herrscht ist schon vornhinein dafür bestimmt, Inhaber diktatorischer Gewalt im Ausnahmezustand zu sein, wenn Krieg, Revolte oder andere Katastrophen ihn heraufführen. Diese Setzung ist gegenreformatorisch” (183). This definition of the sovereign prevents history from progressing and, as Benjamin writes, counters any reform. Rather than propelling history forward on a linear and chronological path, the sovereign ceases history.

Through his analysis of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin tediously demonstrates that history is nothing more than a series of fragments that have been artificially strung together merely to evoke the illusion of coherency. To keep us content, the sovereign upholds this illusion and allows us to believe that we are progressing. It tries to convince us of a teleological history, a history with a defined end, in which we have purpose and meaning. Therefore, Benjamin talks about an eschaton in the Baroque in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* – an end of time that exists in the state of exception. He writes: “Es gibt eine barocke Eschatologie; und eben darum einen Mechanismus, der alles Erdgeborene häuft und exalziert, bevor es sich dem Ende überliefert. Das Jenseits wird entleert von alledem, worin auch nur der leiseste Atem von Welt webt...” (184). Instead of ushering in a new historical epoch, the “barocke Eschatologie” does not lead to a revolution that undoes the old order. On the contrary, the inevitability of the state of exception propels us down a linear path into what Benjamin characterizes as a heaven (“Jenseits”), which has been emptied of all earthly things. It is understood as one moment endlessly following upon a previous one – the endless catastrophes that the angel of history sees before him – without a messianic possibility. In *Ausnahmezustand*, the German translation of *Stato di Eccezione*, Agamben’s reading of Benjamin helps clarify

the “barocke Eschatologie”: “Eine solche ‘weiße Eschatologie,’ die die Erde nicht in ein erlöstes Jenseits führt, sondern einem absolut leeren Himmel ausliefert, formt also den Ausnahmezustand des Barock als Katastrophe” (69). By keeping humanity suspended in what he calls an empty heaven, an empty time, the state of exception keeps humanity from experiencing a revolution that leads to salvation. Unless this state is disrupted, history does not advance forward, but exists rather as a series of reoccurring catastrophes in time.

Responding to the cessation of history, Benjamin conceives of ways to overcome the state of exception in his theory on violence. He addresses the topic in one of his earliest published works, “Zur Kritik der Gewalt” (1921), which explores the relationship between the juridical order and mythical violence. More specifically, the dialectical relationship between law-making and law-preserving violence shapes the foundations of all theological and political ideology: “Alle Gewalt ist als Mittel entweder rechtsetzend oder rechtserhaltend” (15). Perhaps the more interesting aspect of his essay – and what will serve as my theoretical focus – is Benjamin’s juxtaposition of these two types of violence with “reine Gewalt” (pure violence). This type of violence neither sets or preserves the order of preexisting laws, but is posited outside of the realm of law altogether.⁷ Also described as a kind of “göttliche Gewalt,” pure violence demolishes any mythical violence that lies at the foundations of every law: “Ist die mythische Gewalt rechtsetzend, so die göttliche rechtsvernichtend, setzt jene Grenzen, so vernichtet diese grenzenlos...” (25). Aside from destroying any laws or boundaries, pure violence also

⁷ In his reading of Benjamin’s critique, Agamben defines “reine Gewalt” in *Ausnahmezustand* as: “Der spezifische Wesenszug dieser Gewalt ist, dass sie weder Recht setzt noch bewahrt, sondern Recht ent-setzt ... und so eine neue Geschichtsepoche eröffnet” (65).

has the capacity to break the state of exception that Benjamin mentions in his *Trauerspiel* book. He notes: “Auf der Durchbrechung dieses Umlaufs im Banne der mythischen Rechtsformen, auf der Entsetzung des rechts samt den Gewalten, auf die es angewiesen ist wie sie auf jenes, zuletzt also der Staatsgewalt, begründet sich ein neues geschichtliches Zeitalter” (29). If it can break the reoccurring cycle of history and “entsetz” what the sovereign has set, pure violence may be a means with which to overcome more than just the sovereign and the state of exception. With the possibility of opening a new historical epoch, moreover, it may also allow us to move beyond the empty heavens and to reanimate history. Because it exists only in theory, however, we must ask: Can we truly grasp divine violence, if the language into which we are born always includes us into the law, as Agamben suggests?

This question is also one that Benjamin faces in “Zur Kritik der Gewalt.” He is reluctant to provide any tangible description of the world outside of what he calls “menschliches Einschränken,” a human world that is confined within language.

Nonetheless, Benjamin conceives of the potential for pure violence in human revolutions:

Wenn die Herrschaft des Mythos hie und da im Gegenwärtigen schon gebrochen ist, so liegt jenes Neue nicht in so unvorstellbarer Fernflucht, dass ein Wort gegen das Recht sich von selbst erledigte. Ist aber der Gewalt auch jenseits des Rechtes ihr Bestand als reine unmittelbare gesichert, so ist damit erwiesen, dass und wie auch die revolutionäre Gewalt möglich ist, mit welchem Namen die höchste Manifestation reiner Gewalt durch den Menschen zu belegen ist (29).

Opposite from Robespierre’s revolution, as depicted in Büchner, Benjamin’s understanding of revolution is without order, posited outside of the juridical realm

altogether. Nonetheless, he makes clear that this revolution is not the highest (or purest) manifestation of violence, but the highest *human* manifestation. Despite the fact that Benjamin's critique never clarifies if we are able to transcend our human confinement, it is necessary to strive for pure violence – something he returns to in his later works. Even though there are no explicit references to “reine Gewalt,” he mentions a messianic rhythm, as a type of absolute destruction, in his “Theologisch-politisches Fragment,” which appeared in one of Benjamin's unpublished manuscripts. At the end of the fragment, he writes: “Denn messianisch ist die Natur aus ihrer ewigen und totalen Vergängnis. Diese zu erstreben, auch für diejenigen Stufen des Menschen, welche Natur sind, ist die Aufgabe der Weltpolitik, deren Methode Nihilismus zu heißen hat” (512). As a part of nature, humans are to strive toward absolute decay, toward pure nihilism, through which everything is destroyed. If the messianic rhythm is read as pure violence, then the nihilism that Benjamin mentions is also a rejection of all earthly things, including human language.

Documenting a Reoccurring History

What ties my texts together is not only their desire to expose messianic moments, utopias outside of comprehensible communication, but also to reveal the state of exception as a reoccurring language in time. All texts rely on citations and intertextuality to represent history in the state of exception onstage. Because they document a specific historical moment, it is tempting to categorize the pieces as documentary theater – a theater genre that incorporates primary source documentation into the fiction of the

drama, so as to understand a particular historic event.⁸ If the line that separates historical from fictional materials is indistinguishable, however, the definition of documentary theater remains problematic. What specifically constitutes a documentary source, if history and the drama share the same language? Identifying citations and intertextual moments may be a simple task in some dramas, but remains more difficult in others. *Dantons Tod*, for example, is often seen as the proto-documentary play, since Büchner directly integrates historical materials into the dialogue of his drama (Dawson 1). He does this without altering the primary source documentation, which he seamlessly blends into the diegetic world of his play. Like Büchner, Jelinek incorporates documentary materials into *Bambiland*, relying on information taken from television reports and newspaper articles to make up her narrative. She alters this information so drastically, however, that it is nearly impossible to single out the documents. Language, in this regard, becomes a way for her to revolutionize theater. Despite their differences, Jelinek and Büchner's plays both document a similar kind of history – one that is, as Benjamin notes, inevitably sovereign-controlled. It is, in Agamben terms, a version of history that is always already inscribed into the law of the sovereign. In their own ways, the dramatists of my selection of texts attempt to overcome this version of history that has existed on the German stage since the Enlightenment.

⁸ Focusing primarily on American theater, Gary Fischer Dawson provides a definition in his *Documentary Theater in the United States*. He writes: “More direct, documentary theater is a theater genre in which primary source documentation is directly incorporated into the dramatic text, and the performance text of each play, and a documentary is one that has had conferred upon it by the institution called theater the status of a documentary play for the purpose of learning about, recalling, interpreting, or responding to, a historical moment” (17).

Because my texts want to disrupt the language of the sovereign, it is profitable to start with a brief analysis of Friedrich Schiller's *Die Räuber*, which depicts the idealization of the law in the context of the Enlightenment. First published in 1781, *Die Räuber* tells the story of the rivalry between two brothers, Karl and Franz Moor. As the egotistic and cold-hearted younger brother, Franz knows that Karl will be the sole inheritor of his father's estate. Jealous of his older and more charismatic brother, whom the Count of Moor loves most, Franz schemes a devious plan to discredit Karl in the eyes of their father. He inevitably succeeds in his mission and drives his own brother from his home into a life of crime. Believing to have lost everything, including his wife, Amalia, Karl joins a group of rebels, who share his cynical worldviews. In the last part of the first act, Karl shares his thoughts on revolution, as he proclaims, "Das Gesetz hat noch keinen großen Mann gebildet...Stelle mich vor ein Heer Kerls wie ich, und aus Deutschland soll eine Republik werden, gegen die Rom und Sparta Nonnenklöster sein sollen" (25). Not only does he question the value of the law, but he also expresses desire for revolution. He yearns for a German Republic – an allusion, presumably, to the First Republic during the French Revolution. After he reveals his ambitions, Karl proceeds to make an unbreakable oath of loyalty to his band of robbers and becomes their leader. His transition from law to lawlessness is finally completed when he describes himself as a, "*Mörder, Räuber!* – mit diesem Wort war das Gesetz unter meine Füße gerollt" (25). The gesture of stepping on what has been set, or "gesetzt," is significant here, since literary representations of the law are, as I later argue, often conveyed through metaphors of hands. It promises to violate the law, which the sovereign's hands administers.

Despite of this promise, however, Schiller's protagonist never takes a final step to abandon the law altogether. Such a step appears to be too drastic for the author.

Instead of inciting a rebellion and fulfilling his pledge to turn Germany into a republic, Karl is not the leader of a revolution, but of reason. After he returns to his father's castle with his gang, Amalia recognizes her husband, begging him to return to his old life. When Karl rejects her request, unwilling to break the oath made to his fellow robbers, she cannot bear being alone and asks him to end her life. In one of the play's most melodramatic moments, Karl fulfills her final plea and murders his wife. He then ponders:

O über mich Narren, der ich wähnete, die Welt durch Greuel zu verschönern und die Gesetze durch Gesetzlosigkeit aufrecht zu halten! Ich nannte es Rache und Recht – ich maßte mich an, o Vorsicht, die Scharten deines Schwertes auszuwetzen und deine Parteilichkeiten gut zu machen – aber – o eitle Kinderei! – da steh ich am Rand eines entsetzlichen Lebens und erfahre nun mit Zähneklappern und Heulen, daß zwei Menschen wie ich den ganzen Bau der sittlichen Welt zugrunde richten würden... (102).

Curiously, Schiller's hero acknowledges in the end that he was never a true revolutionary, realizing that his lawlessness served to uphold the law. Because he is now standing on the edge "eines entsetzlichen Lebens," an excruciating life without morals, he wants to mend any laws that he has previously broken. He believes that he is able to heal, what he refers to as, the "mißhandelte Ordnung" (102). Schiller's choice of the adjective "entsetzlich" to describe a life with an injured law is significant: in its verb form, "entsetzen" may also be translated as "to displace" or "to disrank." At least

linguistically, the verb appears to undermine what has already been “gesetzt”; that is to say, it displaces the law. The protagonist does not possess the strength to “entsetz” the order of the law, so to speak, but rather succumbs to reason, refusing to jeopardize the “sittliche Welt.”

Hence, the power of reason and the promise of a moral world win over the drive for revolution in the final moments of Schiller’s play. In the end, Karl hands himself over to the “Hände der Justiz” (102). He makes one last noble gesture, requesting that the money for his capture is to be given to a poor father and his children. Left with the option of continuing with his companions of criminals, to whom he has sworn allegiance, the protagonist makes a conscious decision to stay behind, boasting: “Man könnte mich darum bewundern” (102). Asking others to admire his selfless gesture, he asks his audience to follow him back to reason, wherein the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the individual.⁹ The return to reason, in the context of this study, is understood as a return to language, or what Žižek would have called a departure from the Real. He returns to a community of speakers who share the language of the sovereign – he enters into the state of exception.

Karl’s altruistic act of reason is radically different from the revolution in Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*, which shatters Schiller’s moral world. At the starting point of my dissertation, Büchner takes the step that had previously terrified Karl and crosses the fine line that separates the “sittliche Welt” from the “entsetzliches Leben.” Different from Schiller, Büchner begins with the French Revolution, depicting a revolutionary state

⁹ For a detailed discussion of reason in the Enlightenment, refer to Immanuel Kant’s concept of the Categorical Imperative, “Das kategorische Imperativ” in *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*.

that has reverted back to an even more brutal regime. Being the leader of the newfound regime and of the revolution, Robespierre first appears to distinguish himself from Räuber Moor and his followers. His revolution does not counter reason, as the ending of Schiller's play would suggest, but is rooted in its own code of morals. This code is, arguably, similar to the one that Karl follows before he hands himself over to the law. Imagining himself as the "Polizeisoldat des Himmels," Robespierre does not fulfill the promise of the revolution to undo the oppression of the old monarchy, but establishes his own tyrannical rule. Scholars have already noted that much of his dialogue is comprised of citations stemming from historical sources that document the French Revolution. In *Die Herrschaft des Textes*, for instance, Reiner Niehoff argues that citations establish an overriding historical code to which the characters of his drama have to adhere.¹⁰ Especially Danton and his followers succumb to the order of this code, of which they are unaware. As the new sovereign and ruler of the code, Robespierre falls into the reoccurring cycle of history, in which the revolution has done away with the old law simply to replace it with a new law. In this sense, he shares Karl's ideology, insofar as he enters into the law – which, paradoxically, is also the language of the revolution. If the revolution, as it is depicted in *Dantons Tod*, is based on the moral philosophies with which Schiller ends his play, then is there a type of revolutionary violence that lies

¹⁰ About Büchner's documentary theater, Niehoff writes that "...die Intention des Autors sei es vielmehr, die Zitate in ein eigendefiniertes Kunstwerk umzuarbeiten. Das, was zuvor Geschichte war, weicht nun der überlegenen Fiktion ‚Drama,‘ in deren Grenzen der Autor selbst Geschichte schreibt oder gar hervorbringt" (9). By blending documentary materials into the narration of his drama, Büchner blurs the boundary that had previously separated fact from fiction. He does this, in part, not only to establish his own history that documents the French Revolution, but also to highlight the limitations of historical representation – a topic that will emerge again in my last chapter on Jelinek's *Bambiland*.

outside of the juridical order able to “entsetz” the “Gesetz” of the sovereign? Is there a moment in Büchner’s drama that transcends reason to usher in a new history?

While most of Büchner’s characters fail to recognize Robespierre’s language as recycled citation, Hofmannsthal brings this language to the forefront in *Der Turm*. My second chapter examines the world in Hofmannsthal’s drama, which is no longer based on ontological or empirical truths, but comprised of signs and symbols that are often misunderstood. Whereas Robespierre’s truths are never questioned in Büchner’s drama, Hofmannsthal’s protagonist is keenly aware of the imperfect language into which he is born. After his father, the King of Poland, is finally overthrown in a rebellion, Sigismund asks his followers: “Wundert Ihr Euch, daß ich schnell die Sprache der Welt gelernt habe” (84). Everyone is surprised to learn that the young prince quickly learns the language of his father. As a language of intertextuality, the “Sprache der Welt” is similar to the historical code that is found in *Dantons Tod*. Many characters and motifs of Hofmannsthal’s play are based on Pedro Calderón’s *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*). The fact that his drama is an adaptation of Calderón’s influential drama is especially significant for Benjamin, who sees *Der Turm* as one of the purest reflections of his concept of the Baroque *Trauerspiel*.¹¹ Even though he makes a number of references to Calderón’s text in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, he notes that Hofmannsthal’s piece emphasizes a life that exists only as a flawed language – one that he terms “Sprachleben.” Because his world documents the language of another drama, Hofmannsthal successfully represents Benjamin’s *Trauerspiel*, in which history has

¹¹ The relationship between Hofmannsthal and Benjamin is detailed in my second chapter. A number of authors have already documented the affinity between the two authors.

ceased to exist. Unlike Danton, Sigismund knows that he is trapped in the state of exception, in an endless cycle from which he cannot escape.

Yet Hofmannsthal utilizes theater not only to represent a world comprised of repetitive language, but also as a tool to disrupt that same world. By providing extensive stage directions, more specifically, he relies on the performance of his actors to challenge the “Sprache der Welt.” Since Sigismund’s existence is inextricably linked to this language, the actor playing Sigismund has the unique ability to transcend the limitations of the text. That is to say, he is no longer bound to an overriding language, but can act autonomously onstage. There may be little doubt that Hofmannsthal was interested in the performance of his drama, but he was hesitant to conclude his play with a messianic promise. Earlier versions of his play end with the utopian arrival of the *Kinderkönig* – the leader of a republic of children, promising to undo the old order – but later ones simply conclude with the death of Sigismund. Whether the old order of the monarchy is successfully dismantled or merely replaced, the play’s ending remains open for interpretation, depending on the version that one reads. By providing various version of the end, Hofmannsthal may have inadvertently revealed his own struggle with the paradox he faced: if his text were to remain comprehensible, the “Sprache der Welt” could never be completely destroyed. After all, Benjamin points out that a new history can only be ushered in with the absolute destruction of all earthly things.

Also aware of the confines of the words in which he writes, Heiner Müller toys with the potential for absolute destruction in *Der Auftrag* (1979), the focus of my third chapter. In an effort to abolish the old law, to which both Danton and Sigismund succumb, he comes close to destroying the language of his drama. Faced with an

impossible task, he straddles the line between communication and silence, between law and anarchy. Hofmannsthal may have forced Sigismund to speak the words of his father, but Müller frees his characters from the same restrictions. His characters freely manipulate and alter the signs and symbols that make up their world. The action of his short play revolves around three French emissaries on a mission to incite a slave revolt in Jamaica. It soon becomes clear that the three characters are aware that they are merely actors in a play, and that their “Auftrag” is not to stage an actual revolution, but to stage a theater performance of a revolution, in particular, Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*. As the focus of my third chapter, the Büchner parody scene redocuments what has already been documented – a kind of historical code that consists of a recycled language – but also departs from Büchner. Citations that dictate the historical order and retain power in *Dantons Tod* remain meaningless in *Der Auftrag*. In their theater performance, Müller’s protagonists consciously misquote and often misrepresent Büchner’s language, exposing it to be nothing more than a façade. Rather than seamlessly blending citations into the dialogue of his drama, as Büchner and Hofmannsthal have done, Müller unveils them in his play. Intertextual moments regularly emerge as fragments that stand in stark opposition to the rest of the narrative. No longer do they adhere to any chronological order, but they interrupt the flow of the narrative. Müller mixes pieces of text from different genres and time periods into the diegetic world of his drama, disrupting any conventional understanding of time and space.

Aside from simply destroying communication, however, Müller is also interested in creating another language that may be able to transcend the state of exception. Reminiscent of Hofmannsthal, he uses body movements to communicate this new

language on a theater stage. If Robespierre's words merely perpetuate the state of exception, the language that Müller proposes can no longer be understood through preexisting knowledge. It cannot be signified through the same binaries and oppositions, through which the history of the French Revolution was previously understood. For that reason, Müller adds a racial dynamic to his characters, making a crucial distinction between a white and black revolution. Different from what he calls "Das Theater der weißen Revolution," or *Dantons Tod*, the black revolution is taken outside of the European context. It is a type of violence that steps out of the juridical order of the white revolution, or the order of Robespierre, as it is represented in Büchner's text. As a former slave and the only black revolutionary, Sasportas becomes the leader of the black revolution. His body may bear the scars of a white language, the language of colonialism, but he is also the only character in the play who can put an end to the white revolution. Whether or not he remains successful remains unclear, however, considering that Müller does not conclude his play with Sasportas and the black revolution. Instead, his protagonist forgets the revolution in the end. Once the revolution has been forgotten, is Müller inevitably forced to return to the old order, as Hofmannsthal was before him?

Elfriede Jelinek struggles with the same dilemma that had preoccupied Müller: discovering ways to overcome a reoccurring history, which the sovereign controls. As the topic of my last chapter, Jelinek's *Bambiland* recalls the 2003 war in Iraq. At first glance, it is difficult to categorize her work simply as a theater piece, considering that it originally appeared exclusively online. It was not until 2004 that the first printed version of *Bambiland* was published and that the play appeared onstage. Written from the perspective of embedded war journalists, Jelinek's piece first appeared on her personal

webpage mere weeks after the conflict in Iraq began. Another example of documentary theater, her play consists of bits and pieces of information taken from various media reports and historical texts. Because this information has been altered to the point where it becomes nearly impossible to decipher its source, Jelinek pushes the boundaries of comprehensible communication, as Müller has done. What is more, her online text includes various images, which are hyperlinked to websites dedicated to documenting civilian and military casualties of the war. The Internet enables Jelinek not only to disseminate information that would have otherwise remained hidden or unseen to the public, but also ensures that her account of the Iraq War remains in flux. As information online is constantly changing, *Bambiland* is further dispersed across a virtual world that seems to be limitless. Today, images and videos of various performances of her play appear on different digital platforms that span the Internet. Rather than being embedded in a language that refuses to be altered, Jelinek's account of history is unlike the sovereign's. It shatters the illusion of the Baroque eschaton that the Sovereign seeks to uphold, in that it appears not as a linear progression, but as a fragment.

Jelinek's decision to first publish her theater piece online may not be new for today's standards, but she embarks on an interesting debate about rethinking the ways in which history is documented in the digital age. If he had access to the Internet, would Benjamin have been faced with a new task of revising his already-revised concept of history? Could he have ever imagined a digital world in which there is no longer just a single version of history, but countless versions? It remains open for discussion if Benjamin would have joined a number of people who have already expressed their trepidations for the loss of the Real, as Žižek points out. As a revolutionary tool,

however, the Internet may also have been useful for Benjamin, as it continues to be for Jelinek. Although the sovereign continuously attempts to control the hyperreality in which we live, it is not always successful. Too often, sensitive information is leaked to the public, as the sovereign desperately struggles to inscribe it back into its language, into its juridical order. Yet the brief moments in which this information remains outside of comprehensible language, in which it is not understood, are also the moments that could usher in a new history. The question remains: are these moments are enough to disrupt the state of exception?

Chapter 1

Living in the State of Exception: The Language of History in Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*

The title of Georg Büchner's drama, *Dantons Tod*, announces more than just the protagonist's fate; Danton's death is inscribed into the order of the text. That is to say, there is a prevailing structure embedded within the language of the text to which the already-dying Danton is inevitably subject. He is a mere puppet, he proclaims, "... von unbekanntem Gewalten am Draht gezogen; nichts, nichts wir selbst! die Schwerter, mit denen Geister kämpfen - man sieht nur die Hände nicht, wie im Märchen. - Jetzt bin ich ruhig" (46). A number of scholars have described these "unbekanntem Gewalten," these unseen forces, as a type of rhetorical violence – an overriding language, which Danton is unable to master. Aside from the physical representation of violence through the guillotine and certain street scenes with the citizens, violence is almost exclusively played out on a linguistic level; Danton falls victim to Robespierre's speeches and the sentence of the revolutionary tribunal.¹² Although scholars have focused on the

¹² Similar to Reiner Niehoff's argument (detailed below), John B. Lyon argues that the drama is a critique of language in his article, "The Inevitability of Rhetorical Violence:

rhetorical violence in Büchner's works, few, if any, have discussed the ways in which this type of violence legitimizes itself within the language of text. Why do Robespierre's words rule over those of Danton and his followers, the Dantonists? How does Robespierre legitimize his order of the law in a revolutionary state?

A potential answer to these questions may be found in *Die Herrschaft des Textes*, in which Reiner Niehoff claims it is Büchner's use of citation that dictates the entire structure, or syntactical code, of the drama. He argues that the cited historical passages establish an overriding code or documented history that controls the entire structure of the drama.¹³ What he terms the "herrschende Struktur," or code, is the historical language of the French Revolution, with which Büchner takes issue (Niehoff 33-4). What is more, Robespierre and his followers, whose speeches constitute the majority of the citations, are the administrators of this language. They are not, however, the unknown forces that manipulate the puppets or the Dantonists, but instead the *representatives* (the agents) of the "herrschende Struktur"; they are the defenders of a

Georg Büchner's *Danton's Death*." This language is the violence that shapes the drama's action. And because "...Büchner limits representations of violence almost exclusively to language instead of presenting violent acts on stage, even when treating relatively brutal historical subject matter," according to Lyon "he highlights both the violent potential of language as well as the fact that violence, to some degree, is a formal problem, a result of the structured nature of language and, more specifically, rhetoric" (102). Although it may be true that Danton's death is the result of rhetorical violence, it should be noted that there are some instances of physical violence in the drama. This violence is represented only briefly on stage through the citizens, most notably during the alley scene of the first act (I, 2). The collective will of the citizens is a necessary physical violence that enforces the law – the citation, which forms the basis of the drama's overriding language.

¹³ See Reiner Niehoff's *Die Herrschaft des Textes*. He writes that the citation "nicht nur Anfang, Verlauf und Ende des Geschehens bestimmt und die Figuren des Dramas zu seinen Agenten macht," but also "... alles *Sprechen* zu regeln und die Akteure zu seinem Sprechen zu machen" (104).

preexisting historical code.¹⁴ The sovereign in the text, then, is both an agent of the code as well as the protector of a historical order (citation). Pushing Niehoff's analysis even further, I argue that the sovereign not only manipulates the actions of the Dantonists through the articulation of the code but also excludes them from the same language. Only through this exclusion (i.e. an exception made to the code) are Robespierre and his followers able to legitimize their language and determine the forces of history.¹⁵

The first part of this chapter will demonstrate the ways in which Büchner's drama legitimizes the "herrschende Struktur" – the code to which the Dantonists are subject. As an agent of this structure, the sovereign makes exceptions to the code, so as to ensure its survival. Danton and his followers meet their deaths not solely through the integration into that code, but also because they are, paradoxically, excluded. They are left suspended between rule and exception, law and anomy, order and disorder. This is illustrated in the following ways: 1) Büchner's use of metaphors of severed hands describe the enforcement of a dismembered body of law.¹⁶ The hands implement and enforce the law. Even though the Dantonists attempt to cling to a coherent structure of

¹⁴ Toward the end of the "Reign of Terror" of the French Revolution, the historical figure, Robespierre, meets his own ironic death only three months after Danton's execution in 1794.

¹⁵ This notion of the sovereign is similar to Carl Schmitt's definition in *Politische Theologie*. He defines the sovereign as "...wer über den Ausnahmezustand entscheidet. Diese Definition kann dem Begriff der Souveränität als einem Grenzbegriff allein gerecht werden" (11). Only through the exception is the sovereign able to legitimize itself, according to Schmitt. Walter Benjamin (and later Agamben), however, takes issue with the notion of the decision ("die Entscheidung") of the sovereign, insisting that history has already entered into a permanent state of exception. If any decision were to be made, it would have to be the decision to suspend the state of exception.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion on the severing of bodies in *Dantons Tod*, see Helmut Schneider's "Tragödie und Guillotine. *Dantons Tod*: Büchners Schnitt durch den klassischen Bühnenkörper" in *Die deutsche Tragödie* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2006) to which I will later return.

this law, they find that the juridical realm is nothing more than an incoherent, dismembered body, to which they are necessarily bound and from which they are simultaneously excluded. 2) Similar to the hand metaphors, citation forces Büchner's characters to assimilate to the structure of the text that abandons them at the same time. Citation seduces them to become part of an apparatus that governs their speech; it integrates them into the "one language" or historical code of the revolution.¹⁷ Although the death of Danton is already inscribed into that language, the events leading up to his death are the result of an exception to this language. At key moments in the drama, Danton is barred from citation, thus enabling the ruling structure to effectively rid any threat to its sovereignty. 3) At the same time the Dantonists are excluded from citation and stripped of their own language, they are denied access to history. As with the fragmented citation, the historical code remains incomplete and unfulfilled; it is a dismembered hand, eternally tied to the "unbekannten Gewalten." All that is left is the "one language" to which Danton is necessarily bound, but from which he is also barred.

The second half of this chapter will focus on instances in the text where the "herrschende Struktur" is disrupted. There are precise moments, as others have pointed out as well, that threaten the code of the revolutionary language. Büchner scholars, most notably Paul Celan during his acceptance speech of the Georg-Büchner-Preis (1960), agree that women in the drama transcend the structure that has inscribed Danton's death

¹⁷ Niehoff writes, "Der Verführer drängt auf Erfüllung, oder, anders gesagt, auf Integration in die *eine* Sprache der Revolution" (99). The way in which citation seduces its speaker into one language is similar to Michel Foucault's notion of the dispositive, detailed in *Dispositive der Macht*. The dispositive is a network of discursive categorizations, which demarcate a specific type of language and knowledge, among other things. Like the citation in Büchner's drama, these categories force the speaker into their perspective, into their speech.

into the order of the text. Women, in particular Lucile, break the “one language” of the revolution. Different from other characters who participate in the citation and who inadvertently sentence themselves to death, Lucile counters the historical code with her own language. While the Dantonists are caught between anomy and law, between exclusion and inclusion, she frees herself from the juridical structure altogether. Her final words, “Es lebe der König,” in the second to the last line of the drama (IV, 9), is an intentional speech (one that is not already inscribed into the “herrschende Struktur”), which recognizes the citation as a mere structure of words. It exposes the frailty of this structure and simultaneously disrupts the sovereign order. Lucile’s words sever the strings that manipulate the puppets and that determine the course of history.¹⁸ Whereas history has ceased to exist for the Dantonists, she offers her spectator another historical language – a revolutionary language or violence that may reinstate history. Thus the revolution lies not within the preexisting code of the revolution, as citation, but rather within a language that frees itself from that code.

The Hands of the Law

The rule of law is that there is no clearly defined law in the revolutionary world of Büchner’s *Dantons Tod*. Yet the title of the drama suggests that Danton falls victim to some type of juridical structure or a historical language, which the Dantonists as well as Robespierre and his followers must abide. Although most of Büchner’s characters are subject to this order, there are a number different ways in which they interact with the law. On the one hand, the members of the Committee of Public Safety

¹⁸ See Paul Celan’s “Rede Anlässlich Der Verleihung Des Georg-Büchner-Preises, Darmstadt, Am 22. Oktober 1960” (7-8).

(“Wohlfahrtsausschusses”), including Robespierre, St. Just, Barrère, Collot d’Herbois, and Billaud Varennes, are the administrators and defenders of the law. Both Herrmann and Dumas, the presidents of the revolutionary tribunal, as well as the public defender, Fouquier Tinville, are key figures in the drama that can also be aligned with Robespierre. They are, as I will later demonstrate, the citation that dominates the language of the drama, and they represent the sovereign who makes exceptions to the juridical order. On the other hand, the “Deputierte,” comprised of Danton and his followers, Legendre, Camille Desmoulins, Herault-Séchelles, Lacroix, Phillippeau, Fabre d’Englantine, Mercier, and Thomas Payne criticize the law. The Dantonists are at once included and systematically excluded from the law; unlike Robespierre and his followers, they are not the agents of the historical language. Instead of being integrated into the language of citation, they are left suspended between anomy and law, order and disorder. Although the immanence of their death is already inscribed into the language of the text, the events leading up to their death is the result of an exception made to that same language.

Aside from contrasting the Dantonists to Robespierre’s men, the drama highlights two additional groups of characters that fall outside of this distinction: women and citizens. Danton and Camille’s wives, respectively Julie and Lucile, as well as Rosalie, Adelaide, and Marion, the three “Grisetten,” are neither the defenders nor enforcers of the law, nor have they resigned themselves to their deaths. Rather, they recognize the citation as citation, as mere words, thus being able to unbind themselves from the historical code. They speak in a language different from other characters in the drama; they play with and eventually deconstruct this code. Before illustrating this

deconstruction, it is pertinent to examine the ways in which this code is constructed and enforced throughout the text.

The collective will of the citizens is the physical force of law in *Dantons Tod*; it is a type of violence that is necessary to implement the ruling structure. Whereas Robespierre and his followers are the agents as well as defenders of the language of citation, the citizens physically enforce Robespierre's rhetorical violence. That is to say, the signification of Robespierre's rhetoric and the juridical force of the revolutionary tribunal is made possible only through the collective approval of the citizens – a collective body capable of imposing physical violence.¹⁹ Two instances illustrate this potential: 1) during the second scene of the first act, the spectator witnesses one of the only physical altercations on stage when Simon, the “Souffleur,” brutally beats his wife in front of the citizens. After the bystanders separate the couple, the wife justifies her husband's reaction, stating that he suffers from a drinking problem (23). Seen as a commoner and victim of the aristocracy, Simon does not face any ramifications from the other citizens; he, instead, gains the collective approval of the citizens. 2) Only moments later, in the same scene, the citizens physically detain and want to lynch a young man who can read and write, an aristocrat who blows his nose not with his hands but with a handkerchief. The first citizen yells: “Totgeschlagen, wer lesen und schreiben kann,” to which the others respond, “Er hat ein Schnupftuch! ein Aristokrat! an die Laterne! an die Late!” (24). Unlike Simon, the young man is radically different from the citizens; the

¹⁹ The collective approval needed to signify concepts, here, can be better understood in terms of linguistic theory. Ferdinand de Saussure, in his *Course in General Linguistics* (Trans. Roy Harris. London: Duckworth, 1983), points out that the basic structures of a linguistic sign are always socially determined, and, although the link between sound-images and the signified concepts are arbitrary, their relationship must be collectively agreed upon within a community of speakers (71).

opposing sign “Aristokrat” helps signify the citizens’ concept of the commoner. Not only is the collective approval of the citizens essential for the signification of a sign, but the physical violence of the citizens also demarcates their understanding of the law. This law, however, cannot be so easily comprehended.

The citizens’ concept of any juridical order oscillates between anomy and law. After one citizen asks what the law is, Robespierre defines it as “Der Wille des Volks.” The first citizen responds: “Wir sind das Volk, und wir wollen, daß kein Gesetz sei; ergo ist dieser Wille das Gesetz, ergo im Namen des Gesetzes gibt's kein Gesetz mehr, ergo totgeschlagen!” (25). At first glance, the response appears to be an oxymoron: how can one ban law in the name of law?²⁰ If it is the citizens’ will to abandon all forms of law, then the will cannot be bound to the order of law; it would have to remain within an anomic space. As soon as the will appears to divorce itself from the law, however, it is immediately reinstalled into the order of the law once again (“... ergo ist dieser Wille das Gesetz”). The metaphor constructed here is unmistakable: “Wille” *is* “Gesetz.” It seems that the will, whether it calls for or speaks against the existence of law, is inevitably and irrevocably set (or posited) in the language of the law – the “Namen des Gesetzes.”²¹ At the same time that the will is the law, it is also “kein Gesetz”; it is a law of lawlessness

²⁰ T.M. Holmes, in *The Rehearsal of Revolution*, also comments on the absurdity of the citizens’ reasoning. He later points out, however, that there may be a trace of logic behind the argument, in that the citizen is protesting not necessarily against the cessation of law altogether, but rather against the law of the authority, the law of Robespierre. This law, according to Holmes, has lost touch with the will of the people (198).

²¹ Niehoff makes the similar argument that there is an overriding structure in Büchner’s play and one that is predetermined. This structure, according to Niehoff, determines and controls all dramatic action. He writes: “Den Figuren in *Dantons Tod* ist eine Struktur des Geschehens bereits vorgegeben und hat sich durch sie reproduziert,” adding that “Die Struktur des Schauspiels herrscht über die Akteure und durchherrscht sie ...” (82).

or, rather, the force of law without being enforced.²² Nevertheless, Danton and his followers are always subject to this lawless law, or, what has also been described as, the “unzugänglichen Übermacht.”²³ that is in permanent flux. This type of law is enforced through the metaphorical hands that remain hidden, or inaccessible, to the Dantonists.²⁴ Hands appear severed from the body of the law, but they also determine the language of the law. The “unzugängliche Übermacht” guides the hands of those characters able to grasp this language – the ones who are fully immersed in the one revolutionary language.

As soon as the Dantonists make any attempt to concretize this “Übermacht,” from which they are barred, their link to the law is immediately severed again. Not only is this observed through Büchner’s strategic use of citation but also through his utilization of metaphors of body parts and especially of hands. The hand can be read as having a link to the notion of “greifen” (to “grasp” or “seize” something), which has further etymological roots in the noun “Begriff” (translatable to “term” or “concept”). Although the hands of Robespierre and his followers may seize the terms, or delineate the language, of the law, they too are severed from the “unzugängliche Übermacht.” This is illustrated in the example above, in the third scene of the first act, in which Robespierre’s hands are directly linked to the enforcement of the law. After the first citizen voices his

²² This idea stems from Giorgio Agamben and his analysis of the state of exception – a topic that emerges throughout my dissertation. For a more detailed discussion on the conditions of law and its exception, see Agamben’s *State of Exception*, in which he argues that the law, within the state of exception, is a pure being-in-force without application (the form of law) and pure application without being in force (60).

²³ Fritz Heyn’s “Die Sprache bei Georg Büchner” (48).

²⁴ As with the hands that represent a dismembered body of law, the heads of the Dantonists are always severed from the body. In “Tragödie und Guillotine. ‘Dantons Tod’: Büchners Schnitt durch den klassischen Bühnenkörper,” Helmut Schneider points out that this severance determines all action of the drama. “Sie tragen den Todesschnitt, der sie in der Handlung erwartet, schon dramaturgisch a priori in sich; sie agieren und sprechen im Bewusstsein ihres abgeschnittenen Kopfes“ (143).

desire to abandon the law in the name of law, a woman in the crowd responds, “Hört den Messias, der gesandt ist, zu wählen und zu richten; er wird die Bösen mit der Schärfe des Schwertes schlagen. Seine Augen sind die Augen der Wahl, seine Hände sind die Hände des Gerichts” (25). The woman equates Robespierre’s hands to the court of law. His hands can be read as his ability to grasp the terms of the law; that is to say, they represent the force of law. Instead of writing “Hände des Gesetzes,” however, Büchner describes these hands as “Hände des Gerichts.” This is significant because Robespierre, like Danton, can never have unrestrained access to the “Gesetz,” as that which has already been set; his physical body is different from the body of the law to which he is permanently subject. Since he is ultimately subject to the same code as the Dantonists, he is only able to operate within the administrative court of the law, within the linguistic order of the citation.

Robespierre must, however, establish a link to the “Übermacht” to validate his authority. A higher, inaccessible law, in other words, is paramount to the legitimization of the sovereign’s language.²⁵ Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s *Politische Theologie*, Hannah Arendt also asserts that the sovereign state always requires the church or higher law to sanctify its sovereignty (159-60). Robespierre’s rhetoric is a type of (what Schmitt would

²⁵ Schmitt claims that all sovereign terms are secularized theological concepts. He argues that the state must necessarily draw upon a theological foundation, so as to legitimize its structure and sovereignty. He writes: “Nicht nur ihrer historischen Entwicklung nach, weil [die Begriffe des Staates] aus der Theologie auf die Staatslehre übertragen wurden, indem zum Beispiel der allmächtige Gott zum omnipotenten Gesetzgeber wurde, sondern auch in ihrer systematischen Struktur, deren Erkenntnis notwendig ist für eine soziologische Betrachtung dieser Begriffe” (49). Benjamin questions this link between God and the sovereign state in, what he defines as, “der wirkliche Ausnahmezustand.” Since there cannot be a decision to declare an exception in the permanent “Ausnahmezustand,” Benjamin argues that the tie between any metaphysical structure and the sovereign is always blurred.

term) theological rhetoric that must necessarily appeal to an omnipotent power to legitimize itself. His ability to “wählen und zu richten” has been bestowed upon him or transmitted (“gesandt”) from God, for he is the “Messiah” in the eyes of the citizen.²⁶ This is reinforced when Danton asks Robespierre, “Bist du der Polizeisoldat des Himmels?” The latter responds, “Du leugnest die Tugend?” (35). Robespierre accepts his role as the heavenly policeman, insofar as he views his own principles as virtuous. In other words, if he is to legitimize his power to declare Danton as non-virtuous, then he must first see himself as the self-righteous Messiah. This revelation allows Robespierre to proclaim to the citizens in the third scene of the first act that the “...Schwert des Gesetzes roste nicht in den Händen, denen ihr es anvertraut habt!” (30). Here it is the sword of the law that rests in the hands of the sovereign power, whereas Danton is, according to Lacroix’s description, merely “ein toter Heiliger” (34). At this moment Robespierre’s natural or physical body (his hands) merges with a political body (the law); that is to say, Robespierre acquires two bodies to establish his sovereignty.²⁷ While the corporal body is, like Danton’s, transitory and fragile, his political body possess metaphysical qualities.²⁸ Büchner’s text raises this body to “angelic heights,” so to speak, and demonstrates its superiority over the natural body (Kantorowicz 9).

Whereas Robespierre preserves the language of the law, which necessarily appeals to a higher force, Danton is cut from and involuntarily subjected to that

²⁶ Schneider asks us to remember, “...dass die historischen Akteure der Revolution sich eine quasi-göttliche Schöpfungsmacht zugesprochen hatten. In den Reden Robespierres und St. Justs...lebt dieses Pathos ungebrochen fort...” (135).

²⁷ For a detailed discussion on the notion of two-bodied King, see Ernst Kantorowicz’s *The King’s Two Bodies*.

²⁸ However, if Arendt is correct, and all revolutions are secular in nature, then Robespierre will eventually be stripped of his own political body. See my discussion on history and revolutions in the third section of this chapter.

language.²⁹ He has entered into a state in which language has inclusively excluded him – where the hand of the Messiah may appear severed, but the “Begriff” still rules.

Although Danton is, what other scholars describe as an automaton through which the “unzugängliche Übermacht” speaks, he is systematically removed from that speech as well.³⁰ Unlike Robespierre, whose hands are seen holding the sword of the law, the hands remain obstructed from the Dantonists. To return to Danton’s conversation with Julie at the end of II, 5, he admits not seeing the hands of the puppeteer: “...man sieht nur die Hände nicht, wie im Märchen. - Jetzt bin ich ruhig” (46). The hands are unseen and beyond Danton’s reach, that is to say “unzugänglich.” They can be read in one of two ways: 1) the hands may be seen as a type of language that controls the actions of Danton, and 2) they represent the “Begriffen” (the language) of the sovereign, which abandons the Dantonists. What remains inaccessible is not only Danton’s own language but also the language that determines the juridical power structure. The latter reading would also explain the final sentence, “Jetzt bin ich ruhig,” insofar as this language literally silences Danton. He can neither speak nor see the hands, for he is excluded from the language of

²⁹ Agamben describes the notion of being at once included and excluded from the language of the law most clearly in *Homo Sacer*. Like Schmitt, he argues that all law depends on an exception, which cannot simply be defined as “exclusion,” but rather an active “taking outside” (18). If Danton is taken outside of the juridical context, he is simultaneously included into it as well; he is, what Agamben would term, inclusively excluded. Similarly, the law must always include but also reject its exception: “Law is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusive exclusion of the exception: it nourishes itself on this exception and is a dead letter without it” (27).

³⁰ Drawing on Wolfgang von Kempelen’s *Mechanismus der menschlichen Sprache*, Niehoff describes Danton and his followers as a machine, through which an unfamiliar operator speaks. “Die Sprachmaschine ist *das* Modell eines Verlustes von Vormacht, denn der Mensch verliert den Vorrang der Sprache; und dies ist ein Modell von fremder Übermacht insofern, als der Mensch selbst nichts als eine Sprachmaschine ist, die von einem fremden Operateur zum Sprechen gezwungen wird” (130).

the sovereign. Only through this exclusion, being taken outside of the law, can Danton be included once again into the juridical order, which has already sealed his fate.

Hence, the language of the law that predetermines Danton's execution can only be legitimized through an exception made to its order. If Danton is to be convicted (or, using a more germane word, "sentenced") to death – that is to say, included into the juridical order – he must first be cut off from the hand that administers the law. This severance is illustrated throughout *Dantons Tod*. In the first act of scene six, for instance, Robespierre says:

Wir werden das Schiff der Revolution nicht auf den seichten Berechnungen und den Schlammböden dieser Leute stranden lassen; wir müssen die Hand abhauen, die es zu halten wagt - und wenn er es mit den Zähnen packte! ... Keine Tugend! Die Tugend ein Absatz meiner Schuhe! Bei meinen Begriffen! (36)

Robespierre's "Begriffen" is to replace the severed "Hand," which threatens to hinder the revolution. He secures an exclusive type of language, in that he modifies "Begriffen" with a possessive pronoun ("meinen"); he is the Messiah who enforces the language of the law. This can, again, be read as an attempt to integrate the language of the Dantonists into the one language of the revolution. Those who fail to assimilate to Robespierre's "Begriffen" should have their hands, their own language, severed. Such a reading suggests that Danton is nothing more than an automaton, through which the sovereign speaks. Another reading of the passage suggests that Robespierre calls for the Dantonists to be barred from the juridical order. If hands represent the administration of the law, then the severing of the hand can be seen as the exclusion from the court of law. Danton

is not only stripped of his own language, but he is also taken outside of that court, which simultaneously includes him.

The Dantonists are left in a state that oscillates between inclusion and exclusion, order and disorder. On the one hand, they cannot escape the immanence of the revolutionary language – the hands that manipulate the drama’s action. They are eternally bound to those hands, prompting Danton to exclaim: “Sie haben die Hände an mein ganzes Leben gelegt, so mag es sich denn aufrichten und ihnen entgentreten; unter dem Gewichte jeder meiner Handlungen werde ich sie begraben ... Wenn ich einen Blick auf diese Schandschrift werfe, fühle ich mein ganzes Wesen beben” (55). If Danton inevitably succumbs to the hands of the sovereign, his attempt to bury those hands under his own “Handlungen” is fruitless. Danton’s “Handlungen,” referring to his previous revolutionary accomplishments, have completely lost their value, for he is “ein toter Heiliger,” nothing more than a forgotten relic. These stand in sharp contrast to Robespierre’s “Handlungen,” which are legitimized through God. The “Schandschrift” in the latter part of the passage may be interpreted in one of two ways: on the narrative level, it refers to the indictment brought against Danton in front of the revolutionary tribunal. It is also an implicit reference to citation or the dominant language of the revolution. Moreover, Danton is inadvertently forced to participate in this “Schandschrift,” which is part of a citation; he thus sacrifices his own language in the process.³¹ Thus he is unable to escape the weight of the hands that rest on him, forever tied to the language of the law. On the other hand, the fate of the Dantonists is also the

³¹ Niehoff writes: “Indem Danton in III, 4 in die Revolutionssprache einstimmt und den Zitattext gewissermaßen mit- oder zu Ende schreibt, affirmiert er die Negativität, die in der Revolutionssprache liegt” (103)

result of an exception made to this juridical language. Danton meets his death not only because he is included but excluded from this language as well. That is to say, the hand of the sovereign is not necessarily the hand that pulls the string of the guillotine. During a meeting of the “Wohlfahrtsausschuß” (III, 6), St. Just argues it would be a grave mistake to execute Danton with one’s own hands:

Sie müssen weg, um jeden Preis, und sollten wir sie mit den eignen Händen erwürgen. Wagt! Danton soll uns das Wort nicht umsonst gelehrt haben. Die Revolution wird über ihre Leichen nicht stolpern; aber bleibt Danton am Leben, so wird er sie am Gewand fassen, und er hat etwas in seiner Gestalt, als ob er die Freiheit notzüchtigen könnte (58).

St. Just’s intentions are clear: he wants to circumvent Danton’s fate, who had previously spearheaded the creation of the revolutionary tribunal and voted for the execution of King Louis XVI. In order to avoid becoming another corpse of the revolution, St. Just seeks to wipe his hands clean of the execution. Danton’s death, then, is not part of the juridical process, the hand that wields the sword, but is rather the result of an unseen force – a force of law without being enforced. Once again, the hands are removed from the Dantonists; the hands remain unseen in a space from which Danton is denied access.

Citation is “Das Dogma der Revolution”

At precise moments in *Dantons Tod*, the Dantonists are not merely metaphorically excluded from the language of the law, as seen with the hands, but their exclusion also occurs on a narrative as well as syntactical level. This can be observed in Büchner’s use of citation throughout the text. In Niehoff’s reading, citation coerces the characters into a

prescribed code, into “das *eine* Sprechen” of the revolution. The Dantonists are drawn into conversation with the revolutionary language, and they are forced to assimilate to the grammatical structure of the citation. After Danton asks Robespierre if he is the “Polzeisoldat des Himmels” (I, 6), he continues, “Übrigens, um bei deinen Begriffen zu bleiben, unsere Streiche müssen der Republik nützlich sein, man darf die Unschuldigen nicht mit den Schuldigen treffen” (35). The latter part of the passage, starting with “unserere Streiche,” is a translated citation of an early 19th century French history text.³² Without the use of quotation marks, Büchner seamlessly blends the original dialogue with the citation, separated only with a comma. Nevertheless, Danton demarcates the citation in this instance: “um bei deinen Begriffen zu bleiben.” He believes he is employing Robespierre’s terminology, which dominates the remainder of the dialogue and constitutes the citation; Danton inadvertently partakes in the citation.³³ The separation between the two characters, in this paradigmatic moment, is apparent: whereas Danton merely cites the citation, Robespierre *is* the citation – his “Begriffen,” or his hands, embody the “one” language of the revolution. Robespierre’s words are “das Dogma der Revolution,” which demarcates the entire structure of the drama.³⁴

³² According to Peter von Becker’s *Kritische Studienausgabe* of *Dantons Tod*, the original title of the cited text is “Galerie historique des contemporains, ou nouvelle biographie : seule édition, dans laquelle se trouvent réunis les hommes morts ou vivans, de toutes les nations, qui se sont fait remarquer a la fin du 18me siècle et au commencement de celui-ci, par leurs écrits, leurs actions, leurs talens, leurs vertus ou leurs crimes” (Bruxelles: A. Wahlen, 1817-1820).

³³ Niehoff argues that the code of the citation “...drängt nicht auf Wiederholung, sondern auf eine operationale Benützung; auf die Generierung des Zitattextes” (132).

³⁴ Danton proclaims: “Robespierre ist das Dogma der Revolution, es darf nicht ausgestrichen werden. Es ginge auch nicht. Wir haben nicht die Revolution, sondern die Revolution hat uns gemacht.” (Büchner 39)

Every aspect of Danton's language succumbs to this dogma; Büchner integrates the syntactical structure of Danton's sentences into the code of the citation. In a dialogue with Lucile and Camile (II, 3), Danton foreshadows his own death:

Der Wohlfahrtsausschuß hat meine Verhaftung beschlossen. Man hat mich gewarnt und mir einen Zufluchtsort angeboten. Sie wollen meinen Kopf, meinetwegen. Ich bin der Hudeleien überdrüssig. Mögen sie ihn nehmen. Was liegt daran? Ich werde mit Muth zu sterben wissen, das ist leichter, als zu leben (43).

This passage is comprised of two citations, which were taken from historical works that were first published between 1818-1830.³⁵ The definite article that begins the passage is an integral part of the syntactical structure of the sentence, but is not part of the original citation; it is Danton's own language. Without the citation that follows the article, his language would remain fragmented and incomplete. Danton has to add the article in front of the citation in order to formulate a coherent sentence; that is to say, his words are forced into the syntax of the citation. Ironically, if the title of the drama is read as a citation, the language of the citation, to which Danton adapts, has already prescribed his death. He is speaking his own death sentence – a language that will ultimately lead to his execution.

Helmut Schneider's reading is similar, claiming that the character who is integrated into the citation, which is itself an act of severing a particular passage from a

³⁵ According to Becker's archival research, the first citation stems from the same French history text as above, first published in Brussels. The latter citation, starting with "Sie wollen..." is taken from *Die Geschichte unserer Zeit*, a collection of 30 volumes, compiled by Carl Strahlheim et al. between 1826-1830. The majority of the citations that appear in *Dantons Tod* are taken from *Unsere Zeit*.

textual body, inevitably undergoes the same fate as the citation. Once Danton enters into the fragmented citation, he partakes in a severed language, which sends him to the guillotine. The characters citing the historical passage are cut from their own language, according to Schneider, and are predestined to meet their deaths. Like the guillotine, which severs the head from the body, the citation severs the words of the already-dying individuals, that is to say, those who speak their own death sentence.³⁶ Danton's word (the definite article in the example above) is, as Schneider would argue, severed with the citation. The word is made part of the citation and is an indication of what is to be expected at the end of the drama. This would also explain the final words of the same dialogue ("das ist leichter, als zu leben"), which is also not part of the citation. Any words that remain severed from the citation – Danton's own language, which would feasibly ensure his survival – suffer the same fate as those who are guillotined; their death is inscribed into the syntactical code of the text. Instead of reading Danton's own words (i.e. his intentional language) as being integrated into the citation, as Niehoff has done, this chapter focuses on the ways in which those words are systematically excluded, or severed, from the text.

The most paradigmatic example of this exclusion is found in the tribunal scenes of the third act. When it becomes apparent that Danton may persuade the people of his innocence and free himself from the order of the law, the sovereign decides to make an exception to the law to ensure the swift conviction and subsequent death of Danton.

³⁶ Schneider writes: "Der Zitierende wird für das von seiner Intention abgeschnittene Zitierte haftbar gemacht und liefert sich damit selbst an die Guillotine; die Worte, die den ‚toten Leuten‘ (d.h. den mit ihnen sich ungewollt das Todesurteil zusprechenden Gegnern) aus dem Mund genommen wurden, wenden sich gegen ihren Denunzianten...Der Atem, der das tote Wort beseelt hat, wird selbst von ihm erstickt..." (137).

Again, only the characters who administer the juridical order – the public defenders, members of the revolutionary tribunal, as well as Robespierre and his followers – represent the sovereign who can determine the exception. As the president of the revolutionary tribunal, Herrmann, who is speaking to the public defender, Fouquier, says: “Ein Mittel wüßt' ich, aber es wird die gesetzliche Form verletzen ... Wir lösen nicht, sondern suchen die Handfesten aus” (53). The democratic process, which the “gesetzliche Form” has previously protected, is taken into the hands of those who preside over the revolutionary tribunal. Similar to the citizens arguing with Robespierre in the alley (II, 2), who want to eliminate the law, Herrmann seeks to circumvent the existing laws and make an exception to the juridical order. This exception made to the preexisting “gesetzliche Form” eventually ensures the outcome of Danton’s trial and execution. Although Herrmann’s endeavor to violate the “gesetzliche Form” can be read as a suspension of the juridical order altogether, the cessation of the law is eventually reinscribed into the language of the law. Similar to the example with the citizens, where the will is law, Herrmann’s will to suspend the law is always already bound to the juridical order.

Thus the suspension of the order is already embedded into the structure of the language of the text; it is, again, a lawless law. This is illustrated when Herrmann uses the term “Handfesten” (literally translated as the “tangible” or the “concrete”) to describe those individuals who would ensure the conviction of Danton; the “Handfesten” are to secure the language of the text. If “Hände” is a metaphor of “Begriff,” then Herrmann’s term is an attempt to secure and preside over the language of the law. Even though he calls for the cessation of the previous juridical order, he then reinstalls the outcome of the

trial back into this order insofar as he selects the “Handfesten” to secure Danton’s sentence.³⁷ In this sense, the exception that Herrmann proposes is a threshold between the inclusion and the exclusion of the sentence (or the linguistic order of the law). This inclusive exclusion can be further observed in Büchner’s use of citation. Herrmann’s second sentence, “Wir lösen nicht, sondern suchen die Handfesten aus” (53), is an approximate citation taken from Adolphe Thiers and Felix Bodin’s *Histoire de la Révolution française*. Herrmann’s preceding sentence, then, has to logically adapt to the citation, which operates as a preestablished structure that dictates his speech. His sentence has to follow a specific code, so as to secure its comprehension.³⁸ His desire to bypass the law (“gesetzliche Form verletzen”), in other words, is already embedded into the code of the citation, or the juridical language. The sentence of the revolutionary tribunal – the citation that ensures the outcome of the trial – imposes a language to which Danton is permanently tied.

Although the cited passages in the drama guarantee Danton’s death, it should be remembered that his execution is also the result of an exception made to the juridical order. Danton is, as Niehoff correctly observes, permanently integrated into the linguistic code of the citation, but his death is also the result of his exclusion from that same code; he is at once included as well as excluded from the citation. Aside from the example of

³⁷ See *State of Exception*, in which Agamben argues that all trials, in the juridical context, end in a sentence – that is to say, a predetermined language that ensures the outcome of a trial. This outcome is always already guaranteed by institutional powers (40). Thus the defendant is already integrated and bound to the language of the law.

³⁸ Niehoff gives a different example of the code, to which Büchner’s characters have to adapt. During a conversation in the first scene of the second act, “Lacroix verpflichtet Danton auf einen bestimmten Code, sofern man unter Code die Benützung eines bestimmten Zeicheninventars und bestimmter semantischer, syntaktischer, phonologischer Kombinationsregeln erstehen will” (99).

Herrmann's conversation, there are a number of instances during the revolutionary tribunal scenes that illustrate this. Both St. Just, as one of Robespierre's followers and members of the Committee of Public Safety, and Fouquier have two almost identical speeches during the trial. During the sixth scene of the third act, St. Just declares that: "Der Konvent muß dekretieren, das Tribunal solle ohne Unterbrechung den Prozeß fortführen und dürfe jeden Angeklagten, welcher die dem Gerichte schuldige Achtung verletzte oder störende Auftritte veranlaßte, von den Debatten ausschließen" (59). Shortly thereafter, Fouquier makes a similar declaration that if the tribunal is interrupted, "... wird das Tribunal ermächtigt, die Untersuchung ohne Unterbrechung fortzusetzen und jeden Angeklagten, der die dem Gesetze schuldige Ehrfurcht außer Augen setzen sollte, von den Debatten auszuschließen" (62). The two speeches are direct citations from Thiers and Bodin's historical text. Certain elements of both speeches are noticeably similar; they are a type of circulating citation found throughout the drama and can be read as the drama's attempt to disrupt the sovereign code of the citation (Niehoff 146).

St. Just and Fouquier both want to continue the deliberation without interruption and vow to suspend the trial if there is a threat to the order of the law. Using a similar language to that of Herrmann's, St. Just wants to exclude the individual who violates the tribunal ("dem Gerichte...verletzte") from the trial. The latter portion of the two citations is unmistakably identical: "von den Debatten auszuschließen." It calls for Danton and his followers, threatening to violate the juridical order, to be literally excluded from the debates ("Debatten") that eventually sentence them to death. Much like the example with Robespierre and his hand as the court of law, the characters included into the debates are the administrators of the law; the debates demarcate the juridical order. Ironically, the

spectator knows that Herrmann has previously violated this order, in that he manipulated the process of selecting tribunal members. If the trial already operates under a state of exception, then St. Just and Fouquier's statements could be read as an appeal to exclude Danton from that which has already been excluded – making exceptions to an exception.³⁹ And, if Danton has already been included into a specific code to ensure the outcome of his sentence, then he is, paradoxically, inclusively excluded from the language of the citation. The cited passage simultaneously forces the characters to adapt to, and be banned from, its linguistic code.

History as the “Gräber von Generationen”

Citation within *Dantons Tod* is the revolutionary language – one that governs our historical understanding and in which Danton's death is already inscribed (Niehoff 34). This, however, does not mean that the spectators of Büchner's drama (and much less the Dantonists themselves) are granted access to history. The citations remain incomplete and severed from their historical sources; they provide us merely with glimpses of historical fragments. As with the spectators, the Dantonists are also barred from history, banned from a completed historical picture (if there is such a thing). Not only are they integrated into and controlled by the dismembered historical code, but they are also severed from that code, unable to ascertain any historical understanding. Along the same line of thought, Schneider claims that Büchner situates his characters between history and

³⁹ Unlike Schmitt's characterization, this type of state of exception echoes Benjamin's (and later Agamben's) definition. Ever since the baroque, the state of exception has become permanent, and the sovereign cannot decide upon, but only against, an exception. Therefore, the members of the revolutionary tribunal are also subject to the inevitability of the state of exception and are merely able to base their decisions from within this state.

theater. The edge of the stage, in other words, symbolizes the blade of the guillotine, which not only severs the past from the present, but also representation from reality.⁴⁰ Danton, as well as the actor playing Danton, is both metaphorically as well as physically cut from, as Schneider astutely points out, a historical reality. What is more, the spectators in the theater are also spatially severed from this history. All that is left is the purely physical death of Danton, symbolized through the guillotine and the edge of the stage: a type of death that is devoid of all meaning.

The meaninglessness of Danton's death is the inevitable result of the revolution, or, more accurately, the *language* of the revolution in Büchner's drama. In other words, the historical citation disallows the Dantonists from deriving any divine revelation. Danton has already lost his moral credibility, as illustrated earlier, insofar as the language of the Dantonists cannot appeal to a higher power. Thus Lacroix's opinion of Danton is indeed accurate: "...du bist ein toter Heiliger; aber die Revolution kennt keine Reliquien, sie hat die Gebeine aller Könige auf die Gasse und alle Bildsäulen von den Kirchen geworfen. Glaubst du, man würde dich als Monument stehen lassen?" (34). His observation not only signifies Danton's lost authority, but the loss of any theological foundation within the revolution as well; it suggests that the revolution is the attempt to secularize preexisting religious structures (Arendt 159-60). The revolution, then, does not appear to free a path to salvation, but rather to the desacralized, or "dead," vestiges of a forgotten religion. Thus Danton's death can only be a purely physical rather than a metaphysical death (Schneider 139). Unlike Robespierre's metaphysical body that

⁴⁰ Schneider writes: "Büchner siedelt damit seine Figuren *zwischen* den Annalen der Geschichte und der Bühne an.... Anders gesagt, die Bühnenrampe als Guillotine symbolisiert den Tod, der die Vergangenheit so unwiderruflich von der Gegenwart scheidet wie die Realität von ihrer Repräsentation im szenischen Bild" (148).

remains intact for the moment, Danton is stripped of his political body (the law). If Lacroix's keen observation is applied to the rest of the drama, however, then Robespierre, who was thought to have upheld the divine link, will succumb to the same catastrophic physicality as Danton; he, too, will become a secularized monument, eventually torn down and forgotten. Instead of providing us with an alternative to the physical death, or allowing us, at least, to glance beyond this physicality, Büchner leaves his spectators with the feeling of uncertainty and ambivalence. Similar to the drama's characters, the spectator is barred from a realm outside of the ruined monuments of the revolution.

If the revolutionaries and spectators, as described in *Dantons Tod*, are disallowed from transcending the vestiges of a forgotten religion, then they are delivered into an empty world in which history ceases to exist. As Schneider already intimated, Büchner's characters suffer a fate similar to that of the players in Benjamin's Baroque *Trauerspiel*, in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (139). In his reading of the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin admits that there may be a Baroque eschaton in which all earthly things face a catastrophic force.⁴¹ This eschatological force, however, will destroy anything worldly – any physical creation (“Gestaltung”). Although Benjamin describes the end of time, the Baroque eschaton is not one of divine revelation, but instead subjects the world to an

⁴¹ As one of the most famous passages in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Benjamin writes: “Es gibt eine barocke Eschatologie; und eben darum einen Mechanismus, der alles Erdgeborene häuft und exalziert, bevor es sich dem Ende überliefert. Das Jenseits wird entleert von alledem, worin auch nur der leiseste Atem von Welt webt, und eine Fülle von Dingen, welche jeder Gestaltung sich zu entziehen pflegten, gewinnt das Barock ihm ab und fördert sie auf seinem Höhepunkt in drastischer Gestalt zu Tag, um einen letzten Himmel zu räumen und als Vakuum ihn in den Stand zu setzen, mit katastrophaler Gewalt dereinst die Erde in sich zu vernichten” (184).

empty heaven.⁴² What lies beyond all earthly things, beyond the forgotten monuments of the revolution, is not the kingdom to come, but rather the empty heavens from which all worldliness has been vacated. Since the Dantonists succumb to the force of the revolution, analogous to the catastrophe Benjamin illustrates, they face an eschaton, a physical death, which delivers them into a vacant heaven; they are subject to meaninglessness. Danton is aware of his own end and admits, “Das Nichts ist der zu gebärende Weltgott” (68).

Similar to the state of exception that Benjamin depicts, history within the state of the revolution in Büchner’s drama stands still. If the revolution is an infinite chain of catastrophic events in time, then Büchner’s characters are prohibited from experiencing an end – an eschaton that would allow them to transcend the meaninglessness, or emptiness, of history. Danton and his men are left in a tragic state of existence, in which any notion of historical progress is negated. The force of history in Büchner’s text, like Benjamin’s eschatological force in the Baroque, follows a natural and inescapable order – a type of order that is not analogous to any notion of historical progress. Both Danton and Robespierre’s followers are subject to the immanence of this order. This is illustrated through St. Just’s speech in front of the national convention (II, 7):

Es scheint in dieser Versammlung einige empfindliche Ohren zu geben, die das Wort ‘Blut’ nicht wohl vertragen können. Einige allgemeine Betrachtungen mögen sie überzeugen, daß wir nicht grausamer sind als die Natur und als die Zeit. Die Natur folgt ruhig und unwiderstehlich ihren Gesetzen; der Mensch wird

⁴²In his reading of the same passage in Benjamin, Agamben also highlights this in *State of Exception*: “It is this ‘white eschatology’ – which does not lead the earth to a redeemed hereafter, but consigns it to an absolutely empty sky – that configures the baroque state of exception as catastrophe” (57).

vernichtet, wo er mit ihnen in Konflikt kommt ... Die Schritte der Menschheit sind langsam, man kann sie nur nach Jahrhunderten zählen; hinter jedem erheben sich die Gräber von Generationen. Das Gelangen zu den einfachsten Erfindungen und Grundsätzen hat Millionen das Leben gekostet, die auf dem Wege starben. Ist es denn nicht einfach, daß zu einer Zeit, wo der Gang der Geschichte rascher ist, auch mehr Menschen außer Atem kommen? (49)

St. Just attempts to justify the violent methods of Robespierre's regime, in that he conflates the pronoun "wir" with "Natur." Following his logic, the violent order of this regime abides to the same laws as nature, and anyone who obstructs this natural law will succumb to a catastrophic violence. If Robespierre and his followers are the administrators of the juridical language of the revolution, then the natural law, to which St. Just refers, can be read as the language, or citation – the unseen force – that dominates the drama. As mentioned earlier, Robespierre is merely an agent of this force who succumbs to the language of the text, for he, too, is subject to the natural violence of history. It is as if St. Just is foreshadowing his own death: the catastrophic events that have left graves of generations in their wake will ultimately claim his life as well.

Again, St. Just's description of the "Gang der Geschichte" is not to be confused with historical progress, for the steps of mankind "sind langsam" and can be counted only after centuries. Instead, he emphasizes the immanence of a natural type of violence; behind every step are the graves of generations, the victims of this violence. That is to say, history is a chain of catastrophes in time, moving forward with relentless force, and those who stand in its way will inevitably be left behind. Like Benjamin's description of the unremitting force of the Baroque eschaton, the path of history that St. Just depicts has

not only abandoned the Dantonists (as well as Robespierre and his men), but has also left behind a chain of catastrophes in its wake. As with the players in Benjamin's Trauerspiel who cannot encounter an eschaton that would grant them access to the promised heavens, Büchner's characters face an end that is devoid of all earthly things. The end of Büchner's drama could be read as a failed revolution and another catastrophe in time – a purely physical death.

Women and the Sovereign

Even though Danton faces certain death and the revolution upholds, instead of breaking, the juridical order, there are several unresolved questions in Büchner's text that remain. Among one of the more important, and perhaps most basic, question is: if the spectator is always aware of the outcome of the drama, why does Büchner bother with writing about a revolution in the first place? What does it mean, in other words, to write about the brief life of Danton in the face of an imminent death? Although all meaning has been removed from the revolution's eschaton, there are moments in Danton's life that retain some meaning. After all, Danton does not see himself as "Nichts," but rather as "Etwas." During his imprisonment at the end of the drama, Danton proclaims:

Aber ich bin ein Atheist. Der verfluchte Satz: Etwas kann nicht zu nichts werden!
 Und ich bin etwas, das ist der Jammer! - Die Schöpfung hat sich so breit gemacht,
 da ist nichts leer, alles voll Gewimmels. Das Nichts hat sich ermordet, die
 Schöpfung ist seine Wunde, wir sind seine Blutstropfen, die Welt ist das Grab,
 worin es fault. - Das lautet verrückt, es ist aber doch was Wahres daran (61).

Danton's description of himself is decisive because it is a response to or critique of the empty eschaton. If the world that lies beyond the end ("der zu gebärende Weltgott") is the "Nichts," then the one who does not believe in God has to be the "Etwas." As an atheist, Danton's life is "das Etwas," a creation, which cannot be characterized as merely nothingness. This "Etwas" is a revolutionary instance, which stands in stark opposition to the code of the citation. That is to say, there are vital junctures in *Dantons Tod* that disrupt the sovereign order, the revolutionary language, and that can be read as an attempt to restore history, which has been lost in the "Nichts."

A number of scholars have written about the ways in which Büchner's drama threatens the predominant code of the revolution. Though T.M. Holmes's *The Rehearsal of Revolution* is largely devoted to the discussion on how Büchner's text does not only depict the failure of a revolution, but also performs a revolution itself, Niehoff was one of the first to look at instances in the drama's language that oppose the "unzugängliche Übermacht." Niehoff claims that there are elements within the language, such as linguistic inconsistencies and mistakes, which break the rhetorical violence.⁴³ Certain citations remain incomplete, even incomprehensible, lest they are syntactically rearranged and/or supplemented with the characters' own words. If these citations were to stand alone, without being integrated into the dialogue, they would lose their readability and reveal their innate instability. What would be left is a fragmented sentence, a speech act without meaning. Without being contextualized, the citation is merely a sentence that stands in ruins and a reminder of the disastrous aftermath of the

⁴³ He writes: "In der Wortwörtlichkeit der Sätze und in der einfachen Umstellung ihrer Elemente liegt die Möglichkeit, den Zitattext in sich aufbrechen zu lassen; die Worte verbergen nicht mehr das Unheil und die Gewalt, die sich in ihnen produzieren" (154).

French Revolution.⁴⁴ To follow Niehoff's argument, the aforementioned conversation between Lucile, Camille, and Danton in the third scene of the second act must be read differently. Instead of reading the missing article, which does not belong to the original citation, as being integrated into/excluded from the "eine Sprache" of the revolution, the article is seen as a necessary element of the cited passage. Not only would Danton's own words remain incomplete without the citation, but the citation would be grammatically incorrect without Danton's language. The added article underlines the vulnerability of the citation, which itself has become a ruined monument of the revolution without meaning.

The final words of *Dantons Tod* highlight the same instability within the citation as the example above. After witnessing the execution of Camille, Lucile, in a final desperate act, yells out to some passing followers of Robespierre: "Es lebe der König." Only in the drama's stage directions does the reader find out that Lucile is immediately surrounded and arrested for her blasphemous remark. Her words could be read as another direct citation from the history of the revolution, as Peter von Becker has done. Yet the spectator cannot determine with absolute certainty whether Lucile is employing her own (intentional) speech in this instance. Her words, if not contextualized, are nothing extraordinary and could stem from a number of different historical texts. Because it cannot possibly be traced back to an origin, the citation as citation remains unreadable. In the context of the revolution, however, her remark acquires significance. Knowing that the old king represents the corpse of the revolution, the vestige of a

⁴⁴ If the citation is not contextualized into a coherent dialogue, according to Niehoff, then the citation would remain "...ein verworfener Satz, ein sprachlicher Akt ohne Sinn, eine Abweichung ohne Wert; eine Satzruine als Denkmal für die Brüchigkeit des Zitattextes, ein einfaches Desaster der Revolutionssprache. Die Sprache bleibt unbeherrscht." (171).

forgotten religion, the spectator is left with words that somehow clash with the language of the revolution. Her words are a direct response to the existing order, in that they evoke a hostile reaction from Robespierre's men, and simultaneously free themselves from the sovereign order. What is more, if the fate of the old king is kept in mind, then Lucile's comment discloses that which has already died. She reanimates, so to speak, the life of the old king, and her words remember, or reconstruct, the forgotten monuments of the revolution. What has been forgotten is precisely that the revolution has failed and that history has come to an end. As one of the only characters who appears to be aware of what is at stake in Büchner's text, Lucile's words break the predestined code of the revolution. Without wanting to understand the language of the sovereign, Lucile is the only one who can really see and hear.⁴⁵ Her words provide the spectator with a space, "das Etwas," which transcends the corpses of generations that St. Just describes or the catastrophic emptiness in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*.

Not only does Lucile offer her spectators another language, one that has not adapted to citation but also a type of rhetorical violence that defies the violent order of Robespierre and his followers. Whereas the Dantonists are unable to recognize the one language (the hands) of the revolution that manipulates them, for they cannot see nor free themselves from the hands that pull their strings, Lucile is conscious of this language. She not only distinguishes those hands and strings, but her "Es lebe der König," as Celan points out, severs her tie with the sovereign.⁴⁶ This severance is a kind of rhetorical

⁴⁵ Drawing on Celan's speech, Schneider also writes: "So ist es Lucile, die...wirklich sieht und hört, ohne doch zuzuhören und zu verstehen (verstehen zu wollen)..." (151).

⁴⁶ Celan describes Lucile's sentence as "...das Gegenwort, es ist das Wort, das den 'Draht' zerreit, das Wort, das sich nicht mehr vor den 'Eckstehern und Paradegulen der Geschichte' bckt, es ist ein Akt der Freiheit. Es ist ein Schritt" (8).

violence that directly confronts the ruling structure. It could be read as another death sentence; in this sense, Lucile subjects herself to certain death with her remark. Such a reading, however, would be based on pure speculation, for Büchner's text stops short of disclosing Lucile's fate. Responding to her words, one of the citizens speaks the last line in the drama: "Im Namen der Republik." Instead of interpreting his line as a condemnation of Lucile's remark, the citizen's response can also be seen as an affirmation of her words. Although the king and the republic initially appear to be at odds with each other, his response could be read as a call for remembrance. In other words, the forgotten monuments of the revolution, the old king, should be remembered and reanimated in the new republic or, more specifically, in the language ("Namen") of the republic. What is more, Lucile's words gain the collective approval of the citizens – a physical violence or revolutionary moment – that is necessary to usher in a new order.

Celan has already stressed the significance of Lucile, arguing that her final words transcend the adorned language ("kunstreiche Worte") of the revolution, the citation.⁴⁷ In contrast to her lover, Camille, and the other Dantonists who have spoken their own death sentence, insofar as they have participated in the citation, she is able free herself from the citation. She speaks in an intentional language that is, according to Celan, both personable and perceptible. By cutting the strings that were once attached to her, she ventures out into an unfamiliar realm, which clears room for new possibilities. Celan

⁴⁷ Celan writes: "Die Mitgefahrenen sind da, vollzählig, Danton, Camille, die anderen. Sie alle haben, auch hier, Worte, kunstreiche Worte, sie bringen sie an den Mann, es ist, Büchner braucht hier mitunter nur zu zitieren, vom gemeinsamen In-den-Tod-gehen die Rede...als rings um Camille Pathos und Sentenz den Triumph von 'Puppe' und 'Draht' bestätigen, da ist Lucile, die Kunstblinde, die selbe Lucile, für die Sprache etwas Personhaftes und Wahrnehmbares hat, noch einmal da, mit ihrem plötzlichen 'Es lebe der König!'" (7).

describes Lucile's "Es lebe der König" as an active stepping out into an uncanny space and is similar to a type of "Dichtung."⁴⁸ This poetry should not be confused with the poetic speeches of the Dantonists, for it deconstructs, rather than upholds the existing language. To this end, it pushes language to the limits and opens new possibilities.⁴⁹

Rather than resigning to the inevitability of the drama's language, she rejects her own death. She tells Camille, "Höre! die Leute sagen, du müßtest sterben, und machen dazu so ernsthafte Gesichter. Sterben! ich muß lachen über die Gesichter. Sterben! Was ist das für ein Wort? Sag mir's, Camille. Sterben! Ich will nachdenken. Da, da ist's. Ich will ihm nachlaufen; komm, süßer Freund, hilf mir fangen, komm! komm!" (67). Those individuals who tell Lucile that she faces certain death are those who have resigned to the order of the citation; they are the ones who have halted the revolution and accepted their deaths. Lucile, however, rejects this outcome, for she is conscious of the fact that death, as marked in the text, is merely "ein Wort." Rather than dying, she wants to reflect ("nachdenken"). Why does the text use the word "nachdenken" to describe the intentions of Lucile? What specifically does she want to reflect? Or, instead, is she asking her spectator, her "Freund," to remember? Perhaps she wants him to contemplate the failures of the revolution or, more precisely, the one language that articulates his understanding of the revolution. Maybe she wants him to scrutinize this language, in a

⁴⁸ "Das ist ein Hinaustreten aus dem Menschlichen, ein Sichhinausbegeben in einem dem Menschlichen zugewandten und unheimlichen Bereich – denselben, in dem die Affengestalt, die Automaten und damit ... ach, auch die Kunst zuhause zu sein scheinen (Celan 11).

⁴⁹ Celan writes: "Sondern aktualisierte Sprache, freigesetzt unter dem Zeichen einer zwar radikalen, aber gleichzeitig auch der ihr von der Sprache gezogenen Grenzen, der ihr von der Sprache erschlossenen Möglichkeiten eingedenk bleibenden Individuation" (17).

final hope that the revolution will succeed. Perhaps only then is he able to replace the citation with the “Etwas” and reinstate history.

Chapter 2

Beyond the *Trauerspiel*: Revolutionary Potential in *Der Turm*

...das sind Erfindungen für die Bühne, die ihresgleichen suchen, und in denen Hofmannsthal die Emanzipation des Theaters vom Wort, insbesondere auch die Technik von Geste und Spiel, von der Benjamin im Zusammenhang seiner Bemerkungen zum epischen Theater handelt, um ein weites Stück vorangebracht hat.⁵⁰

- W.G. Sebald

The hand that rules and writes history is exposed in Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Der Turm*. Whereas the hands that pull the strings of marionettes in Büchner's drama remain unseen to the Dantonists, they openly belong to King Basilius in Hofmannsthal's work. The sovereign proclaims that his subjects must fear his hands: “Furcht vor Unser königlichen Händen” (58).⁵¹ Basilius utilizes this fear of hands, with their ability to manipulate language, to implement his rule of law. Yet this language is, as this chapter will later show, inherently unable to legitimize the sovereign. The king attempts to trace the “Furcht,” a type of rhetorical violence, to a higher being, to a metaphysical source.

⁵⁰ W.G. Sebald, “Das Wort Unter der Zunge” (*Literatur und Kritik* 125, 1978), 302-3.

⁵¹ Unless otherwise noted, all references are taken from this original versions of the drama.

After the protagonist, Sigismund, asks the king: “Woher – so viel Gewalt,” the latter responds that it stems from “...Gott unmittelbar” (59). Basilius goes on to argue that “Am Tage, das es Gott gefiel, sind wir in unser Recht getreten als Erbe” (59). Not just in this response, but also throughout the drama, the king makes an effort to link his corporal body with his metaphysical one. Though the physical bodies of Basilius and Sigismund may someday perish, “es stirbt nicht der König” (59). In order for the king to legitimize his sovereignty, his subjects must perceive him as an immortal, able to transcend any material boundaries.

However, the language with which Basilius amalgamates his two bodies and subsequently seeks to legitimize his sovereign “Erbe” ultimately fails him. This failure is part of a systemic symptom of the time that Walter Benjamin explores in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. Benjamin sees *Der Turm* as one of the purest reflections of the *Trauerspiel*, despite the fact that Hofmannsthal’s works were written well after the time commonly associated with the Baroque. Like the Baroque tragedy, according to Benjamin, *Der Turm* represents a world that is comprised of signs, a world he calls the “Sprachleben” (166). Both authors emphasize that this type of world is no longer physical, as previously thought, but exists rather as a fragmented idea.⁵² What is at stake for Hofmannsthal and Benjamin is that any juridical order (and more broadly, history) is invariably tied to a flawed language that is defined by the collective will of a community of speakers. Because of the limitations of this language, any attempt to legitimize the law

⁵² Scholars have explained the “Sprachleben” in terms of allegory in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. For instance, in “Walter Benjamin’s Theory of Allegory,” Bainard Cowan describes allegory as “...more than an outward expression; it is also the intuition, the inner experience itself. The form such an experience of the world takes is fragmentary and enigmatic; in it the world ceases to be purely physical and becomes an aggregation of signs” (110).

remains empty and meaningless.⁵³ Yet there are revolutionary moments in *Der Turm* that not only expose this emptiness, but also push the boundaries of the “Sprachleben.” These are marked by instances where theater transcends the language of the *Trauerspiel*. Thus the primary focus of the second half of this chapter is to further explore these revolutionary possibilities in which Hofmannsthal is able to emancipate theater from language.⁵⁴ *Der Turm* may be a Baroque tragedy, in the Benjaminese sense, but it also foregrounds a utopian space outside of the linguistic realm, a messianic possibility that can be represented only on the stage.⁵⁵ In order to examine this revolutionary space, it is necessary to examine the relationship between *Der Turm* and the Baroque tragedy first.⁵⁶

Not only does Hofmannsthal’s piece represent a world that only exists as language, but also a world that is both fragmented and enigmatic.⁵⁷ Various versions

⁵³ As a reoccurring theme in my dissertation, this emptiness is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s notion of the “empty” baroque eschaton in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. Within the “barocke Eschatologie,” Benjamin explains, the “Jenseits wird entleert von alledem, worin auch nur der leiseste Atem von Welt webt” (184).

⁵⁴ This idea stems from W.G. Sebald’s literary analysis of *Der Turm* (see epigraph). Although Sebald emphasizes the significance of the moments in which theater is used as a liberating type of space – “die Emanzipation des Theaters vom Wort“ – he does not provide any details in his analysis. My chapter will use Sebald’s observation as a starting point to demonstrate, more specifically, the ways in which Hofmannsthal’s piece pushes the boundaries of language.

⁵⁵ Some scholars have already examined Hofmannsthal’s increased interest in the relationship between his dramas and the theater stage. See, for example, Donna van Handle’s *Das Spiel vor der Menge: Hugo von Hofmannsthals Bemühungen um Bühnenwirksamkeit am Beispiel ausgewählter Dramen*. My study wants to not only expose this “Bühnenwirksamkeit,” that van Handle mentions, but to also explore the implication it has, in terms of physically deconstructing the “Sprachleben.”

⁵⁶ A number of scholars have extensively written on the relationship between Walter Benjamin and Hofmannsthal. See, for example, Marcus Twellmann’s comprehensive study in *Das Drama der Souveränität*. For a detailed analysis of Benjamin’s definition of the *Trauerspiel*, please refer to *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*.

⁵⁷ Cowan’s essay on Benjamin and allegory prompted me to look at the fragmented and enigmatic nature of *Der Turm*. However, this is not the only point of comparison that can be made between Benjamin and Hofmannsthal. I will also explore the most prevalent

of *Der Turm* were first published between 1920 and 1927 before Hofmannsthal's untimely death in 1929. All of them are adaptations of Pedro Calderón's influential drama, *La vida es sueño* (*Life is a Dream*), written in the early 17th century, roughly resembling the period in which Hofmannsthal's story is set. Both Calderón and Hofmannsthal tell the story of a young prince, who has been imprisoned by his own father, due to an earlier prophecy that he will one day overthrow the king in a rebellion. *Der Turm* begins years after the prophecy with a doctor who has been called in to examine the now adult-aged prince in a cage. Appalled by the state of the prisoner, the doctor convinces Julian and Anton, the dungeon master and his servant, to reunite Sigismund with his father. It is during this reunion in the third act where Hofmannsthal's adaptation differs sharply from Calderón's drama: Sigismund unexpectedly attacks his father, in one of the few moments of physical violence onstage. Believing the prophecy to have fulfilled itself, Basilius orders his son to be locked in the prison tower once again. Only a short time passes, however, before a brutal revolution led by the soldier and rebel-leader, Olivier, allows Sigismund to seize his claim to the throne. Although Sigismund's rule was meant to undo the old order of Basilius, he has adopted the overriding language to which most of the drama's characters eventually succumb: in the prince's own words, he admits to having learned the "Sprache der Welt" (84). As he begins to realize that this language is as insurmountable as it is inescapable, Hofmannsthal's storyline becomes more fragmented and obscure in the last two acts. Readers observe brief segments of Sigismund's rule and the mysterious death of Julian and Olivier. The fifth act also hosts a number of mysterious characters with supernatural abilities, notably *Die Zigeunerin*,

examples in which Hofmannsthal's drama corresponds to Benjamin's understanding of the *Trauerspiel*, particularly the notion of the "Sprachleben."

Der Mann auf der Erde, who appears in the form of the deceased Julian, and the *Kinderkönig*.⁵⁸ These characters have no specific names and are no longer based on “reality,” underscoring that they can only exist in an imaginary world that is comprised of a fragmented language.⁵⁹ What further splits the final acts are the various versions of the drama that Hofmannsthal published in a span of seven years: older ones end with the messianic child-king and the republic of children, whereas later ones simply end with the murder of Sigismund. My study will focus on the original version, since most of Benjamin’s critiques of *Der Turm* mention the *Kinderkönig*.

For Benjamin, Hofmannsthal’s drama embodies the characteristics of the Baroque *Trauerspiel*, by objectively documenting the language and the collective will of the time it was written. Benjamin wrote a personal letter to Hofmannsthal in 1925, explaining that, “In Wahrheit sehe ich in Ihrem Werke ein Trauerspiel in seiner reinsten, kanonischen Form” (613). Not surprising, therefore, is that he asked Hofmannsthal to look at his manuscript before *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiel* first appeared in 1928.⁶⁰ It was not until later, however, that Benjamin clarified the relationship between *Der Turm* and the *Trauerspiel*. In “Kritiken und Rezensionen (1926),” he writes that Hofmannsthal’s *Trauerspiel* is an objective documentation, in that the author no longer

⁵⁸ I will return to and analyze these characters later in this chapter.

⁵⁹ It should be noted, here, that any “reality” for Hofmannsthal is based on language; that is to say, there are no intrinsic or ontological truths outside of language. This corresponds to Benjamin’s notion of the “Sprachleben” and his reading of Hofmannsthal’s drama.

⁶⁰ In his letter to Hofmannsthal from June 11, Benjamin writes: “Es wäre mir empfindlich, wenn mit diesen wenigen Worten ich etwas Fremdes Ihnen vorgetragen haben sollte, wenn die Gedanken meines neuen Buches [*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*] darin dem Geiste Ihres Werkes unziemlich begegnet wären. Ich hoffe, dem ist nicht so und diese Gedanken werden Sie nicht hindern, bei gelegener Zeit einen Blick in das Manuscript zu werfen, das Ihnen mit gleicher Post zugeht” (615).

controls, but belongs to the substance of his drama: “Der Künstler aber wirkt nur in den Stoff hinein, indem er ihm gehorcht” (29). In his sense, Hofmannsthal is not the “souveräner Genius” that controls the language of his work, but is already part of a predefined construct that is already in place. The author, furthermore, embodies the historical code that is defined by the time in which he lives. Benjamin goes on to argue that, “Die großen Themen staffeln sich in Formen, von denen eine in die andere greift. Und nirgends gilt dies strenger als im Drama. Denn seine Form ist ein sehr wichtiger Index von schöpferischen Willen eines Kollektivs” (29). These “Formen” can be understood as the parameters of a preexisting language; they are, in linguistic terms, the predefined signifiers of a signified concept. What is more, the relationship between signifier and signified (as well as the dramatic form) is determined and legitimized by a community of speakers, by the will of a collective. Because he manages to capture this will in the world of his drama, Hofmannsthal is successful in portraying the *Trauerspiel*, according to Benjamin.

Before his literary critique of Hofmannsthal’s drama, Benjamin refers to the collective will of a time period as the “Sprachleben” – an essential characteristic of the *Trauerspiel* – in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. Benjamin defines the tragedy as a necessary and objective documentation of history, epistemologically understood through ideas. It is “im Sinne der kunstphilosophischen Abhandlung,” according to him, “eine Idee” (153). An idea is a way in which the world, including history, is ordered and categorized. It incorporates, furthermore, a specific “Bild der Welt. Ihrer Darstellung ist zur Aufgabe nichts Geringeres gesetzt, als dieses Bild der Welt in seiner Verkürzung zu zeichnen” (164). The *Trauerspiel* provides its spectators with an abbreviated glimpse

into the time it was written. What is more, it depicts history not as a series of progressions in time, but as fragmented construct (part of a collective will) that merely upholds the illusion of coherency. Precisely because the *Trauerspiel* "... notwending dieser Zeit entsprang – in einer höchst gewalttätigen Anstrengung," Benjamin suggests, "und dies allein würde besagen, dass kein souveräner Genius dieser Form das Gepräge gegeben hat" (166). The purpose of this form is, in part, to "Dokument des Sprachlebens und seiner jeweiligen Möglichkeiten" (166). This form of documentation is a necessary art form that exposes not only the possibilities, but also the limitations of language. For Benjamin, the parameters of the "Sprachleben" are always already predetermined by the collective will of a community of speakers and are beyond the control of the author.

Hofmannsthal begins his drama by portraying Sigismund as the ultimate victim of this collective will, from which he can never escape. The young prince bears the burden of a prophecy – the order of a predefined language, which is seemingly unalterable. During the doctor's examination, Anton orders the prince to speak: "Jetzt wird der Sigismund auch sprechen. Alle werden wir miteinander diskutieren. Mit Reden kommen die Leut zusammen. Hund reden auch. Schaf auch: machen bäh!" The uncertain prisoner asks, "is Sprechen erlaubt?" to which Anton responds, "Und obs erlaubt ist! Befohlen ists!" (10) All of Hofmannsthal's characters are brought together at this point only insofar as they share the same language; they are, in other words, commanded into the "Formen" of the *Trauerspiel*'s code. Even Sigismund is inevitably pulled into the play's "Sprachleben," forced to assimilate to a world in which animals also speak the same language. Although it seems that the protagonist is able free himself from the language of the *Trauerspiel* once he takes the throne later in the drama, he always succumbs to the

language of his world, like the rest of the characters. Swayed by the doctor's impassioned plea to free Sigismund, and with the blessing of the king, Julian and Anton work on a plan to reunite the prince with his father. Julian convinces Basilius that Sigismund is, "Arglos. Ein weißes unbeschriebenes Blatt," and one that has escaped the markings of language" (35). This assessment of the prince is tested in the third act when son and father see each other for the first time in 19 years. Their reunification is short-lived, however, and the prophecy of the Grossalmosenier seems to fulfill itself after the prince unexpectedly attacks his father. In one of the only explicit acts of physical violence on stage, Sigismund throws his father to the ground, threatening to kick him. The guards quickly overpower the prince, who is imprisoned once more. After the people's uprising and the death of the king in the play's fourth act, Sigismund is freed yet again and restored as the rightful leader. He promises a new rule that would undo the old order: "...aus der alten Ordnung herauszutreten" (95). Sigismund may be able to recognize the world as an aggregate of signs, but he inevitably succumbs to the language of his world – an admission he makes in the last act. He asks the other characters (as well as his spectators): "Wundert Ihr Euch, daß ich schnell die Sprache der Welt gelernt habe?" (84). Considering that the symbolic order of the *Trauerspiel* is as inescapable as it is insurmountable, Sigismund's confession does not come as a surprise. The language, into which the seemingly innocent prince is born, poisons him like the rest of the characters in the drama.

Let There Be Light

Hofmannsthal eventually severs the link between metaphysics and the order of the law in his drama, demonstrating that the law is based in an empty and meaningless language. Even though it seems that Sigismund is born into a world in which words rule and people believe in ontological truths, the foundations of the “Sprachleben” are not as indestructible as previously thought. A number of scholars, including W.G. Sebald, have pointed to the power of words and rhetorical violence in Hofmannsthal’s drama. In his literary critique of the drama, he writes: “Noch in den Wörtern selbst herrscht Gewalt als könnte einzig so die Inkommensurabilität des Stoffes verantwortet werden” (302). The seemingly incommensurable obstacle for Sigismund, as for all characters, is the “heilige Ordnung” that permeates the entire text. Speaking to the Grossalmosenier, who first prophesized Sigismund’s dissent, the king questions his actions: “Diese Tat und alle meine Taten habe ich getan unter deiner Gewalt. Du hast mir gezeigt: eine heilige Ordnung, gesetzt von Gott. Die heißest du mich schützen, und in ihrem Dienst waren wir verbunden” (32). It is precisely a fear of physical violence that drives the king to adhere to the prophecy. A closer reading to passage reveals, however, that Basilus does not necessarily fear a metaphysical force, but rather the violence of the Grossalmosenier. More precisely, this violence is inscribed into the rhetoric of the prophecy. It was, after all, the Grossalmosenier’s “Gewalt” that has dictated all of Basilus’s actions, including the order to imprison his child. There is a clear disconnect, nevertheless, between this violence and God and a lack of legitimization; that is, the order that has been set (“gesetzt”) by God does not protect the king. Instead, the king requires the Grossalmosenier to shield him from the old order (“Die heißest *du* mich schützen”).⁶¹ If

⁶¹ Emphasis mine.

the king equals God, moreover, then it seems curious that it was the Grossalmosenier who first showed him the “heilige Ordnung,” prompting the question: why was Basilius not already aware of God’s will? One answer is that the king does not intrinsically know that which has already been “gesetzt” from God, because he requires a language to interpret the metaphysical order.

Thus there are no ontological truths in Hofmannsthal’s piece, but rather truths that are based on metaphors in language, to which Hofmannsthal’s characters are forced to adhere.⁶² Hofmannsthal’s characters often do not speak on their own accord (which holds especially true for Sigismund), but words are rather placed into their mouths. Instead of having the ability to name, they can only be named. They become, as Julian complains, merely “...ein Instrument, weiter nichts” (20). Even Sigismund, who was first shielded from the world of language, discovers that he is nothing more than an instrument of a symbolic order. This awareness, however, leads him to question his own existence, realizing that there are no truths outside of language. Speaking to the Grossalmosenier again, the king explains that “[Sigismund] wollte da sein, nackt aus dem Nackten, blutig aus dem Blutigen, tödlich aus dem Tödlichen, und wahrmachen die Prophezeiung vom ersten Schrei an” (33). This moment demonstrates once more that the prophecy, as part of the “heilige Ordnung,” is not intrinsically true by itself, but requires a linguistic sign to make it true. Only Sigismund’s “Schrei,” signaling his entry into language, constructs truth; his first scream is, in this sense, a type of “wahrmachung.” Thus the truth of the prophecy is nothing more than, in Nietzschean terms, a metaphor – one that may be

⁶² This is reminiscent of Nietzsche, who explains that all truths are nothing more than metaphors in his short essay, “Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne.”

determined by the collective will of the king and the Grossalmosenier, but one that is also destructible.

Although truths may appear constant and indestructible to most of Hofmannsthal's characters, Sigismund sees them as a mere façade in language. He possesses the ability to realize the emptiness beyond the beams and boards of this façade, using Nietzsche's terminology again.⁶³ This is observed most clearly in the second act when Julian boasts about the gift of language he gave Sigismund. As someone who believes in the veracity of truths, Julian speaks to the prince: "Einen gewaltigen Magier habe ich aus dir gemacht, gleich Adam und Moses! Denn ich habe das Wunder der Sprache in deinen Mund gelegt" (42). The latter replies with a moan. Julian continues, "Ha! So liebe ich dich, Sigismund: denn dadurch wird der Mund des Menschen gewaltig, daß er in die Buchstaben seinen Geist eingießt, rufend und befehlend! – Warum stöhnst du?" (42). Not only is there an attempt to legitimize language through metaphysics again, but also to remove language from a collective will. It is as if Julian paradoxically believes that one can possess language by inserting one's soul into the words he speaks. Language, in this sense, is not determined by a community of speakers, but is instead individually controlled. This assumption seems paradoxical, however, considering that Julian claims to have placed language into the mouth of Sigismund. The imprisoned prince does not share Julian's assessment of language, of course. He is initially unable to respond and can only moan. When Sigismund finally finds the words, he asks: "Wer ist das: ich? Wo hats ein End? Wer hat mich zuerst so gerufen? Vater? Mutter? Zeig mir sie!" (43). One may read the response as the prince's attempt to localize his parents,

⁶³ See Friedrich Nietzsche's essay "Ueber Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinne."

whose identities have been kept from him. At the same time, Sigismund questions the origins of language, which is always displaced. Does not the self (the “ich”) exist only by being called into existence by another “ich?” A chiasitic pattern emerges: the “ich” signifies itself through another “ich,” which is signified through another “ich,” and so on. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that Sigismund cannot localize the source, or the “End” of language, for it never existed in the first place; he recognizes the endlessness of the end.

Perhaps the third act of *Der Turm* demonstrates this emptiness most clearly when the sovereign is unable to legitimize his violence. The most poignant moment in the act occurs when Julian reunites Sigismund with his father. What makes this instance significant is that the king unknowingly reveals the limitations of his own sovereignty. In fact, he inadvertently exposes his inability to legitimize his rule of law – the force that guides his hands. As soon as he sees his father, Sigismund has a visceral reaction to Basilius’s hands – a reaction that Hofmannsthal gives in his stage directions.⁶⁴ Seeing the terror on his son’s face, the king responds:

Die Hände? Furcht vor Unseren königlichen Händen? Sie sind milde,
 fruchtspendend, heilen den Kranken, dem ich sie auflege. Aber Ehrfurcht gebührt
 ihnen: recht so, mein kluger Sohn. Eines Königs Hand ist beredter als die Zunge
 des Weisen. Ihr Wink ist Befehl und im Befehl ist die Welt eingeschlossen: denn
 in ihm liegt die Vorwegnahme des Gehorsams. Indem er befiehlt, gleicht der
 König seinem Schöpfer. – Wie Gott befahl: es werde Licht! so befehle ich dir: es
 werde Licht in deinem Haupt und Gehorsam in deinem Herzen! Und dies wird dir

⁶⁴ I will return to the significance of stage directions and gesturing later in the chapter.

leicht sein: denn rege dich, tritt hierher und dahin, und Alles, worauf dein Auge fällt, kommt von mir! (58)

The king makes an important correlation between language and hands, which he uses to justify his power. Similar to *Dantons Tod*, hands in Hofmannsthal's drama can be associated with the notion of "greifen" or "Begriff" (hands not only have the ability to grasp, but also to name and control language). The king's hands are, after all, "beredter als die Zunge des Weisen." They signify, so to speak, Basilius's sovereignty.

With his capacity to name, Basilius is able to legitimize his command on a purely linguistic or epistemological level. He uses the plural pronoun "unser" referring to his hands, attempting to reconcile his corporal body with his metaphysical one. As mentioned already, this is reminiscent of Robespierre's efforts in Büchner's drama. Yet his attempt is unsuccessful, marking the crucial difference between the two dramas. More direct than in Büchner, Hofmannsthal's king proclaims a direct correlation between himself and the Creator: "der König [gleich] seinem Schöpfer." In so doing, Basilius reveals that his analogy is merely a function of language. Different from God's language, seen as an ontological type of truth that is not bridged by metaphors, the king's words can only be comprehended metaphorically. Whereas God's command is meant to bridge the arbitrary gap between signifier and signified, Basilius is unable to mend that same space. He is bound to a flawed language, in which "Licht" exists only as metaphor. Unlike God, with the ability to name and will "Licht" into existence without collective approval, the king depends on a set of preexisting symbols and signs to convey meaning. That is, he is always already part of, and can therefore only refer to, a preordained language. Although the sovereign may be able to manipulate metaphors with his hands, language does not

belong to him. As one example among many in Hofmannsthal's drama, the shortcomings of the king's language exemplify what is at stake in Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. His drama not only documents the "Sprachleben" as well as its "Möglichkeiten," but also, in Benjamin's words, removes the "souveräner Genius." It explores, moreover, that which is "unmöglich," the impossibilities or limitations of language. For even Basilius can no longer legitimize his sovereignty through the flawed language into which he is born.

A New Language

Sigismund may have inherited his father's language, but a central question remains: does he eventually keep to his promise and step out of the old order? At the end of the play, he confronts Oliver, the leader of the civilian rebellion that helped free him from prison in the fourth act. He tells Oliver, "Ich bin wie ihr seid. Aber ich weiß, und ihr seid ohne Wissen" (75). Only his knowledge that truths are mere metaphors through which violence is legitimized separates Sigismund from the others. Whereas Oliver and the rest of Hofmannsthal's characters place value in truths and laws, which they use to legitimize violence, Sigismund recognizes the impending emptiness behind these truths. After all, he admits that "Wir wissen von keinem Ding wie es ist..." (75). If Sigismund submits to this uncertainty of truths, accepting the hollowness of the *Trauerspiel's* language, is his knowledge of his predicament the only redeeming quality in *Der Turm*? That is to say, is there a true "Ding," a redemptive space perhaps, that exists beyond the linguistic world (beyond Benjamin's "Sprachleben") in which he lives?

Even though language may prevent him from knowing the world the way it really is, Sigismund never suggests that a world outside of language cannot exist. As a matter

of fact, the revolutionary (or messianic) potential of this world – a utopian space outside of language – is observable throughout *Der Turm*. Hofmannsthal is able to explore such spaces that exist beyond Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* by pushing the possibilities of theater. By providing meticulous stage directions and relying on the theatricality of his characters, he is able to disrupt the architecture of the *Trauerspiel*'s "Sprachleben." Through gestures, his characters momentarily emancipate themselves from the overriding power structures that consume them. This holds especially true for Sigismund, whose unspoken expressions can even be read as a kind of counter-violence to the *Trauerspiel*'s unyielding rhetorical violence. Thus any messianic redemption in Hofmannsthal's piece is not manifested in the violence that is communicated through language, but rather in that which can be expressed only through silence, through non-verbal theater.

Perhaps the drama's ending provides the sharpest glimpse of a utopian future that lies beyond the *Trauerspiel*'s language. Only the original version of *Der Turm* ends with the republic of children led by the *Kinderkönig*. If the Children's King signals the beginning of a utopian or messianic era, it is not surprising that the figure of Sigismund is often read as a second Messiah, who faces a necessary martyrdom. After the death of the young prince, the *Kinderkönig* tells his followers to lift up his body in the final moments of the play: "Hebet ihn auf. Wir brauchen sein Grab, unsern Wohnsitz zu heiligen" (102). What follows the death of Sigismund cannot be summarized in words, for Hofmannsthal (and the spectators) can only communicate within the symbolic confines of the *Trauerspiel*. In such a reading, the utopia is indescribable insofar as its description would have to be composed of a kind of pure language that could bridge the signifier and signified gap. Nevertheless, before one fully accepts the messianic potential in

Hofmannsthal's piece, it should be kept in mind that the newer versions of the drama do not deify Sigismund. Although Benjamin sees *Der Turm* as a representation of the *Trauerspiel*, he does not necessarily read the end as a messianic beginning in "Kritiken und Rezensionen (1926)." About the end of Hofmannsthal's play, Benjamin writes: "Sigismund geht zugrunde. Die dämonischen Gewalten des Turms werden seiner Herr. Die Träume steigen aus der Erde auf und der christliche Himmel ist längst aus ihnen gewichen" (33). His analysis of the drama's ending aligns with his understanding of the Baroque eschaton, an end that is devoid of both metaphysics and of meaning.⁶⁵ Such a reading also underscores the traditionally melancholic nature of the *Trauerspiel*.

What is surprising, however, is that Benjamin does not explicitly mention the revolutionary potential of a theoretical kind of violence in *Der Turm* that would lie outside of the dialectics of a juridical order altogether.⁶⁶ In his literary critique, he notes only that "Im Aufruhr tritt ein sagenhafter 'Kinderkönig' die wahre Erbschaft dieses Prinzen an..." (33). Yet Benjamin never reveals the ways in which this true legacy of Sigismund is to appear. Nonetheless, Hofmannsthal is clearly interested in a utopian and chaotic type of violence that is neither law-making nor law-preserving, and that is different from the *Trauerspiel*. Even though the theoretical concept of such violence already appears in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt* (1921), one that Benjamin terms "reine Gewalt," it is unclear if Hofmannsthal derives the idea from Benjamin. There are several instances throughout Hofmannsthal's piece that refer to the potential of such violence, most notably in the last act after Julian returns as *Der Mann auf der Erde*. As soon as he

⁶⁵ Refer to my introduction, in which I explain the Baroque eschaton in relationship to

⁶⁶ As examined more thoroughly in my introduction and Büchner chapter, this type of violence is similar to Benjamin's notion of "reine Gewalt" in *Zur Kritik der Gewalt*, first published in 1921.

forewarns the prince he has taught Sigismund the wrong language of the world, an elderly man with a banner proclaims:

Furchtbar ohne Maßen war das Dräuen der Zeit, aber furchtbarer war der Zwiespalt, der unser Herz zerriß. Gewalt und Gesetz, diese beiden, auf denen die Welt ruht, vor unsern Augen in ungeheurem Widerstreit! Der Sohn gegen den Vater, Herrschaft gegen Herrschaft, Gewalt gegen Gewalt wie Wasser gegen Feuer, aber ein drittes gegen beide, wie wenn am Tage des Gerichtes die Erde sich auftut und Wasser und Feuer verschlingt: mit den Narren und Verbrechern, den Gottesfeinden und Schwarmgeistern, den Gleichmachern und Selbsthelfern brach Asien herein und wollte Herr sein in unserem Hause wie in grausigen Tagen der Väter. Furchtbar über dem Chaos schwang in Eines Gewaltigen Hand das Banner der zerrissenen Ketten, daß es klang über unsern gebeugten Häuptern wie Gottes Geißel (94).

Sigismund's banner man assesses history in this crucial passage. Curiously, his assessment differs slightly from Benjamin's understanding of history in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, which is neither progressive nor continuous. Noteworthy, here, is that the historical representation is progressive insofar as there are various forms of violence in each time, all of which are described as "furchtbar." The banner man speaks of three distinct periods: 1) a time without "Maßen," without measurement⁶⁷; 2) a time of "Zwiespalt," of dichotomies; and 3) another type ("ein drittes") that juxtaposes the first two.

⁶⁷ I am reading "Maßen" not as "moderation," but rather raking the etymological root of the term, "Maß" or "messen," which is associated with "measurement."

This third type is chaotic violence and is arguably most similar to Benjamin's notion of "reine Gewalt." Whereas the first period can be read as a time without language, used to measure, the second represents the *Trauerspiel* and *Der Turm* most closely. This period is also marked by dichotomies and binaries: father against son, one sovereign against another, fire against water, and so on. It is also a time in which law exists only with violence ("Gewalt und Gesetz") and in which law-making violence stands in a dialectical relationship with violence that is law-preserving ("Gewalt gegen Gewalt"). Yet the third period the banner man describes is "gegen beide" and is marked by a kind of apocalyptic violence, which no longer defines binary categories. Instead, this chaotic violence destroys all – Hofmannsthal uses the verb "verschlingen," here. It is the destructive force of God, to which everyone (both "Gottesfeinden" and "Schwarmgeistern" alike) is subject. For Hofmannsthal and Benjamin, this messianic force exists only as a theoretical concept. Since all versions of his drama end with the abrupt death of Sigismund, Hofmannsthal never ventures outside of the realms of the *Trauerspiel*. He leaves his audience to imagine the republic of children in a world without dichotomies or traditional juridical orders. Because binary oppositions ("Zwiespalt") form the foundations of the *Trauerspiel*, the world beyond the boundaries of language remains inaccessible. This world may be a utopia in every sense of the word, but it remains an imagined possibility. Hofmannsthal makes a number of these references throughout his piece. In one example, Indrik the Smith mentions a higher force: "Du hast uns gezeigt: Gewalt, unwiderstehliche, und über der Gewalt ein Höheres, davon wir den Namen nicht wissen, und so bist du unser Herr geworden, der Eine, der Einzige, ein Heiligtum, unzugänglich" (95). The smith lacks a sufficient language to give

this “Höheres” a name, for he can only communicate with metaphors that the “Sprachleben” provides. This higher force may remain “unzugänglich” for the time being, but it exists as an idea, which transcends the conventional violence of the drama.

Before Indirik, the doctor is not only the first person who attempts to save Sigismund from imprisonment, but he also mentions a destructive force similar to the one the elderly banner man describes. Initially, he seems to be the only figure able to heal the injustice of the *Trauerspiel*, heal the damage that has been caused by the overwhelming violence. Julian goes as far as likening him to an angel, telling him, “Gewaltiger Mann, wie dein Sehstern leuchtet! Bleibe bei mir, ich werde dich verehren wie einen Engel” (67). The doctor responds by reminding him of his mortality: “Ihr werdet mich kaum wiedersehen. Die Kräfte freizumachen ist unser Amt, über dem Ende waltet ein Höherer” (67). Able to work only within the parameters of a preordained language, the doctor can only speculate about the powers he sets free. Like Sigismund’s banner man, he describes this force as a progression in time: “Gewaltig ist die Zeit, die sich erneuern will durch einen Auserwählten. Ketten wird sie brechen wie Stroh, Stürme wegblasen wie Staub” (66). More direct than in the example above, time is described as an unyielding force (“Gewaltig ist die Zeit”) that tries to renew itself. Again, this notion of time is different than the one Benjamin’s angel of history sees in its path.⁶⁸ Instead of being a series of reoccurring catastrophes, the time that the doctor describes is both new and destructive. It is an apocalyptic kind of violence that breaks chains like straw and that has the capacity to put an end to an antiquated language and its power structures. More importantly, as

⁶⁸ See Walter Benjamin’s *Angelus Novus* in his “Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen.”

the banner man notes, it is a chaotic force that works against dichotomies and the dialectics of the king's violence.

Kicking Ass

An apocalypse that would undo the old order and usher in a new time, however, would also mean the destruction of language. Hofmannsthal shows that this can only be achieved through a non-verbal act onstage. There are a number of moments of physical violence in his piece that disrupt and even overcome the collective order of the "Sprachleben." These moments have similarities to Benjamin's pure violence, in that it incorporates any instance that falls outside of the linguistic realm and attempts to undo the juridical order of the king. To this end, Hofmannsthal is able to represent this type of violence only through theater and the movements of actors. More precisely, his extensive stage directions call on his actors to use physical gestures to challenge the "Sprache der Welt" that permeates all facets of the drama. Even if these stage directions are themselves based in language, they are non-verbally communicated in a performance.⁶⁹ Particularly noteworthy are gestures that contradict the symbolic significance of hands, which have been previously associated with the ability to name and ultimately determine the juridical order (thinking back to the analysis of Basilius's hands in the beginning of this chapter). Any challenge to the king's law, therefore, would have to dismantle the significance of hands in Hofmannsthal's piece. This occurs precisely with the shift from

⁶⁹ Because the emphasis of this section is on non-verbal communication, an interpretation of Hofmannsthal's stage directions is based not necessarily on the ways in which they appear in writing, but rather on an imagined performance of them on a stage. It must be remembered, nevertheless, that my focus is on literary analysis and theory, not on performance theory, which would exceed the scope of this study.

the physical and metaphorical representations of hands to feet – a kind of revolution that turns around, or inverts, the conventional depiction of violence.

Since this revolution cannot be understood and expressed through familiar signs and symbols, it reveals itself outside of intelligible moments in the drama. One of these moments occurs in the fifth act, when the deceased Julian returns as *Der Mann auf der Erde*. Before the man speaks, Hofmannsthal gives specific stage directions:

reißt sich sein unkenntliches Gesicht ab und enthüllt sich als der tote Julian. Er sitzt auf der Erde und winkt Sigismund mit seiner grünen Hand. Hör mich. Ich habe wenig Zeit. – Sigismund. – Ich hab dich nicht die rechte Sprache gelehrt. Ich möchte mir die Haare raufen. Die ich dich gelehrt habe, reicht nur für die Anfänge. Es geht aber alles immer weiter. Hier, wo ich wohne, ahne ich erst die neue Sprache: die sagt das Obere und Untere zugleich (90).

Noteworthy is the green hand with which the figure waves to Sigismund. If the hand always signified the ability to rule (i.e. Basilius's "Königliche Hände"), then the hand of the deceased Julian is curious. The color green may be associated with decay and passing: the hands that have previously manipulated language are now poisoned; they are no longer a symbol of power. Indeed, the figure makes it clear that the old language of the world is false, "nicht die rechte." What is more, green may also represent renewal and rebirth in nature, having the etymological root "ghre," meaning "to grow."⁷⁰ After all, *Der Mann auf der Erde* speaks of a progression, or continuation, in time. Yet he references a new language where he lives – an imagined space beyond the *Trauerspiel*. Although this space is inexpressible within the confines of metaphors, the "neue

⁷⁰ <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=green&searchmode=none>

Sprache” conflates both what is at the top and at the bottom; it is not defined by the “Zwiespalt” of the *Trauerspiel*’s metaphors. In this sense, the “neue Sprache” cannot be understood and the gesture of *Der Mann auf der Erde* remains inexplicable. Rather than being symbolic, the green hand disrupts communication.

Key moments throughout *Der Turm* highlight these physical moments, in which actors are able to reject the overriding language of the *Trauerspiel*. One of these, for instance, occurs in the second act when Julian and Anton prepare the young prince to be presented to his father for the first time. In my earlier example, Julian boasts about having taught Sigismund the wonders of language, claiming “...denn ich habe das Wunder der Sprache in deinen Mund gelegt” (42).⁷¹ Especially interesting are Hofmannsthal’s stage directions that follow Julian’s claim: “*Sigismund birgt sich leise stöhnend im Stroh*” (42). The fact that the prince does not immediately answer the dungeon master is as ironic as it is significant, insofar as he physically refuses to participate in “das Wunder der Sprache,” about which Julian boasts. Sigismund’s moan, furthermore, is a theatrical moment that challenges the *Trauerspiel*’s prevailing power structure. Like the green hand of *Der Mann auf der Erde*, it signals an unintelligible moment that transpires onstage. Hofmannsthal ensures that any production of his play incorporates his stage directions by inserting the prince’s moan into the dialogue of the drama. Sigismund’s physical reaction perplexes Julian, who asks, “Warum stöhnst du?” It may not be the response that Julian expects, as indicated by his question, but the moan is also reinscribed into the metaphors of the drama’s “Sprachleben.” As a term in Julian’s question, “stöhnen” is a metaphor. However, as a noise out of Sigismund’s

⁷¹ For the full citation, please refer back to the previous section in my chapter, titled “Let There be Light.”

mouth, it no longer a metaphor that communicates information, but it interrupts the dialogue of the drama. This interruption can be further read as a rejection of language and another kind of violence, which falls outside of the confines of the rhetorical violence of the *Trauerspiel*.

In addition to the moan, Hofmannsthal's stage directions also call for Sigismund's character to use non-verbal gestures that reject the violence of hands. In the various versions of *Der Turm*, these meticulous and often lengthy stage directions determine the physical movements of all of Hofmannsthal's characters. What is significant, as also mentioned earlier, is that the majority of his stage directions directly correlate to the dialogue in his drama, making sure that they are included in any stage production.⁷² In his first interaction with Julian, Sigismund is reluctant to approach the dungeon master, saying: "Du bist oberste Gewalt über mir, vor dir zittere ich. Ich weiß, daß ich dir nicht entrinnen kann. *Er verbirgt unwillkürlich seine Hände*. Ich sehe auf deine Hände und deinen Mund, damit ich wohl verstehe, was du willst" (41). As with the king in my earlier example, hands signify the capacity for violence. It is particularly noteworthy, here, that the stage directions call for Sigismund to conceal his hands. The gesture indicates the prince's (silent) refusal to partake in the same violence of which he speaks. It may be an involuntary ("*unwillkürlich*") gesture for the character, but it is, at the same time, a calculated move by Hofmannsthal: a sort of counter-strike to Julian's and, more broadly, the *Trauerspiel's* violence. Perhaps the most significant example of non-verbal occurs later in the third act. Before he is reunited with Basilius, the frightened prince silently observes his surroundings that Hofmannsthal describes in meticulous detail in the

⁷² This may be attributed to Hofmannsthal's interest in the "Bühnenwirksamkeit" that Donna van Handle's essay mentions.

stage directions: “*Sigismund sieht alles an; erblickt sich im Spiegel, der überm Kamin hängt; erschrickt etwas, verbirgt seine Hände unter den Ärmeln. Seine Miene drückt Mißtrauen aus und eine angespannte Wachheit*” (54). After he sees himself in the mirror, Sigismund hides his hands again. This time the gesture is voluntary; even his facial expression indicates the mistrust in his own hands. Once again, this physical moment demonstrates that the prince can only silently act against the overriding violence of hands and of the law.

Aside from simply concealing his hands, Sigismund’s reluctance to speak with, and subsequent attack on, his father in the third act demonstrate his revolt against the *Trauerspiel’s* violence most clearly. After the king faces his son for the first time, he asks the prince to speak: “Laß Uns deine Stimme hören, junger Fürst! Wir sind begierig nach ihr. Wir haben ihren Klang zu lange entbehrt” (58). Oblivious to the sovereign’s command, Sigismund attempts to whisper, but cannot respond. In the stage directions, Hofmannsthal writes that Sigismund, “*redet, aber es dringt kein Laut über seine Lippen.*” The King responds: “Was flüsterst du in dir? Möge es ein guter Geist sein, der aus dir flüstert!” Yet the stage directions clarify that the prince “*kann nicht reden*” (58). One may read Sigismund’s inability to speak as an expression of an overwhelming emotion – which is also the way in which Basilius’s interprets his son’s refusal to speak, asking him: “Ist dein dein Herz überwältigt?” (58). Particularly interesting, here, is that the king uses the pronoun “wir” to refer to his desire to hear Sigismund’s voice. It is as if he is inviting his son into the collective will of the “Sprachleben,” in which all characters are assimilated into one language and categorized under the same pronoun. Nonetheless, the prince declines his father’s invitation, and the “Geist” that Basilius interprets does not

manifest itself as language, but rather as silence. Hence, Sigismund refuses to participate in the overriding violence of Hofmannsthal's drama. It seems only appropriate then that, as soon as the prince finally manages to speak, he asks, "Woher – so viel Gewalt?" (59). The sovereign, of course, cannot provide him with an adequate response.

Because he does not want to resort to the violence of his father, Sigismund turns to another type violence, which falls outside of the king's juridical order. To be more specific, he replaces the violence of Basilius's hands with the violence of his feet. Hofmannsthal's drama places emphasis on the prince's feet for the first time in the second act. Anton and Julian devise a plan to drug Sigismund, so as to make him believe that his life in the prison tower was only a dream. After Sigismund drinks the sleeping potion, Anton is seen touching the prince's feet, as dictated by the stage directions: "*Kniet bei Sigismund, streichelt ihm die Füße*" (44). A short time later, in the same scene, Sigismund first mentions his feet:

Engel und Teufel sind eins: sie haben den gleichen heimlichen Gedanken. *Er tritt noch einen Schritt vor.* Seht ihr auf meinen Mund, daß ich ihn euch sage? Eines Menschen Mund ist wie eine Blume, aber unverwelklich! Aus ihm steigt die Lobpreisung. Der Mensch ist eine einzige Herrlichkeit, und er hat nicht zuviel Leiden und Schmerzen, sondern ihrer zu wenig. Das sage ich euch! *Mit veränderter Stimme.* Es hebt mich auf. Ganz weg ist alle Furcht. Nur die Füße werden auf einmal so kalt. Wärm sie mir, Anton (45).

The reference to the mouth can be read in one of several ways: is Sigismund ironically suggesting that the "Lobpreisung" (directly translated to "doxology" or "praise to god") is indeed the language of the *Trauerspiel*? Would another language without the

“Lobpreisung” fall outside of the confines of the *Trauerspiel*? If the answer to the second question is yes, then Sigismund proposes a hypothetical language without god, a language that exists in a world with more suffering and pain. After all, he implies that the characters in Hofmannsthal’s “Sprachleben” suffer too little: “...nicht zuviel Leiden und Schmerzen, sondern ihrer zu wenig.” There is also an unapparent link between feet and language, for both are brought together in the last two lines of the passage. Instead of having some symbolic significance, however, the prince’s feet appear out of place in the context of the passage. They do not control language, as the king’s hand do, but they disrupt communication, by remaining meaningless.

Not only does Sigismund use his feet to interrupt the dialog, but he will later use them also to usher in “die neue Sprache” that *Der Mann auf der Erde* mentions. Whereas hands are used to make and preserve the sovereign’s law, feet enforce a violence that abolishes any juridical order. Even though there are allusions made to the king’s feet a few times throughout the play, Sigismund’s feet are associated with one of the drama’s only explicit acts of physical violence in the third act. After the prince finally speaks to his father, the king asks his son to sit by his feet (59). He wants to convince Sigismund that it was Julian who orchestrated his imprisonment in the tower and proposes that they should rule the kingdom together: “Es ist von nun ab ein König in Polen: aber wandelt in zwei Gestalten. Weh unseren Feinden! *Er öffnet seine Arme*” (61). Basilius invites his son into the symbolic order of the monarchy, in which the king has two bodies; his corporal body exists simultaneously with his metaphysical body. Rejecting his father’s invitation, the prince does not fear his father hands, as he had before, but he brutally attacks his father. Sigismund ask: “Wer bist du, Satan, der mir Vater und Mutter

unterschlägt? Beglaubige dich! *Er schlägt ihm ins Gesicht...bedrängt den König, reißt ihm das Schwert aus der Scheide, schwingt es*” (61). This moment promises a turning point in the play, in which violence is not only played out on a rhetorical level, but also on a physical one. The blow to the king’s face falls outside of the “Sprachleben,” insofar as it is an act not representable through language, but rather through the actor’s movement onstage. What is more, Sigismund seizes the king’s sword and expresses the desire to kick his father: “Ich befehle! Da hinüber! Nieder auf den Boden! Ich will treten auf dich! – Seitdem ich da bin, bin ich König! Wozu riefest du mich sonst?” (61). Although he initially strikes him in the face, the threat of the kick is as shocking as it is significant; the prince does not want to resort to the violence of his father. Instead, it represents another destructive force that is not administered by hands, or by the language of the *Trauerspiel*.

Yet the looming threat of this language prevails and (consistent with Benjamin’s understanding of “reine Gewalt”) the revolutionary violence of the kick remains merely theoretical. In the end, the prince resorts to his hands to strike his father in the face. Taking into account that Sigismund admits to having learned the language of the world, the question of whether or not his gestures can disrupt the old order still remains. More specifically, is the violence of the kick really different from the violence of hands? The primary difference, arguably, is that the gesture of the kick is meant to not preserve, but to momentarily disrupt the law. Accordingly, Sigismund seeks to unhinge the dialectical relationship between a law-making and law-preserving violence, which the king tried to legitimize through god. In fact, he wants to disrupt any metaphysical violence – also

being the objective of Benjamin's pure violence.⁷³ Immediately after his attack and as stunned guards rush to help Basilius, the prince tells the king's aids: "Mein Tun wird meinem Willen genügtun. Verstehet mich! Meine Gewalt wird so weit reichen als mein Wille. Auf die Knie mit euch! *Er wirft ihnen das nackte Schwert vor die Füße.* Da! Ich brauche das nicht! Ich bin der Herr!" (62). By throwing the sword to the ground, Sigismund discards the preexisting order. Different from Robespierre, who makes the choice to wield the sword of the law, Sigismund decides not to participate in the juridical order of the sovereign. He claims that violence can only reach as far as his will – a claim that is also fundamentally different from the king's (and Robespierre's) assertion that all violence is preordained by god.

Beyond the Tower

Even though the violence of his kick promises to undo the old order of the monarchy, Hofmannsthal is reluctant to end his drama with a messianic moment that exists outside of representation. Ultimately, the author preserves the language with which he communicates his drama. In all versions of *Der Turm*, Sigismund, like the Dantonists in Büchner's drama, must die in the same language into which he was born. Only the earlier adaptations of Calderón's play end with a utopian possibility – the republic of children that takes over after Sigismund's death – whereas newer ones simply conclude with the abrupt death of the protagonist. It remains questionable, however, whether the *Kinderkönig* actually destroys the law to establish the messianic world that

⁷³ As something that has been mentioned in the introduction, Benjamin first references the notion of pure violence – a type of divine violence – in "Zur Kritik der Gewalt." He writes: "Ist die mythische Gewalt rechtsetzend, so die göttliche rechtsvernichtend, setzt jene Grenzen, so vernichtet diese grenzenlos..." (25).

Benjamin imagines. Aside from the arrival of the *Kinderkönig*, moreover, there are a number of significant differences between the two versions: the most noteworthy being that Sigismund calls for the destruction of the tower, the structure that had imprisoned him, in the original ending. The tower, for Sigismund, also represents a place in time before he learned to speak the “Sprache der Welt” – a place not represented in Hofmannsthal’s *Trauerspiel*. In contrast, more recent versions of the drama make no specific reference to the tower, or to a moment that exists beyond the confines of language.

Later versions of *Der Turm* depict the language of the sovereign as a structure that cannot be overcome, but rather as part of a reoccurring cycle in history. The ending of these versions suggests that the collective will of the “Spracheleben” continues long after Sigismund dies. Moments before he dies of a fatal gunshot wound, Sigismund wants to return to the large crowd of people, the “Stimmen” outside of his window. He tells Anton and the doctor, “Ich will zum Fenster und mit meinen Gefreundeten reden, sie rufen mich” (75).⁷⁴ Anton responds by telling him not to get too close to the window, foreshadowing the impending gunshot. Likewise, the doctor perceives that something is amiss, as Sigismund nears the window: “Eine Wendung, alldurchdringender Gott! – Oder lass mir die Herzader brechen und im Zusammenstürzen mich den Himmel sehen, darin ich mit diesem sein werde!” (75). The doctor perceives a divine intervention, which helps explain why Anton hesitates in allowing Sigismund to return to the “Gefreundeten.” It marks a moment in which the young sovereign achieves divine status in the eyes of the doctor, who expresses a desire to reside with him in heaven. Although

⁷⁴ An online version of *Der Turm* is available on: <<http://www.zeno.org>>.

“diesem” could refer to “Gott,” the pronoun could just as easily signify Sigismund in the doctor’s curious comment. Unlike King Basilius, however, who previously relied on the metaphor of the king with two bodies to rule, Sigismund is elevated to a level that transcends humanity. As a mere human, the doctor explains he can no longer exist with him, lest he would be in heaven after he dies. Allowing Sigismund to return to the “Stimmen,” the collective voice of the people, would also reintegrate him into the “Sprachleben” – something that both Anton and the doctor want to prevent.

Yet the young sovereign does not heed Anton’s warning, and returns to the language of the people. Instead of preserving his divine status, by remaining in heaven, so to speak, he makes a conscious decision to return to the people. This signals not only his return to the “Sprachleben,” but it also seals his death, as a gunshot suddenly rings out from the crowd. Hofmannsthal does not reveal the culprit, but leaves the identity of Sigismund’s murderer open for interpretation; it is as if the “Stimmen” themselves are responsible for the sovereign’s death. In this regard, Sigismund shares the fate of Danton, who eventually also succumbs to the will of the people, the language of his time. Moments before he takes his last breath, Anton asks the dying sovereign, “Uns haben der Herr König nichts zu sagen?” to which the king replies, “Gebet Zeugnis ich war da, wengleich mich niemand gekannt hat” (75). Noteworthy, here, is that Sigismund asks Anton to bear witness to his life, despite the fact that he remains unknown to others. In German, the term “Zeugnis” has an etymological connection to “Zeug,” translatable as a tool, which may be used to furnish evidence (“Beweis”) in a court of law, for example.⁷⁵ Also in the English translation, the term has a relationship to the law: to provide

⁷⁵ For an online German etymological dictionary, refer to: <<http://www.dwds.de>>.

“testimony,” or to be a “witness,” in the juridical context, means to furnish proof, to speak the truth. Of course, etymologically, the term also has a relationship with “wit,” or “knowledge.”⁷⁶ Hence, Sigismund’s final request can be read as a wish to be memorialized in the preexisting knowledge, or the law, of the people. To this extent, his death is not to be left outside of representation, as an unfamiliar and indescribable experience, but rather reinscribed into the “Sprache der Welt.”

In the original version of the *Der Turm*, Sigismund also wants to be memorialized in the “Sprachleben,” to remain indefinitely in the collective knowledge of his followers, but his death propels him into heaven. Instead of descending back down to the level of the people to be reinscribed into a reoccurring language, he acquires divine status. The circumstances leading up to Sigismund’s death are noticeably different from the newer versions of the drama. Rather than dying from a gunshot, for instance, he presumably dies from a cut of a poisoned knife during his interaction with the *Zigeunerin*. An enigmatic figure that appears at the beginning of the fifth act, the gypsy woman is taken prisoner after the fall of Oliver. Followers of Sigismund reveal her to be one of Oliver’s many prostitutes. Upon her arrival, a young horseman describes her: “Das ist die Zigeunerin und der Reiter, der sie eingebracht hat. Sie hat blutige Füß, er hat sie hinter dem Pferd laufen lassen” (83). The allusion to the woman’s bloody feet is significant, if the reference is read as a moment that disrupts communication in the drama. Like the threat of Sigismund’s death, her feet signify a force that interrupts the violence of the hands. Her feet, moreover, stand in sharp contrast the cut on Sigismund’s hand.

Although it is unclear whether the gypsy inflicts the fatal wound, the doctor depicts the

⁷⁶ For an online English etymological dictionary, refer to: <<http://www.etymonline.com>>.

cut as “...ein scharfer Schnitt quer über die ganze Palme hin und senkrecht durch die Lebenslinie” (91). The lifeline can only represent a life that exists in the language that Sigismund learned to speak; it is the “Sprachleben” that is based on the same law and order on which the old monarchy was based. Hence, the cut momentarily interrupts this order, interrupts the language of Hofmannsthal’s drama.

Since his life is inextricably tied to the language of the world, moreover, Sigismund desperately clings to his “Sprachleben” at the end of the drama. He hesitates to venture to a realm beyond signification, a place without law and order – a step that had terrified Karl Moor in Schiller’s *Die Räuber*. Despite his hesitation, however, Sigismund is unlike Karl and crosses the line that separates the “sittliche” from the “entsetzliche” world. As something that is not mentioned in newer versions, Sigismund’s last request is for his followers to destroy “der Turm,” in which he finds himself trapped again.

Moments before he takes his last breath, the sovereign speaks:

richtet sich auf. Ah! wo war ich! noch einmal im Turm? In der Schwärze! ah! ah! erschlagt den Alten! zerschmeißt den Turm! zerbrecht die Ketten! Ich bin da! ich will nicht sterben! Entblößt das Schwert! mir! Ich will es halten! *Er versucht.* Es ist niemand da außer mir! Ihr sehet nicht wie die Welt ist. Nur ich, weil ich schon einmal tot war. – *Er reißt sich ganz auf.* Alle zu mir! Mit dem Schwert brechen wir die Tür in die Zeit auf! Her! her! – Ich reiße euch alle mit mir herein – in das – in die Sonne – Gift und Licht – und – dennoch! dennoch! *Er fällt zusammen.*

(98)

The tower, of course, is not just a reference to the title of Hofmannsthal piece, but also to the structure that had once imprisoned Sigismund, the structure that kept him from the

language of the world. It was, after all, only after he is freed from the tower that Sigismund learns the “Sprache der Welt.” If he was already born into the language of the prophecy, nevertheless, the structure could also be read as the prison of a preexisting language. This structure includes him into the law, by simultaneously excluding him – what Agamben would have called an inclusive exclusion. In either reading, the dying king finds himself imprisoned in the tower once more, terrified of the unknown, the “Schwärze.” If the tower is seen as a place outside of representation, Sigismund’s fear seems reasonable, for he can no longer rely on language to provide him with knowledge. As he is nearing his death, the king inevitably ascends to a place that cannot be signified. He frantically tries to avert this place, by trying to grasp the sword of justice, attempting to preserve the juridical order, but he cannot. His last words, “Hier bin ich, Julian,” marks his final ascension to heaven (101). If Julian is also *Der Mann auf der Erde*, who returns earlier in the fifth act, then Sigismund reunification with his old friend also signals his ascent into a higher language. It was, after all, the deceased Julian who first references the “neue Sprache” that is no longer based in metaphors.⁷⁷ This language, of course, remains outside of representation, since it conflates the space that separates the signifier and signified. It can, therefore, only remain outside of the drama, as an imagined possibility.

Yet Hofmannsthal does not necessarily end *Der Turm* with the prospect of a utopia. While it is tempting to read the republic of children after Sigismund’s death as a utopia, it is questionable if the *Kinderkönig* successfully transcends the drama’s

⁷⁷ In an aforementioned passage, *Der Mann auf der Erde* returns in the body of Julian, explaining: “Hier, wo ich wohne, ohne ich erst die neue Sprache: die sagt das Obere und Untere zugleich” (90).

“Sprachleben.” In the final moments of his play, Hofmannsthal provides a number of detailed stage directions that reveal his hesitation to conclude his text with a messianic possibility. After Sigismund utters his last words, he writes: “*Der Kinderkönig steht auf und hebt die rechte Hand. – Alle erheben sich und recken, wie er, die rechte Hand empor. – Die drei Bannerträger senken die Banner zu Sigismunds Füßen*” (101). Again dichotomy between hands and feet is significant: whereas the feet are associated with the deceased Sigismund, the hand is now a symbol of the *Kinderkönig*’s newfound order. This marks yet another revolution, a turn, from the rule of feet back to the rule of hands. In this sense, the revolution does not signal a linear progression in time, but a reoccurring cycle; it returns Hofmannsthal’s characters back to the beginning of the drama. “*Indem er das in der Scheide geborgene Reichsschwert ergreift,*” the *Kinderkönig* proclaims, “*Hebet ihn auf. Wir brauchen sein Grab, unsern Wohnsitz zu heiligen.*” (102). If the “Reichsschwert” is the same sword that Robespierre and King Basilius wielded during their rule, then the *Kinderkönig*’s law is no different from the laws of his predecessors. His order is based on the same metaphysical violence and metaphors as before. The only difference is that Sigismund is now a “Heiliger,” the metaphysical source, through which the *Kinderkönig*’s rule is legitimized.

Chapter 3

Under the Mask: Performance *Dantons Tod* in Heiner Müller's *Der Auftrag*

The overriding language of *Der Turm* has returned in Heiner Müller's *Der Auftrag*. Instead of merely exposing this recurring language of history, Müller wants to interrupt it. In *Gesammelte Irrtümer*, containing his recorded conversations with Ulrich Dietzel from 1985, Müller says: "Mein Interesse an der Wiederkehr des Gleichen ist ein Interesse an der Sprengung des Kontinuums, auch an Literatur als Sprengsatz und Potenzial für Revolution" (167). "Wiederkehr des Gleichen," the Eternal Return, is what Nietzsche scholars have interpreted as the recurring signifiers in language that determine the order of the world.⁷⁸ In this study, it refers to the signs that form the foundations of the "Sprachleben," or the citations to which the Dantonists in Büchner's drama fall victim. Müller's desire to smash the Eternal Return serves as a starting point to this

⁷⁸ In his introduction to *The New Nietzsche*, David Allison describes the Eternal Return: "Man and world, word and thing, both belong to the order of the signifier, the *only* order of things – a doctrine that will be variously repeated throughout Nietzsche's works under three titles: Eternal Return, Will to Power, and Overmann" (xix). Important to point out is that only the signifier is part of the Eternal Return, as Allison notes. For Nietzsche, this does not suggest that signified concepts do not change over time, once the old concepts have been actively forgotten and revalued. Whereas the relationship between signified and signifier is constantly altering, revolutionizing, the basic structure of language, the linguistic sign, remains the same.

chapter. It examines the ways in which he imagines another kind of violence in *Der Auftrag* that is different from the representation of revolution in *Dantons Tod*. Rather than using the same citations that have sentenced Danton to death, Müller uses his text to undermine and eventually destroy the language of Robespierre's revolution – the language of, what he calls, “Das Theater der weißen Revolution.”

As the focus of the first part of this chapter, *Der Auftrag* systematically strips the meaning from the recycled citations in *Dantons Tod* to stage another kind of revolt that is more inline with Müller's ideas on revolution (mentioned in *Gesammelte Irrtümer*). Müller recites what has already been cited in Büchner, so as to unveil the emptiness behind the language that represents the French Revolution. In a bizarre parody, the protagonists in *Der Auftrag* stage a performance of the “Theater der weißen Revolution,” but fail to play the roles of Danton and Robespierre, as they are assigned in Büchner's piece. This failure is what differentiates both authors: Müller's characters are keenly aware of their predicament, wanting to forget the old language of the white revolution. Therefore, his characters do not restage, but stage another revolution, a black slave revolt, which destroys all earthly things – perhaps even the signifiers that are part of the Eternal Return. The second half of this chapter examines the implications of this revolution and its aftermath. Reminiscent of Hofmannsthal, Müller uses the physical movements of his actors onstage to communicate a revolution through bodies, instead of through words. Whereas Hofmannsthal was reluctant to publish his first drama with the *Kinderkönig* ending, Müller incorporates a utopian possibility, or the possibility of transcending the

Eternal Return, the linguistic order of all things.⁷⁹

Before this utopia, Müller writes in a language that becomes progressively more unreadable as his play progresses. First written in 1979 and performed onstage in 1980, *Der Auftrag. Erinnerungen an eine Revolution* tells the story of three delegates of the French assembly sent to Jamaica to stage a slave revolt against the British colony. Müller bases several of his characters and key motifs on Anna Seghers's "Das Licht auf dem Galgen," which begins with Galloudec's letter to Antoine, around the time of Napoleon.⁸⁰ In his version of the letter, one of the delegates and son of a slave owner, Debuissou, has betrayed the revolution by having abandoned his post. They also find out that the two other emissaries, Galloudec and Sasportas, a farmer from Brittany and former slave from Haiti, have also failed in their revolutionary mission, in their "Auftrag." Galloudec writes: "Ich teile Ihnen mit, dass wir den Auftrag zurückgeben müssen, den der Konvent durch Ihre Person uns erteilt hat, da wir ihn nicht erfüllen konnten. Vielleicht richten andere mehr aus... Entschuldigen Sie meine Schrift, sie haben mir ein Bein abgenommen und ich schreibe im Fieber" (11). At this point, there is no information that would reveal the exact nature or the origins of the "Auftrag." Despite the fact that it had already failed at the time he wrote the letter, Galloudec expresses a desire to continue his mission, handing it back to Antoine through the letter. Yet the writing in the letter (at least in the diegetic world of the play) becomes progressively unreadable and, like the gradual deterioration of Galloudec's health, so does the lucidity of Müller's plot. First denying

⁷⁹ The Eternal Return is not something that Nietzsche thought could be overcome, but only relived (or rediscovered) – see Pierre Klossowski's article, "Nietzsche's Experience of the Eternal Return" (108-9).

⁸⁰ For a detailed discussion on the relationship between Heiner Müller and Anna Seghers, see John Pizer's article, "Negritude in East German literature: Anna Seghers, Heiner Müller, and the Haitian Revolution."

his knowledge of Galloudec's existence, Antoine later admits to his wife privately that he is in fact familiar with the "Auftrag." This also serves as a transition to the next scene in which the narrative travels back in time to when the emissaries first arrive in Jamaica.

What makes the moment unusual and difficult to follow is the sudden arrival of two women from the past, the "Engel der Verzweiflung" and "ErsteLiebe." Both female characters resemble figures of a Greek tragedy and have sinister intentions. They also signal important time shifts in the play, marking the start of, what Sasportas later calls, "Das Theater der weißen Revoluton" – a reference to the theater production of *Dantons Tod*. At one of the most poignant moments in the play, Galloudec, Sasportas, and Debuissou parody various scenes from Büchner's drama in the slave colony. Sasportas quickly calls an end to the theater, however, and there is another shift back to an unspecified time in the present, depicting a businessman in an elevator. In one continuous monologue, the man details his disorientation, having received an unknown "Auftrag" from his superior who commits suicide and left abandoned in, what he describes, "...dieser wüsten Gegend jenseits der Zivilisation" (28). Without warning or transition, and without the appearance of the "Engel der Verzweiflung," the setting jumps back to Jamaica. Here we learn that Debuissou betrays the revolution, with the other two revolutionaries continuing their fight. Sasportas has now become the leader of what he calls the black revolution. Although Galloudec expresses their failure to fulfill the "Auftrag" at the beginning, the end of Müller's play clings onto a revolutionary hope that is reminiscent of the original ending of Hofmannsthal's drama.

To understand the failure of the emissaries, one must ask what is perhaps the most obvious question in Müller's play: what is the "Auftrag" exactly? An answer allows us

to comprehend the larger implications of the Büchner parody, represented as “Das Theater der weißen Revolution” – the focus of the second section of this chapter. Keeping Müller’s revolutionary philosophy in mind, it seems too simple to say that the “Auftrag” is merely the mission to stage a revolution. In the full title of the play, for instance, the mission asks to fulfill the task of the subtitle: to remember a revolution. Although it clarifies that memory is somehow tied to a revolution, the title does not specify at whom the “Auftrag” is directed. Some scholars have argued that it is aimed at the readers or spectators of Müller’s play.⁸¹ Yet the identity of the individual giving the assignment and the person doing the remembering remains obscured.⁸² Does the author ask his readers to recall a revolution, or is someone else asking the author? Another thing to consider is that Müller does not use the imperative form of the verb “erinnern,” which would be a command specifically directed at the reader. Instead, he uses the noun “Erinnerungen,” suggesting that the content of what follows the title explores an already existing memory; the revolution is already part of a thing from the past. As Galloudec’s letter reveals at the beginning of the play, the emissaries have failed in their mission and the revolution remains just a concept on paper – one that the “Auftrag” was unable to materialize in practice. Along the same line of reasoning, Yasmine Inauen makes a

⁸¹ See, for example, Yasmine Inauen’s *Dramaturgie der Erinnerung*. In her discussion of the “Auftrag,” Inauen writes: “Die Frage, was hinter der Chiffre des Auftrags stecke, um welche Art Auftrag es sich handle und wie er zu erfüllen sei, ist also direkt an die Leserinnen und Zuschauer gerichtet” (27). Although Inauen agrees that the reader cannot discern a clearly defined subject in the title – the individual who is meant to remember a revolution – she does read the letter at the beginning of Müller’s text as an assignment for the play’s spectators.

⁸² Inauen continues, “Wiederum ist das Subjekt der Erinnerung nicht festgeschrieben und ebenso wenig, ob es sich um eine willkürliche oder unwillkürliche Erinnerung handelt und wodurch sie ausgelöst wird. Immerhin wird ein Zusammenhang deutlich: ihr Gegenstand ist *eine*, zunächst noch unbestimmte Revolution” (19).

convincing case that Müller's play does not simply remember a revolution, but the *texts* of the revolution (20). Aside from the example of Galloudec's letter, Müller uses intertextuality throughout his work to illustrate the constructedness of the revolution (as well as history). He uses citation from other works to show that the revolution represented in his text is an event in time that is fabricated out of the bits and pieces of a preexisting language.⁸³ While Inauen emphasizes the intertextuality in *Der Auftrag*, the title also highlights the crucial relationship between the revolution and theater. What role does theater play specifically in the construction of a revolution?

If the "Auftrag" in the title asks the spectators or readers of Müller's play to remember other texts, then the "Auftrag," in the diegetic world of the play, asks the three French emissaries the same thing. More specifically, within the context of the "Theater der weißen Revolution," they are asked to remember Büchner's text. In this regard, the "Auftrag" requires Debuissou, Galloudec, and Sasportas not just to incite a slave rebellion, as the narrator leads us to believe, but rather to *stage* revolution.⁸⁴ The act of staging is significant here, since it can be read in theatrical terms. Put differently, the revolution in Müller's play is nothing more than a play in a play.⁸⁵ This already becomes apparent in the first scene on Jamaica, when Debuissou introduces himself and his fellow comrades. He makes an allusion to theater by mentioning the various masks that they are forced to wear: "Nehmen wir unsre Masken vor. Ich bin der ich war: Debuissou, Sohn

⁸³ Again, I will revisit the role of citation in Müller's play, providing specific textual examples in the second section of this chapter.

⁸⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁸⁵ Inauen writes that the end of the theater of the white revolution signifies, "...die Destruktion der Bilder und Ideale des Revolutionsgedächtnisses und nicht zuletzt auch die Erkenntnis des theatralischen Charakters der Revolution...Sie legt letztlich die grundsätzliche Fragwürdigkeit des Revolutionsmodells bloß und entlarvt es als Mythos" (152).

von Sklavenhaltern auf Jamaika, mit Erbrecht auf eine Plantage mit vierhundert Sklaven” (16). Aside from revealing that he is the son of a slave owner, Debuissou also notes that he resembles the mask that he wears. If the mask represents his role in a theater production, he is an actor who is playing himself. He makes several more explicit references to the theater later in the dialogue, telling Sasportas, for example, “Ich weiß, daß du die schwerste Rolle spielst” (17). It is not difficult to read “Rolle” as a part that is played in theater – which further underlines a self-referential moment. By acknowledging that they are playing roles, Müller’s characters highlight again that they are merely actors asked to perform a play. The audience is no longer watching a play of a revolution, but it is now aware that it is watching a play of a play of a revolution.⁸⁶ Their mission is not just to remember, but also to reenact a revolutionary (i.e. Büchner’s) text. Hence, the “Auftrag” that is first mentioned in Galloudec’s letter is to put on a theater production, and the emissaries’ failure to carry it out is their failure to perform *Dantons Tod*.

Büchner in Jamaica

Galloudec and Sasportas’s failure to perform their assigned roles is significant, as it allows them to move beyond the antiquated language of past revolutions to stage another kind of revolt. Robespierre’s republic that overthrows the French monarchy in *Dantons Tod* or the people’s uprising that frees Sigismund in *Der Turm* are both

⁸⁶ Inauen writes that the end of the theater of the white revolution signifies, “...die Destruktion der Bilder und Ideale des Revolutionsgedächtnisses und nicht zuletzt auch die Erkenntnis des theatralischen Charakters der Revolution...Sie legt letztlich die grundsätzliche Fragwürdigkeit des Revolutionsmodells bloß und entlarvt es als Mythos” (152).

examples of revolutions that participate in the reoccurring language that Müller wants to demolish. If the “Auftrag” in Müller’s play asks the three emissaries to perform the revolutions in Büchner and Hofmannsthal’s dramas, then it also asks them to communicate in the same language to which both Danton and Sigismund eventually fall victim. It is precisely because the emissaries fail in their “Auftrag,” they avoid partaking in this language. Their failure, along the same line of reasoning, is a necessary step that enables Müller to stage a revolution in his text that exists outside of the old order. It will allow him to break the continuous cycle (if only momentarily) of the Eternal Return. Before being able to understand how the emissaries are unable to carry out the “Auftrag,” their performance has to be analyzed first.

There may be several recognizable similarities that emerge between Büchner and Müller’s dramas during the emissaries’ performance of *Dantons Tod*, but these only highlight the more important differences between the texts. Initially described as “Das Theater der Revolution” and later retitled “Das Theater der weißen Revolution,” the Büchner performance is one of the most striking moments in the play. The scene begins with the dialogue between the former slave, Sasportas, playing the role of Robespierre (SasportasRobespierre) and Galloudec portraying Danton (GalloudecDanton), with Debuisson watching the spectacle from a throne. In an argument with GalloudecDanton, SasportasRobespierre begins the spectacle:

Den Verräter, der die Nase rümpft vor dem Geruch des Blutes, mit dem die Revolution den Leib der neuen Gesellschaft wäscht. Soll ich dir sagen, warum du kein Blut mehr sehn kannst, Danton. Hast du Revolution gesagt. Der Griff nach dem Fleischtopf war deine Revolution...Länger als bis dein Kopf fällt unter dem

Beil der Gerechtigkeit wirst du die Tugend nicht verhöhnen. Du kannst nicht sagen, dass ich dich nicht gewarnt habe, Danton. Jetzt wird die Guillotine mit dir reden, die erhabene Erfindung des neuen Zeitalters, das über dich hinwegschreiten wird wie über alle Verräter. Ihre Sprache wirst du verstehn, du hast sie gut gesprochen im September (21-2).

Several parallels between Büchner and Müller are discernible in the dialogue. The moment in which SasportasRobespierre blames GalloudecDanton for ridiculing morality is reminiscent of Robespierre asking Danton in Büchner's play, "Du leugnest die Tugend?" (35). Whereas Robespierre's morals in *Dantons Tod* are rooted in his unwavering patriotic belief in the people and the republic, the exact nature of SasportasRobespierre's "Tugend" is unclear. Despite this ambiguity, the moment is significant because it directly cites Büchner. Although the citation has been significantly altered, Müller emulates the rhetoric and employs the same strategies of Büchner's Robespierre. Both Robespierres control the language of the (white) revolution insofar as they both cite preexisting texts; SasportasRobespierre cites Büchner's Robespierre citing historical materials that document the French Revolution. By threatening his adversary with rhetorical violence, both characters force Danton into their language. While Büchner's Robespierre wields the sword of justice, thus being on the side of virtue, Müller's Robespierre threatens GalloudecDanton with the guillotine of justice ("Beil der Gerechtigkeit"). As the sword signifies the law, or at least the juridical language that signifies justice, so does the guillotine in *Der Auftrag*, which speaks a language. SasportasRobespierre, moreover, prophesizes that GalloudecDanton will learn to comprehend the guillotine's language ("ihre Sprache"). With this statement, Müller's

Robespierre forces Danton, at least rhetorically, into the revolutionary language comprised of citation. This is similar to the fate of Büchner's Danton, who is inscribed into the historical code of the text.⁸⁷ Unlike GalloudecDanton, he faces an inevitable death: like the symbolic fate of the citation, which remains severed from the original text, his head is severed from his body.

Because his death is not already inscribed into the title of the play or acted out onstage at the end of the "Theater der weißen Revolution," GalloudecDanton is dissimilar from Büchner's Danton. He is always aware that he is merely an actor in a revolutionary drama, aware that he is citing Büchner – a crucial piece of knowledge that eventually contributes to Galloudec's failure to fulfill the "Auftrag." In the aforementioned passage, for example, Sasportas Robespierre points out that GalloudecDanton had once been a willing participant in the language of the guillotine: "du hast sie gut gesprochen im September" (21-2). Indeed, this is different from Büchner's drama, in which Danton involuntarily participates in the citation, and has no choice but to participate in the language of his world.⁸⁸ Both of Müller's characters are also always cognizant of citation and of the history of the French Revolution that extends beyond *Dantons Tod*; they know that everyone ultimately succumbs to Danton's fate. Knowing that SasportasRobespierre participates in the language of the guillotine as he has, GalloudecDanton foreshadows the

⁸⁷ See my Büchner Chapter.

⁸⁸ There is one exception that occurs in Büchner's *Dantons Tod* where Danton admits to citing Robespierre (35). Instead of being a willing participant in the citation, however, Danton cites Robespierre only ironically. Even though he cannot prevent his participation, Danton does not want to be part of the same language that Robespierre and his followers speak.

death of the two characters that they play.⁸⁹ He responds to SasportasRobespierre's remarks in the parody scene: "Jetzt bin ich dran...ES LEBE DIE REPUBLIK. Hab ich dir nicht gesagt: du bist der nächste" (22). GalloudecDanton portrays Robespierre as radically different from the one in Büchner's drama, already conscious of the fact that he, like Danton, faces certain death.

What makes the passage above particularly striking is when GalloudecDanton's cry, "ES LEBE DIE REPUBLIC," is compared to the final words of Büchner's Lucile, "Es lebe der König." Being aware of their place in history, both characters knowingly communicate their own death sentence, challenging the recurring language of the revolution. In *Dantons Tod*, Lucile becomes aware of the recycled citation in the text, the historical code, and she uses her cry that acknowledges the old monarchy to undermine the language of Robespierre's newfound republic. Even if it is for a brief moment, she refuses to participate in the citation that has sentenced the Dantonists to death. Her refusal also signals her own inevitable demise. Müller's Danton is not unlike Lucile, ignorant to what will sentence him to death, but he is aware that his death and that of Robespierre are already inscribed into the language he speaks. Whereas Büchner makes a distinction between Robespierre's republic and Danton's king, Müller does not separate the two, emphasizing that the language of the monarchy is no different from the one of the republic. Although Danton might not have acknowledged the king in Büchner's text, as Lucile did, he would certainly not have glorified the republic that has sentenced him to death. In his regard, GalloudecDanton's acknowledgment to the republic appears out of

⁸⁹ Müller does not portray GalloudecDanton or SasportasRobespierre's death onstage. Their death is only documented in historical records, in an official history of the French Revolution.

place. By accepting the inevitability of history – the Eternal Return – and by choosing to speak in the language of the guillotine, he commits suicide. Instead of dying meaningless deaths, however, he and Lucile highlight the recurring citations that permeate both Müller and Büchner's text. It should be remembered that even though both deaths are only symbolic, insofar as they are not performed only rhetorically, they are drastically different from the death of Büchner's Danton, who dies unwillingly and naively.

Similar to Lucile's refusal to partake in the citation to which the rest of the characters in *Dantons Tod* succumb, GalloudecDanton refuses to impersonate Büchner's Danton. Because he accepts his role in citation, consenting to his own death, Müller's character fails in his "Auftrag." By altering the citation that appears in *Dantons Tod*, Galloudec consciously does not play Danton, as Büchner had envisioned. His failure to play the role enables him to step outside of the language of citation of the white revolution. Furthermore, it allows him to deconstruct the citation. He sets the stage for the theater of the black revolution – a revolt with the potential to overcome the Eternal Return. This becomes especially apparent at the end of "Das Theater der weißen Revolution," when SasportasRobespierre and GalloudecDanton get into an argument. The former slave playing Robespierre announces that his name "...steht im Pantheon der Geschichte," to which GalloudecDanton replies by reciting a few lines of the German children's song, "Ein Männlein steht im Walde" (23). The citation is taken from Hoffmann von Fallersleben's song. At first glance, the citation of the song appears absurd in the context of the dialogue; it is neither an appropriate or intelligible response to SasportasRobespierre's remark. It is only when Galloudec rejects his role as Danton,

knowingly stepping outside of the overriding language in *Dantons Tod*, the citation starts to make sense. GalloudecDanton is still talking in citation, but it is not the same citation that Büchner's Danton speaks. He may fail in his role as Danton, but he uses citation to create a new dialogue, a new language that remains different from Büchner's characters.⁹⁰

It is not just GalloudecDanton or Lucile, but also the three emissaries, who fail in their roles as revolutionaries (at least how Büchner had envisioned them). They use citation against the citation that makes up the history of the French Revolution to undermine the language of Robespierre's republic. Even before the Büchner parody, their failure to perform their assigned roles in the revolutionary theater becomes evident. After Debuissou asks his two comrades to identify their roles, Galloudec refers to himself as,

Ein Bauer aus der Bretagne, der die Revolution hassen gelernt hat im Blutregen der Guillotine, ich wollte, der Regen wäre reichlicher gefallen, und nicht nur auf Frankreich, treuer Diener des gnädigen Herrn Debuissou, und glaube an die heilige Ordnung der Monarchie und der Kirche. Ich hoffe, ich werde das nicht zu oft beten müssen" (16).

There are a number of curious and significant contradictions in the passage. Although Galloudec is later chosen to play the role of Danton, for instance, he emulates

⁹⁰ By piecing together random citation, GalloudecDanton also creates a dialogue that is similar to the monologue in Elfriede Jelinek's *Bambiland*, which will be discussed in my next chapter. What makes Müller's narrative similar to Jelinek's is that it no longer retains a chronological order: Fallersleben's song, for example, appeared well after the time of Napoleon (or the time in which Müller's story takes). Like in Jelinek's text, the dialogue in Müller's text remains fragmented and incomplete at times; it does not follow a linear progression in time.

Robespierre by communicating his desire for violence. Initially he seems to hate the bloodshed and the violence of the previous revolution, but then dreams of more “Blutregen.” Similar to Büchner’s Robespierre, he does not dislike the violence of the revolution, but rather hates the fact that this violence was not “reichlicher.” By saying he is a firm believer in the “heilige Ordnung,” moreover, he employs the language of the sovereign in *Dantons Tod*. Rather than being a believer in the republic, however, he announces his faith in the order of the monarchy and the church – a gesture that is similar to Lucile’s. While Danton would not have acknowledged the republic, as previously mentioned, Robespierre would not have praised the old monarchy. Being cast in both roles, Galloudec significantly alters the original roles that appear in Büchner’s drama; he successfully undermines the citations that make up the history of the revolution. Nevertheless, his ability to alter language also comes at a steep price: his inevitable death. Most likely this is also the reason he expresses doubt at the end of his dialogue, saying that he hopes “das nicht zu oft beten müssen” (16). If Galloudec is like Lucile, he is aware that his demise is already inscribed into the language of “Auftrag.”

This awareness, more importantly, also marks a moment in which Galloudec fails in his “Auftrag” as an actor. The more significant aspect of Galloudec’s aforementioned dialogue is that it is repeated a second time with a slight, but crucial difference. After Debuissou tells Galloudec, “Du bist zweimal aus der Rolle gefallen, Galloudec, Wer bist du,” the latter replies: “Ein Bauer aus der Bretagne, der die Revolution hassen gelernt hat im Blutregen der Guillotine. Treuer Diener des gnädigen Herrn Debuissou. Ich glaube an die heilige Ordnung der Monarchie und der Kirche” (16). Whereas the first dialogue consists of one continuous run-on sentence, the second is comprised of three distinct

sentences. The syntactical structure of the repeated dialogue appears much more rigid than the first. It is as if Galloudec, as an actor in a revolutionary drama, is overly conscious of the lines he is reciting onstage. To be more precise, the rigidity of his dialogue underscores another self-referential moment in *Der Auftrag*, through which the spectators again become cognizant of the play within a play. This is further emphasized by Sasportas's response to the second time Galloudec introduces himself in the dialogue. He mocks him by parodying him: "Ich glaube an die heilige Ordnung der Monarchie und der Kirche. Ich glaube an die heilige Ordnung der Monarchie und der Kirche" (16). By repeating Galloudec's last line, Sasportas challenges the legitimacy of his statement. He draws attention to the fact that he is merely citing Galloudec citing himself, demonstrating that the dialogue of the emissaries consists nothing more than the pieces of a recycled language.

These multiple levels of citation challenge the legitimacy of the language of the "Auftrag" and the effectiveness of the revolution. As with the first time Galloudec introduces himself in the passage above, the last sentence in the introduction is the only one that is grammatically complete, with a discernable subject and verb. While the grammatical subject in the first introduction casts doubt over what he is saying, he appears more certain and more confident in his second introduction. As already mentioned, Galloudec's doubt contributes to his failure to play his role convincingly. Although Galloudec's "Rolle" is never specified, it can be assumed that the first time he fails, according to Debuissou, is when he communicates his desire for more "Blutregen." Instead of reading his craving for bloodshed as being similar to Robespierre's desire for violence, it can also be read as an admission that the French Revolution failed. After all,

Galloudec wishes for more bloodshed not in France, but elsewhere, and implicitly admits that the revolution was not successful outside of the French context. Thus, he casts doubt on his own role as a revolutionary. By setting his characters up for failure, Müller is successful in illustrating the ineffectiveness of the revolution, as it has been portrayed in “Das Theater der weißen Revolution.”

Aside from Galloudec or Sasportas, who both contribute to the failure of the “Auftrag” and the revolution, the two female figures in Müller’s play possess the unique ability to step outside of citation all together.⁹¹ Particularly, the “Engel der Verzweiflung” not only undermines the dialogue that consists of citations, as the emissaries have done, but she systematically strips the meaning from the metaphors that make up the citation. To be more exact, she alters the value of the term “revolution” in the context of the revolutionary theater to show its ineffectiveness. Unlike Büchner’s Lucile or GalloudecDanton, who are conscious of the roles they play, the angel of despair silences the patriarchal language of the revolution that Robespierre tries to control. Her first appearance is at the beginning, shortly after Antoine admits to his wife that he knows Galloudec and the “Auftrag.” After Antoine has a sexual encounter with his wife, the text suddenly jumps to the angel before it fast-forwards again to the emissaries on Jamaica:

Ich bin der Engel der Verzweiflung. Mit meinen Händen teile ich den Rausch aus, die Betäubung, das Vergessen, Lust und Qual der Leiber. Meine Rede ist das Schweigen, mein Gesang der Schrei. Im Schatten meiner Flügel wohnt der

⁹¹ One could argue that Debuisson is able to do the same thing. As we learn from Galloudec’s letter at the beginning of the play, he is the first to abandon the “Auftrag.” In so doing, he willingly steps out of the role that the revolutionary theater has assigned.

Schrecken. Meine Hoffnung ist der letzte Atem. Meine Hoffnung ist die erste Schlacht. Ich bin das Messer mit dem der Tote seinen Sarg aufsprengt. Ich bin der sein wird. Mein Flug ist der Aufstand, mein Himmel der Abgrund von morgen (14).

If the angel of despair marks the beginning of the revolutionary theater, which is suppose to remember a revolution, it is curious that she describes herself as a symbol of forgetting. Instead of setting remembrance into motion, she initiates a state of amnesia, silencing the language of the revolution. Any words that the angel speaks must be scrutinized, for her speech is silent and her songs are screams; she communicates a language that the spectator cannot understand. In Inauen describes the language of the angel best: “Die zum zivilisierten Gesang ‘verstellte’ archaische (Stimme) Äußerung wird in einer Bewegung, die alle Ordnungen außer Kraft setzt, sich selber zurückgegeben. Und das Schweigen verweist über das dichotomische Schema der Rede hinaus auf ein anderes Sprechen” (63). Inauen points out the most important function of the angel, which is to remove all order from language. No longer are readers able to glean information from the angel’s speech because she displaces all metaphors – her heaven is the abyss of tomorrow. While they are able to make sense of the citation in Büchner’s drama, they find that Müller’s angel of despair destroys everything they hold familiar. The angel also reminds them to scrutinize all of Müller’s text, for she promises, “Ich bin der sein wird.” If she has seized control of the text, having displaced the meaning of metaphors, then we are forced to reevaluate the title of the play. Rather than being asked to remember the theater of the white revolution, are we expected to forget the theater? Does the angel ask us to reconsider our own understanding of the revolution?

Possible answers to these questions are found in two central metaphors that emerge in the middle of Müller's text: "Die Revolution ist die Maske des Todes. Der Tod ist die Maske der Revolution" (18). Although Müller does not disclose the identity of the narrator of these metaphors, the angel of despair is perhaps the speaker of the passage. Written in capitol letters, these two sentences are repeated several times on the following page, as one of the older slaves carries Debuissou away at the start of the Büchner parody.⁹² The first sentence is repeated exactly eight times and the second seven times in a row. There are exactly two metaphors that explain the revolution, as they appear in Müller's text: the revolution *is* the mask of death and death *is* the mask of the revolution. Curiously, Müller does not directly link the revolution to death, but rather to the *mask* of death in the first metaphor. This suggests that the revolution is merely a mask, or a performance in theater. Of course this only holds true if meaning is ascribed to the sign "mask." Aside from being a symbol of theater, the mask seems to signify more. If readers were to read the two metaphors separately and remove the mask from the revolution, they would also reveal death. Reading them in isolation seems problematic, however, considering that the first metaphor precedes and follows the second one (the first as well as the last line of the passage begins and ends with "DIE REVOLUTION IST DIE MASKE DES TODES"). When both sentences are read together, the second metaphor suggests that which has been unveiled is simply another façade: death is the

⁹² It must be noted here that these two metaphors appear earlier in the play, when Debuissou tells the two other emissaries that "Die Revolution ist die Maske des Todes. Der Tod ist die Maske der Revolution" (17). This occurs before the beginning of the Büchner parody. However, it is not until the angel of despair reappears that the metaphors are repeated several times in a row without punctuation marks. This repetition, as I argue above, enables the reader to create new metaphors that reveal the emptiness behind the façades of the concepts "revolution" and "death."

mask of the revolution. Thus the sign “revolution” in the second metaphor has to be changed to “mask.” Now the entire metaphor can be revised from “death is the mask of the revolution” to “death is the mask of a mask,” and the first metaphor to “the revolution is the mask of a mask.” Whether readers try to glean meaning from the term “death” or “revolution,” they only unearth another mask, or mere appearance. That is to say, they unveil a floating signifier without a signified concept.⁹³ Because the sentences are repeated several times, both terms signify an endless circle of masking and unmasking. As soon as one term is unmasked, it is immediately masked again.⁹⁴ If the concepts remain empty, the revolution in Büchner’s text has to be revalued. As it is signified through our available language, the revolution is inadequate and cannot rid the old order. It simply remains a sign without substance, which is always already part of a reoccurring language, the Eternal Return. More importantly, it is unable to produce a type of violence and an end that Benjamin envisioned, one that would clear a space for a new

⁹³ In his *Structural Anthropology*, Claude Levi-Strauss first coined the term “floating signifier.” The term refers to a sign that no longer signifies a specific concept; that is to say, the signifier becomes more prevalent and concrete than the signified concept.

⁹⁴ This cycle of masking and unmasking is reminiscent of Martin Heidegger’s exploration of truth in the work of art. In *Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, he writes: “Die Wahrheit ist Un-Wahrheit, insofern zu ihr der Herkunftsbereich des Noch-nicht (des Un-) Entborgenen im Sinne der Verbergung gehört ... Die Wahrheit ist der Urstreit, in dem je in einer Weise das Offene erstritten wird, in das alles hereinsteht und aus dem alles sich zurückhält, was als Seiendes sich zeigt und entzieht” (48). The prefix “un” is not synonymous with “not,” but rather with “not-yet.” Adding the “yet” or “already” (“Noch”), suggests a possibility of uncovering the “covering” (“Verbergung”). It creates a desire to find the truth in the un-truth. Simultaneously, the “not,” which negates the “yet,” suggests that the “covering” has not already been revealed. It opens an ambiguous space between certainty and uncertainty. Upon closer inspection, instead of the prospect of unveiling a specific truth that has been covered, the “uncovering” of the verb “covering” reveals only the process of an endless cycle; it reveals that the object which has been uncovered is always already covered.

beginning.⁹⁵

The Black Revolution

If Müller demonstrates that our language is unable to put an end to the endless cycle of Eternal Return, then is there a revolution in his text that is different from the one that is staged in the theater of the white revolution? Since the European model of a revolution proves to be unsuccessful, as Galloudec inadvertently admits in his introduction, Müller imagines another kind of revolution outside of the European context. He names this the black revolt.⁹⁶ As other scholars have already noted, the white European intellectual (e.g. Debuissou or Robespierre) is no longer able to carry out the revolution in Müller's play.⁹⁷ Beyond this, Sasportas, as the only black revolutionary in the play, incites a revolt that is different from the French Revolution in Büchner's drama. Following the Büchner parody, the slaves carry him onto the throne, on which Debuissou was sitting. Sasportas proclaims: "Das Theater der weißen Revolution ist zu Ende. Wir verurteilen dich zum Tode, Victor Debuissou. Weil deine Haut weiß ist. Weil deine Gedanken weiß sind unter deiner weißen Haut... Weil du ein Besitzer bist, ein Herr" (23).

⁹⁵ In his "Theologisch-politisches Fragment," for example, Benjamin writes that the end of time – unlike the eschaton that is depicted in the Baroque *Trauerspiel* – should experience a "Messianic Rhythm." The nature of this rhythm is absolute passing and decay ("Vergängnis"). Benjamin goes on to say that the aim of man, including his politics, should be to strive toward this passing, toward nihilism (512).

⁹⁶ This moment in Müller's text criticizes the model of the Marxist revolution, which is, more specifically, a European revolution. When Marx and Engels had described the revolution as a national struggle, they were specifically referring to nations within Europe (*Das Kommunistische Manifest*).

⁹⁷ In "Der Auftrag and Die Maßnahme: Models of Revolution in Heiner Müller and Bertolt Brecht," Arlene Akiko Teraoka's writes: "The white intellectual, it is suggested, is incapable of carrying through the revolution: ultimately his position is one of privilege, whether it is as master of a slave plantation or as rhetorician debating the goals and means of revolution while the masses shed their blood" (68).

His proclamation to put an end to the theater of the white revolution is only symbolic, of course, but the implications of it are significant nonetheless. Some have argued that the end marks the failure of the European revolution that Marx and Engels had envisioned.⁹⁸ While this may be true, the focus of this chapter is on the important correlation that Sasportas makes between the body and language, by suggesting that the color of Debuissou's skin affects his thoughts. Although Büchner and Hofmannsthal already explore this link, demonstrating that hands have the capacity to control language, Müller goes further to argue that there is also a racial component to this ability. After all, it is the *white* hand of the son of a slave owner that directs "Das Theater der weißen Revolution." Whereas white hands have written both the "Auftrag" and the citations in *Dantons Tod*, the black body leads the revolt against the revolutionary theater in Müller's play. Different from Büchner's Robespierre or Hofmannsthal's Basilius, his body is part of a language that the white revolution cannot touch – one that is not comprised of citation.

Though it has the capacity to speak another language, the body of Sasportas inevitably remains scarred by the same language that has already sentenced Danton and Sigismund to death. When Debuissou asks his comrades to define their roles at the beginning of the play, for example, Galloudec tells Sasportas that his role is already inscribed into the color of his skin: "Ich weiß, dass du die schwerste Rolle spielst. Sie ist dir auf den Leib geschrieben, Sasportas. Mit den Peitschen, die ein neues Alphabet

⁹⁸ See Helmut Fuhrmann "Der Mythos der Revolution: Heiner Müllers *Der Auftrag*." Fuhrmann writes: "Sasportas setzt hier nicht nur einen schwarzen Rassismus gegen den weißen, dessen Opfer er und seine Vorfahren geworden sind, er entwickelt auch den Mythos einer farbigen Revolution, den er der Realität der europäischen Revolutionen entgegenstellt..." (144).

schreiben werden auf andre Leiber in unsrer Hand” (17). As a former slave, Sasportas role is forever inscribed into the scars of the lashes on his back. While the hands control the Dantonists like marionettes in Büchner’s drama, the hands impose scars on the bodies of slaves in Müller’s text. No longer are the hands parts of an unseen rhetorical structure, but they are capable of inflicting physical violence, which is visible onstage. They are part of a colonial language, which has left its mark on the world outside of Europe.⁹⁹ Debuissou refers to these marks, which are part of the theater of the white revolution, as songs that are played on the bodies of slaves. Upon first arriving in Jamaica, he likens the moans of the slaves in cages to the “Marseillaise der Leiber, auf denen die neue Welt gebaut wird. Lernt die Melodie. Wir werden sie noch lange hören, freiwillig oder nicht, es ist die Melodie der Revolution, unsrer Arbeit” (17). He tells his comrades that their work, their “Auftrag,” is to learn the Marseillaise, the melody of the slave’s moans and of the revolution.¹⁰⁰ And, because the white hands in *Dantons Tod* control the revolution, the “neue Welt” that Debuissou imagines is constructed out of the same old citations that Robespierre employs.

If the language of Debuissou’s new world is comprised of intertextual moments, then Sasportas’s revolution has to exist outside of those moments. By ending the theater of the white revolution, the former slave also ends Robespierre’s language. Sasportas

⁹⁹ See Inauen, 170. Some scholars have referred to this world simply as the third world. Hence, Sasportas revolt against this colonial language is actually the beginning of, what Teraoka, calls the “Third-World Revolution.” She writes: “...the ideology of European vanguardism is abandoned in favor of a black man’s call for an undefined ‘new history’ that waits to be created in the Third World” (80).

¹⁰⁰ As the national anthem of France, moreover, the melody represents the sovereign state, establishing an important link between the political and the biological body (bare life) that Giorgio Agamben examines in *Homo Sacer*. This relationship will also be the focus of my next chapter that deals with Elfriede Jelinek.

condemns Debuissou to death, emphasizing that the concept of the white revolution has become illegitimate. He inverts the role of master and slave, the role of white and black. No longer does the white son of a slave owner sit on the throne, but the former slave takes his place. Unlike Debuissou, who ties the revolution to the Marseillaise and France in his concept of the new world, the revolution in Sasportas's statement is not related to a specific nation. It is reduced to a mere performance onstage. Whereas the pronoun "wir," in Debuissou's statement above, refers to the French Republic and the three revolutionaries sent to Jamaica, "wir" in Sasportas proclamation has an entirely different significance. The pronoun now signifies the slaves in Jamaica, who collectively stage a revolt against the whiteness of Debuissou and the European concept of the revolution. Since Sasportas also condemns Debuissou for being an owner and master ("weil du ein Besitzer bist, ein Herr"), the "wir" is not tied to ownership, but it is the collective struggle and will of the slaves. It is a revolutionary force that is not already inscribed into the "Auftrag" or a specific language and one that cannot be bound to a specific text. This force can only be performed onstage.

Before Sasportas initiates the black revolution, Müller uses his text to venture beyond the realms of the language of the white revolution. He moves past the ending of Hofmannsthal's original version of *Der Turm* to explore the space beyond Sigismund's death. As a tool of the revolution, literature allows Müller to depict a utopian world that exists after the end of the "Auftrag," after the arrival of the *Kinderkönig* in Hofmannsthal's drama. In *Der Auftrag*, this world begins when Sasportas ends "Das Theater der weißen Revolution," telling Debuissou, "Jetzt gehört dir nichts mehr. Jetzt bist du nichts. Jetzt kannst du steben. Grabt ihn ein" (24). As soon as the burial of

Debuisson is announced, Müller's text jumps to a present-day scene in an elevator, in which a first-person narrator ponders his surroundings. "Ich stehe zwischen Männern, die mir unbekannt sind, in einem alten Fahrstuhl mit während des Aufstiegs klapperndem Metallgestände. Ich bin gekleidet wie ein Angestellter oder wie ein Arbeiter am Feiertag" (24). Unsure of his attire and his setting, the narrator experiences amnesia. All he remembers is that he is on his way to see his employer, who he never met and who has assigned him with a mysterious "Auftrag." Yet the exact nature of his mission is never revealed. It is curious, moreover, that Müller uses an extended space to set apart the narrative of the man in the elevator from the rest of the dialogue in the play. The empty space between Saportas's statement and the elevator scene, which mimics the space that separates the angel of despair's words and those of three emissaries, marks a place that the white hands have left untouched. It transcends the language of the white revolution.

The space also signals a breaking point that shatters all conventions of time and space in the diegetic world of Müller's text. Similar to the arrival of the "Engel der Verzweiflung," the elevator scene disorients readers, denying them any reference points. It transports them to a utopia, a space that exists only on the outskirts of representation. In a dream-like state, the narrator describes his disorientation: "Mir wird klar, dass schon lange etwas nicht mehr gestimmt hat: mit meiner Uhr, mit diesem Fahrstuhl, mit der Zeit. Ich ver falle auf wilde Spekulationen: die Schwerkraft lässt nach, eine Störung, eine Art Stottern der Erdrotation..." (25-6). As the rotations of the earth and even gravity are in the process of being destroyed, the man in the elevator completely loses all orientation. He describes this as "...ein Kaltes Erwachen im langsamen Fahrstuhl zum Blick auf die rasende Uhr" (26). A critical moment in Müller's text, the narrator encounters a

monumental destruction of all the things he holds familiar; the rotations of his watch, which now moves faster than the speed of the elevator, can no longer measure his previous comprehension of temporality. He experiences time and history not as a linear progression, but rather as a “Stottern,” as a malfunction. This destruction is closer to the one Benjamin imagines in “Der destruktive Charakter,” which starts with his amnesia and ends with the absolute demolition of time and space. To this end, he experiences a type of revolutionary violence that Benjamin envisions, with the capacity to clear a space for a new beginning.¹⁰¹

Within this new space, he finds that the language he once knew has also been destroyed. He discovers what the angel of despair has already foreshadowed in her metaphors, namely that revolution and death, as terms that appear in Büchner’s theater, remain mere façades without substance. They are empty signifiers without concepts in the Eternal Return. For this reason, the exact nature of the “Auftrag,” with which the man in the elevator has been entrusted, is never fully disclosed. The only certainty is that his unspecified mission is no longer the mission of the three emissaries, since the white revolution has ended. At the same time, the “Auftrag” cannot signify itself through the same intertextual relationships on which the language of the theater of the white revolution is based. The narrator ponders:

Vielleicht geht die Welt aus dem Leim und mein Auftrag, der so wichtig war, dass

¹⁰¹ Benjamin writes that the destructive character, which is similar to the messianic rhythm in his “Theologisch-politisches Fragment,” cannot be understood or rationalized; rather it lets itself be misunderstood. It does not have a specific aim, but its only purpose is to destroy all earthly things. Moreover the character sees a way through everything, not with raw violence but with refined violence, and cuts a path through the rubble as well as the destruction of history (4-5). As mentioned already, this violence is very different from the revolution that appears in two metaphors of the angel of despair.

ihn der Chef mir in Person erteilen wollte, ist schon sinnlos geworden durch meine Fahrlässigkeit. GEGENSTANDLOS in der Sprache der Ämter, die ich so gut gelernt habe (überflüssige Wissenschaft!), BEI DEN AKTEN, die niemand mehr einsehen wird... (26).

Important to point out is that the man in the elevator admits that his “Auftrag” has become meaningless. He describes it as an object without oppositions in the administrative language that he once learned to speak. No longer can his “Auftrag” be signified through a language that is based on dialectical relationships – one that differentiates between master and slave, between the self and the other, or between Robespierre’s virtue and Danton’s immorality, for instance. In linguistic terms, it no longer follows the traditional signification process, in which the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified must differentiate itself through oppositions.¹⁰² Likewise, the “Sprache der Ämter,” as the old language of the French Revolution that is based on recycled citations, has simply transformed into “überflüssige Wissenschaft.” What had once been regarded as knowledge and science has become insignificant, or rather unsignifiable. Not only does the narrator know that the “Auftrag” has lost its meaning, but he also knows that his knowledge, constructed from the “Sprache der Ämter,” has become superfluous.

With the knowledge that he possesses no knowledge, the man in the elevator encounters a world that has been cleared of all earthly things, of all things that are recognizable to him. Hofmannsthal’s character experiences the apocalyptic destruction that Benjamin imagined. After the narrator exits the elevator, he finds that his superior,

¹⁰² For a detailed discussion on linguistics and the structure of the sign, see Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*.

from whom he was to acquire the details of his “Auftrag,” has committed suicide.¹⁰³ It is a moment in the text that marks the self-destruction of the language of the “Auftrag,” the self-destruction of the signs and symbols that make up the white revolution, which can no longer signify itself. The narrator walks out onto the streets to find a no man’s land in which he has lost his own identity: “Wie soll ich meine Gegenwart in diesem Niemandsländ erklären” (28). Once signified through the “Sprache der Ämter,” his identity remains without value; like any other sign, his presence (“Gegenwart”) without an opposite concept cannot be signified.¹⁰⁴ In the final parts of his surreal experience, the narrator reports:

Die Welt ist nicht untergegangen, vorausgesetzt, das hier ist keine andre Welt.
Wie erfüllt man einen unbekanntem Auftrag. Was kann mein Auftrag sein in dieser wüsten Gegend jenseits der Zivilisation...Keine Wissenschaft der Welt wird meinen verlorenen Auftrag aus den Hirnfasern des Verewigten zern. Mit ihm wird er begraben, das Staatsbegräbnis, das vielleicht jetzt schon seinen Gang nimmt, garantiert die Auferstehung nicht (28).

Even though the narrator lives through the destruction of all earthly things, he realizes that a world still exists. Nevertheless, this realization is overshadowed with a sense of uncertainty; he is unsure if the world is the same place that he had known before.

Readers can only surmise that it is radically different from the Western European world.

¹⁰³ Müller, 29-30.

¹⁰⁴ Carlotta von Maltzan talks at length about the loss of the narrator’s identity in the elevator scene in her article, “Geschichte als Diskontinuität: von der Unmöglichkeit des Subjekts in der Geschichte. eine Untersuchung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Heiner Müllers *Der Auftrag*.” She writes: “Insofern ist dem Ich seine Identität abhanden gekommen, das es außerhalb räumlichen und zeitlichen Kontinuität steht...den das Denken, das Sich-Erinnern an durch räumliche oder zeitliche Kontinuität gebundene Ereignisse verläuft ergebnislos und führt zur Verunsicherung” (193).

It is a space without contrast, a space beyond a signifiable language, described as a desert beyond civilization.¹⁰⁵

Although the world outside of the elevator remains empty of everything familiar, he continues to speak a language that is still recognizable to the reader, highlighting a contradiction in the text. Müller has to use the same signs and symbols that have once defined the “Auftrag” to describe the narrator’s experience. Hence, the aforementioned passage underscores an important paradox: the earthly destruction cannot destroy the language in which the author writes and through which I interpret the text. The narrator claims that the “Auftrag” is forever forgotten; its memory remains eternally buried in the fibers of brain (“Hirnfasern des Verewigten”). Once the “Auftrag” is forgotten, he continues, then the state dies as well: “das Staatsbegräbnis, das vielleicht jetzt schon seinen Gang nimmt” (28). Not even all the knowledge and sciences of the world can bring back the white revolution, as it is written in an “Auftrag” lost in the fibers of the brain. Since the white revolution has already been recorded in language, however, the ability to forget the “Auftrag” and to eliminate the state remains merely the dream of the narrator. By wanting to forget, the narrator has no choice but to remember the “Auftrag” first. Only with his own death, with the complete destruction of language, can it be truly forgotten. As with Benjamin’s “Destruktiver Character,” the destruction that the narrator encounters will eventually eliminate humanity as well. For this reason, he describes the landscape outside of the elevator as having no other mission, “. . .als auf das Verschwinden des Menschen zu warten” (29).

¹⁰⁵ This moment in Müller’s text is reminiscent of the Jean Baudrillard’s discussion of the map and desert at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation*.

Beyond the Rubble

At this point, one can return to a question that was posed earlier: if the legible language of Robespierre's revolution is eradicated, what exactly lies beyond the absolute destruction of all earthly things? What lies beyond the elimination of the sovereign and the state? Is there a mystical language that transcends the dialectics of the "Auftrag?"¹⁰⁶ Since this world lies beyond anything that the narrator and the spectator are able to describe, it is indeed difficult to find concrete answers to these questions. Even Benjamin is reluctant to provide a tangible description of the world outside of what he calls "menschliche Einschränkungen" in "Zur Kritik der Gewalt" (13). This human confinement, which inhibits humans to think outside of a dialectical language, prevents the narrators (as well as the readers) from completely forgetting the "Auftrag" and the white revolution. However, Müller does not want to end on this point. He conceives of a new language that is out of reach of the white hand that directs the revolutionary theater. This language is spoken through the physical bodies of Müller's characters, through the black body of the slave. Albeit for only a brief moment in time, it must be spoken outside of the realms of the "menschliches Einschränkungen" that Benjamin mentions.

Accordingly, Müller makes his characters return to the moment in which a new language is created, the precise moment in which a sign is signified. Desperately attempting to define himself, the man from the elevator throws off his mask, the façades

¹⁰⁶ Teraoka makes the argument that the revolution that Sasportas initiates is a timeless revolt, which is posited in death itself. She writes: "For Müller, the continued revolution in *Auftrag* is guaranteed not by rational methods based on acquired human knowledge but by the irrepressible energy of some untamable, natural, non-European world, not by the philosophical overcoming of individual death in solidarity with the revolutionary collective but by an absolute, quasi-mystical belief in the revolutionary force of death itself. History as the realm of reasoned political action is replaced by the final vision of a timeless revolt of the oppressed in the mythical landscapes of the 'Third World'" (77).

of the old language, to find that he is similar to the others who have also discarded their masks. He exists as a blank slate; his identity is no longer based on the dialectical relationships between opposite signs, between the self and the other, between the master and slave. At the end of his monologue, the first-person narrator: “Ich weiß jetzt meine Bestimmung. Ich werfe meine Kleider ab, auf das Äußere kommt es nicht mehr an. Irgendwann wird DER ANDERE mir entgegenkommen, der Antipode, der Doppelgänger mit meinem Gesicht aus Schnee. Einer von uns wird überleben” (29). His clothes can be read as the antiquated language of the “Auftrag,” which is nothing more than an external mask, a floating signifier. As mentioned earlier, the face below the metaphors of the white revolution, the signified concept, has been destroyed. All that remains is his bare existence, a body without language, which tries to find words to demarcate its difference. What is curious is that he foreshadows his own signification through an “Antipode,” but through someone who bears the same whiteness as the narrator, through his “Doppelgänger.” The precise moment in which the twin, also described as “DER ANDERE,” is likewise the instance that marks the signification process of language, where the self once again distinguishes itself from the other – where the master and slave relationship is reestablished. Whether this language is different from the previous one remains open for interpretation (which is the best one can hope for), since the scene with the man from the elevator suddenly jumps back to the three emissaries in Jamaica.

As the self-proclaimed leader of the black revolution, Sasportas demonstrates that this new language is in fact unique. No longer does he use the same violence and dialectics of the theater of the white revolution to define himself, since the distinctions between black and white, between master and slave, have become obsolete. In one of the

most striking moments at the end of *Der Auftrag*, Sasportas tells Debuissou that his flag has been torn, a symbol of an antiquated nationality and language. The former slave then proceeds to fashion a new one:

Ich will mir eine neue schneiden aus meinem schwarzen Fell. *Schneidet mit dem Messer ein Kreuz in die Fläche seiner Hand.* Das ist der Abschied, Bürger Debuissou. *Drückt Debuissou seine blutende Hand aufs Gesicht.* Schmeckt dir mein Blut. Ich habe gesagt, dass die Sklaven keine Heimat haben. Das ist nicht wahr. Die Heimat der Sklaven ist der Aufstand. Ich gehe in den Kampf, bewaffnet mit den Demütigungen meines Lebens... (35).

In her reading of the passage, Inauen correctly observes that the moment in which Sasportas cuts a cross into his hand is a reconquering of his body.¹⁰⁷ By injuring himself, Sasportas turns his own body from a passive into an active speaker, according to Inauen. Instead of being scarred by the language of colonialism, the body of Sasportas now speaks another language. The cut in his hand that represents the new flag is self-inflicted, and signifies another mark that is not rooted in the old power structures; it is no longer the mark of a slave, but of a master, who takes control of his own body. The metaphor of Sasportas's hand, moreover, can be contrasted to Büchner's drama. Not unlike the hands

¹⁰⁷ Inauen writes: "Seinem Rückbezug auf das, was unter der Haut liegt, die die Narben der Akkulturation trägt, entspricht der Bezug zur Topographie. Die Landschaft trägt die Spuren der Kolonisierung und Zivilisierung wie der Körper. Indem er diese Spuren liest, arbeitet er am Gedächtnis seiner Kultur und damit an einer eigenen Geschichte, in der das Denken der Weißen keine Rolle mehr spielt. Er ist eine Hinwendung zum eigenen Unbewussten und eine Ablehnung der Projektionen des Weißen als dessen Anderer. Die Rückeroberung des Leibs durch das Verfolgen der Spuren der Kolonisierung beziehungsweise der Reste, die davon lesbar sind, und die damit verbundene narrative Wiederaneignung eigener Geschichte und Identität führen den Körper von einem passiven, beschriebenen in einen Sprechenden über, der eine eigene Sprache spricht" (170).

in *Dantons Tod*, as the unseen force that pulls the strings of puppets, the hand in Müller's text is a necessary force that defines the language of Sasportas. Whereas the hand of Robespierre wields the sword of justice and inflicts violence against the Dantonists, Sasportas's hand inflicts violence that is aimed at his own body. It is a physical gesture that is noticeably different from the violence of Robespierre or colonialism, being more similar to the pure violence that Benjamin imagines in his critique of violence.¹⁰⁸

Sasportas's violence is communicated through the body, rather than through words. Written into the stage directions, it is a gesture to be performed onstage, transcending the spoken dialogue in Müller's text – reminiscent of the hand gestures of Sigismund in Hofmannsthal's drama. Not only does the cut leave a mark in Sasportas's body, but it is also signified on the forehead of Debuisson. Only after Sasportas presses his hand onto Debuisson, the new flag becomes legible in a trace of blood. This trace could be read as an inversion of Robespierre's language in Büchner's text, in that the language of the subject (Danton or Sasportas) becomes the language of the sovereign (Robespierre or Debuisson). Instead of marking the other as the other, as an antipode, the imprint left on Debuisson is the mark of the self; that is to say, the slave leaves a physical part of himself on the body of the master. Yet this imprint is significantly different from the scars of colonialism left on Sasportas's back. While the trace left in Sasportas's hand is

¹⁰⁸ In "Zur Kritik der Gewalt," Benjamin examines violence both in and outside of the law. If the new trace left on Debuisson's forehead symbolizes a new order, Sasportas's law, it is still different from the dialectical relationship between law-making and law-preserving violence that characterizes a juridical order. The biggest distinction is that Sasportas's gesture is not "rechtsetzend," a type of force that is *set* or posited outside of itself, and one that is directed against the other. Even though the act of pressing the hand onto the forehead of another is an act of violence, it is not as violent as the violence of the cut itself. Unlike law-preserving violence, moreover, Sasportas's law is not permanently inscribed into the body of the other, but it is merely transitory. It can always be altered.

permanent and represents the physical violence that is required in every signification process, the new trace of his blood is only temporary. Although the canvas on which the trace appears is Debuissou's body, the language can be easily washed away to leave room for a new trace. It is not forever imprinted into history, but is a fleeting moment in time.

With the knowledge that the blood trace is only transitory, Müller does not end his play with Sasportas onstage, but with the possibility of yet another language. The language in his text, including the newfound language of Sasportas, remains in constant flux; it is a type of language that emerges again in Elfriede Jelinek's *Bambiland* (the focus of my next chapter). Left with the blood of Sasportas on his forehead, Debuissou is in fact the last character left onstage. Instead of continuing his revolutionary mission, he frees himself from any structure and submits himself to his most basic sexual desires. He returns to his "ErsteLiebe," one of the two women in the play, who is a symbol of human instinct and an enemy to the revolution.¹⁰⁹ An unspecified narrator describes "ErsteLiebe" as Debuissou's betrayal ("Verrat") at the end of Müller's text:

Der Verrat zeigte lächelnd seine Brüste spreizte schweigend die Schenkel, seine Schönheit traf Debuissou wie ein Beil. Er vergaß den Sturm auf die Bastille, den

¹⁰⁹ As a character in an earlier scene, ErsteLiebe can be read as Debuissou's sexual desire. She is also diametrically opposed to Debuissou's second love, representing the revolution. This may be explained in Freudian terms: whereas ErsteLiebe signifies an instinctual drive, the "It," second love is the symbol of rationality and shame, as perhaps the "Super-Ego." Referring to the revolution, ErsteLiebe says, "Ich habe es dir gesagt, sie ist eine Hure...mit der blutsaufenden Scham. Die Sklaverei ist ein Naturgesetz, alt wie die Menschheit. Warum soll sie aufhören vor ihr. Sieh dir meine Sklaven an, und deine, unser Eigentum. Ihr Leben lang sind sie Tiere gewesen. Warum sollen sie Menschen sein, weil es in Frankreich auf einem Papier steht" (20). For a detailed Freudian reading of Müller's text, also see Fuhrmann's essay, in which he writes: "Vom Ende her gesehen indes, nämlich aus der Perspektive des totalen Triumphes, den das Es erringt, müssen alle diese Gründe, so stichhaltig viele von ihnen der Sache nach sind, als bloße Rationalisierungen des übermächtigen Triebwunsches erscheinen" (148).

Hungermarsch der Achtzigtausend, das Ende der Gironde, ihr Abendmahl, ein Toter an der Tafel, Saint Just, den schwarzen Engel, Danton, die Stimme der Revolution...Aber Galloudec und Sasportas gingen weg einer mit dem andern, ließen Debuissou allein mit dem Verrat, der zu ihm getreten war wie die Schlange aus dem Stein. Debuissou schloß die Augen gegen die Versuchung, seiner ersten Liebe ins Gesicht zu sehn, die der Verrat war. Der Verrat tanzte...Dann warf der Verrat sich auf ihn wie ein Himmel, das Glück der Schamlippen ein Morgenrot (36-7).

Allowing his instincts to win, Debuissou abandons all morality, along with his revolutionary mission to free the slaves of Jamaica. However, if the language of the white revolution has already been destroyed in the black revolt, as seen in the last scene, what exactly is left for him to betray? All that remains is his desire to forget the voice of the revolution (“Stimme der Revolution”), the language that documents the various revolutions throughout history – from the French Revolution to the Ford Hunger March of eighty thousand. By forgetting, Debuissou betrays history. Similar to Jelinek’s narrators in *Bambiland*, who refuse to document history in chronological order, Müller’s character refuses to remember past revolutions.

If he wants to forget the language of history, then Debuissou has to forget Sasportas’s mark on his forehead as well. Even though he has the opportunity to join Sasportas and Galloudec in their newfound mission, he makes the conscious decision to remain behind and allows himself to be seduced by the urge to forget. Debuissou deliberately forgets, thus betraying the language that has been imprinted on his forehead. To put it differently, he “actively forgets” the revolution, including Sasportas’s revolt, as

he closes his eyes during the sexual dance of “ErsteLiebe.” During this process, moreover, he makes room for the new.¹¹⁰ Hence, his revelation, his “Himmel,” is not his ability to create language and to remember history, but his ability to forget. Perhaps the title of Müller’s play asks us to remember that we can also forget the revolution – a possibility to which the “Engel der Verzweiflung” already alluded. With this in mind, we can also forget the Eternal Return (which we have already countless of times), and experience a brief moment where Nietzsche saw the possibility for change. In “Nietzsche’s Experience of the Eternal Return,” Pierre Klossowski describes this moment as a rediscovery of the Eternal Return, during which “...I cease being my own self, *here and now*. I am capable of becoming innumerable others, and I know that I shall forget this revelation once I am outside my own memory” (109). Only if we are willing to forget, signifiers of our old language (the “I”) may still exist, but their signified concepts have changed; the old order dies and a new one is born. In the last moments of the play, the “Glück der Schamlippen” does not only represent Debuissou’s sexual desires, but also the vulva from which new life emerges.¹¹¹ Described simply as the dawn (“Morgenrot”), this life is not necessarily found in the confines of Müller’s text, but it is

¹¹⁰ “Active forgetting” is a term that Nietzsche uses in *Genealogy of Morals*. He describes it as: “Forgetting is no mere vis inertiae as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression, that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it (one might call the process ‘inpsychation’) as does the thousandfold process, involved in physical nourishment – so-called ‘incorporation’” (57).

¹¹¹ Fuhrmann argues that the last lines of Müller’s play demonstrate that human instinct, as represented through Debuissou’s sexual desire, triumphs over the ideological side of humans, which manifests itself in revolutions. He writes: “Der ‘Himmel’ und das ‘Morgenrot’ sind für ihn nicht mehr Metaphern für den Chiliasmus der sozialen Utopie, sondern Bilder für den überwältigenden Augenblick der sinnlichen und insbesondere der erotischen Erfüllung, in dem die konkrete Wünsche des Individuums über die abstrakten Erfordernisse der Gesellschaft, die Bedürfnisse des wirklichen Menschen über die der ideologisch definierten Menschheit triumphieren” (150).

found somewhere else.

Chapter 4

Jelinek's Terrorism: A Fragmented History

“Kein Opfer ist zu groß für unsrer Demokratie, am allerwenigsten das Opfer der Demokratie selbst! Das kann nicht von mir sein, nein. Sagt das etwa unser Benjamin, der auch einmal was sagen will...der bereits alles wusste, leider bevor er es uns noch sagen konnte!”

- Elfriede Jelinek, *Bambiland*

Depicting a flood tablet with one of the oldest pieces of literature, a hyperlinked image of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* appears in the middle of the online version of Elfriede Jelinek's *Bambiland*.¹¹² After clicking on the digital photograph, readers are transported to the casualty database of the Iraq Body Count (IBC) project.¹¹³ The database is continuously updated to identify civilians killed since the American-led war in Iraq began in 2003. With no apparent reference points that guide Jelinek's readers, the link between the image, *Bambiland*, and the IBC website seems nebulous at best. Yet both the flood tablet (more accurately, its digital image) and the database serve as a medium that documents either a fictional or non-fictional event in time. There is also a geographical link between them insofar as they both document events in Iraq that converge online. Jelinek, however, directs our attention to the lack of their chronological relationship; she

¹¹² See Figure 1 at the end of this chapter. A fully copy of Elfriede Jelinek's play can be found on her personal website: <<http://a-e-m-gmbh.com/wessely/fbambi.htm>>. The primary focus of this chapter will be on the online version of the text. Unless otherwise noted, all citations and page references are taken from the printed version of *Bambiland/Babel*.

¹¹³ Refer to, <www.iraqbodycount.org>.

employs hyperlinks not to organize, but to disperse information, also allowing her to showcase material that remains incomprehensible, fractured, and even contradictory. Especially significant is that history in Jelinek's play is not portrayed as an uninterrupted progression in time, but instead as a disorganized fragment. Herein, lies the difficulty of writing about the virtual *Bambiland*: trying to organize in words something that is inherently chaotic and even anti-chronological. Rather than being asked to cease critical engagement with her text, however, Jelinek's readers are invited to participate in another kind of history – one that may be, in a sense, inevitably ahistorical.

Beyond its digital copy, Jelinek's play documents the 2003 Iraq War not as a single historic event in time, but focuses instead on the various ways in which the event is documented. If *Bambiland* is defined simply as a theater text, one fails to take into account that Jelinek's play first appeared online, then onstage, and lastly on paper. Just one month after the bombing campaigns on Baghdad began, it was published on Jelinek's personal homepage on April 2, 2003 and performed onstage in December of the same year under the direction of Christoph Schlingensiefel (Lücke 172). Not until 2004 did the first printed version of the text appear alongside of second theater piece, *Babel*, an amalgamation of three monologues. Although these are categorized under a separate title and were performed in 2005, they are often read in conjunction with and may be seen as a type of reading guide to *Bambiland*, since they appear in the same publication. If *Bambiland* explains the “how,” the methodology, then *Babel* clarifies the “why,” or the stakes in Jelinek's text.

Some scholars refer to *Bambiland* as a type of war report, which recounts key moments of the conflict in Iraq through the eyes of embedded journalists.¹¹⁴ With the same speed and determination of journalists to bring the latest news from the frontlines, Jelinek was busy writing and continuously updating her online report, giving her readers the sense that they were embedded in the action, able to experience the war in real-time. Whereas the goal of the media is to insert (or embed) history into a comprehensible and cohesive structure, her narrative is essentially nothing more than an amalgamation of disjointed observations from one or more unidentified speakers; in a single monologue, almost in the style of a chorus, it frequently switches from first to third person.¹¹⁵ To obfuscate matters further, a number of unrelated images are dispersed throughout her online version, disrupting the monologue. Thirteen of the fifteen images are linked to the IBC project. The last picture is hyperlinked to a site that recorded the number of American military members injured or killed in Iraq.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, the sheer amount of recycled information, unusual images, and hyperlinks render *Bambiland* meaningless – they neither provide any new or intelligible news about the war. Trying to establish correlations to make sense of Jelinek’s “report” thus remains a fruitless attempt. A more productive starting point, it would seem, is to examine her use of dispersion and fragmentation, asking how and why her text seeks to document the documentation of war.

¹¹⁴ See, for example, Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger’s article, “The Audacious Art of Elfriede Jelinek.”

¹¹⁵ The notion of the chorus in Jelinek’s play is examined further in one of Lücke’s earlier articles, “Der Krieg im Irak als literarisches Ereignis: Vom Freudschen Vatermord über das Mutterrecht zum islamistischen Märtyrer.”

¹¹⁶ Refer to, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/iraq_casualties.htm>. Before Barack Obama declared an end to battle operations in 2011, this website continued to update its casualty count that has since been ceased.

Potential answers to these questions may be found in the three monologues of Jelinek's second theater piece, *Babel* (*Irm sagt*, *Margit sagt*, and *Peter sagt*), which help explain the issues in *Bambiland*, namely that the sovereign is in control of the fabrication of history – what Jelinek calls the “Geschichtsschreibung.”¹¹⁷ As a problematic concept that is the focus of this chapter, her term refers to the ongoing process of the sovereign (in Jelinek's case, the focus is on the “Amis”) to write or tell an official history. Echoing the Biblical story, *Babel* divides the single voice of the chorus from *Bambiland* into three distinct narrative voices. As readers of *Babel* and as consumers of Western media, we come to realize that we are not part of a history that is unfolding in front of our eyes, but are standing on its fringes, as mere observers of an already existing narrative.¹¹⁸ In the very first monologue, the first-person narrator ponders: “Die Geschichtsschreibung, an der wir derzeit nicht teilnehmen dürfen, es sind die Amis, die sich allein und ausschließlich ihre Mitgliederausweise an die Glieder heften dürfen...” (90). The “Geschichtsschreibung” can be read as a media event, giving television viewers the illusion that history is unfolding in front of their eyes. It is similar to the catchphrase “history in the making” that the media and military officials coined during the Iraq War.¹¹⁹ To this end, the sovereign aims to embed history in a preexisting narrative that upholds the illusion of progress and continuity – a process from which we are excluded.

¹¹⁷ The term can be more directly translated as “historiography,” which is commonly defined as “the body of literature dealing with historical matters; histories collectively” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/historiography?s=t>)

¹¹⁸ In order to avoid confusion between English, German and Jelinek's frequent use of the personal pronoun “wir” and “uns,” I will use “we” and “us” throughout this chapter to specifically refer to Jelinek's various narrators as well as her readers and consumers of modern media.

¹¹⁹ See Tammy L. Miracle's article “The Army and Embedded Media,” published in *Military Review*.

Unless we receive explicit permission (by obtaining “Mitgliederausweise”), however, we are no longer considered to be “Mitglieder,” or members of the sovereign. Instead we become enemies of the state and mere “Glieder,” dismembered limbs that are excluded from history. Using Agamben’s terminology, we are stripped of our “political” existence and relegated to “bare life.”¹²⁰ This is also reminiscent of Danton’s fate in Büchner’s drama, in that his body is not only dismembered both metaphorically and physically, but that his death is also already inscribed in the preexisting language that Robespierre controls. Similar to Danton, Irm’s identity is inextricably tied to the sovereign’s laws: “...hat ein anderer einen Ausweis, wird er sofort kontrolliert, also, nur an die Amis werden diese Geschichtsausweise ausgegeben, wer bin ich denn, wer bin ich denn schon...” (90). Yet despite the fact that she questions her own identity, the narrator in *Babel* never loses sight of the fact that her exclusion from history is transitory. We are, after all, only presently (“derzeit”) disallowed from taking part in the sovereign’s history. The adverb, “derzeit,” may specifically refer to the time that Jelinek wrote her piece in 2003, or to the moment in which the reader first reads the passage. As an unspecified temporal reference, the term also alludes to a time that has not already passed, to revolutionary moments beyond the present. Already having been dismembered and without the sovereign’s permission, Jelinek’s texts flirts with the possibilities beyond the “derzeit” – a time in which history is no longer controlled by a single entity.

¹²⁰ In *Homo Sacer*, Giorgio Agamben defines “bare life” as our “bare” or “natural” existence outside of the law, that is, our existence outside of language. “Political life,” on the other hand, is our existence within the symbolic order, within the rule of law. The goal of a nation state is to politicize “bare life,” to include us into a language, which the sovereign fully controls. Thus Agamben argues that the modern state can be defined as the reaffirmation of the bond between “bare life” and “political life” (6).

This chapter looks at the printed, virtual, and theatrical versions of *Bambiland* to show that Jelinek takes part in what the sovereign disallows by participating in the process of writing history. Thus the title of her piece signifies a place where documentations are brought together, a space that is also self-referential, considering that there is a linguistic relationship between “Bambi” and “Jelinek.” Keeping in mind that the author’s name in Czech translates to “little deer,” the title could be renamed to read “the land of Jelinek,” a place in which Jelinek disperses any linear or chronological representation of history.¹²¹ This “land,” furthermore, vehemently rejects any historical representation that follows a temporal progression (or geographical coherency) with a clearly defined beginning and end – a teleological type of history that signifies itself through oppositions and differences. Through wordplay and the help of the Internet, “Bambiland” fabricates its own kind of documentary that remains unreadable to reveal the sovereign’s intentions and to disrupt, or perhaps even transcend, the current “Geschichtsschreibung.”

Beyond the printed and virtual *Bambiland*, staged performances have become paramount to Jelinek’s project as well, by challenging the audience’s preconceived perceptions of history. In a number of recent experimental productions of the play, performance spaces are transformed into staging-grounds that further disperse her war report. Several videos of these productions also appear online, adding yet another layer to Jelinek’s documentary process. By documenting her document, so to speak, these productions further disperse an already fragmented account of history.

¹²¹ The first image in the online version of *Bambiland* is a hyperlinked picture of a plastic deer in an artificial forest (see Figure 2 at the end of this chapter).

Printed Bambiland: The “Aufnahmezustand”

The fact that the first hardcopy of *Bambiland* was published well after it had appeared online and was performed onstage is significant; it had already established itself as more than merely one text written by a single author, but as a multimedia project that amalgamates various historical accounts. More importantly, Jelinek had ensured that her “play” does not speak in a single, but in a multitude of voices, through which other texts speak. A crucial difference of the printed version is that it appeared alongside of *Babel*, which can be used as a guide that elucidates the stakes in *Bambiland*. In the first printed (as well as online) version, one or more narrators take on the perspective of media consumers who reflect on the Iraq War, as it is unfolding in front of their eyes. Interlaced with several intertextual and intermedial moments, the narrative often repeats and regurgitates information that was taken from media coverage of the war. A first-person narrator starts with an acknowledgement to “...*Aischylos und die ‘Perser,’ übersetzt von Oskar Werner. Von mir aus können Sie auch noch eine Prise Nietzsche nehmen. Der Rest ist aber auch nicht von mir. Er ist von schlechten Eltern. Er ist von den Medien*” (15). Appearing within a parenthesis, only these first sentences explicitly link Jelinek’s text to theater, listing Aeschylus’s *The Persians*, widely considered to be the oldest surviving play, as one of the primary influences on *Bambiland*. Immediately one is struck by the fact that the text overtly references its own intertextuality, emphasizing that it stems from Nietzsche and the seeds of bad parents, which are defined as the media. In so doing, she becomes a mouthpiece through which other texts speak, a mere medium, absolving herself from any responsibilities. By presenting her work as an intertextual play, however, she complicates her own role as passive narrator: as soon as her narrative

is performed onstage, actors are now the mouthpieces for her language. Because actors lends them a body through which they can now communicate, Jelinek's narrators are no longer simply disembodied entities that other texts control; their words, not anyone else's, are spoken onstage.

By reclaiming their voice, so to speak, the narrators ultimately participate in their own "Geschichtsschreibung," which radically differentiates itself from any chronological representations of history. In order to accomplish this, the emphasis of Jelinek's text, as it appears in print, is twofold: 1) demonstrate that the sovereign controls the media to regulate other representations of history, thus legitimizing its own sovereignty; 2) undermine that same control through word play and subverting the language of the media.¹²² Some scholars maintain that her work is simply a reflection of a media-generated reality in which we live – a kind of hyperreality in which the only truth is that that there is no truth.¹²³ While it is true that *Bambiland* sheds light on an unavoidable hyperreality, it also demonstrates that the sovereign legitimizes its power through this same reality. Andrea Bandhauer suggests that the title of Jelinek's piece as an obvious reference to Disneyland – something that Schlingensiefel also notes in his introduction to the play. *Bambiland* illustrates Jean Baudrillard's concept of a simulacrum:

“‘Bambiland,’ like Baudrillard's Disneyland, belongs to the realm of the hyperreal and

¹²² In part, this idea stems from Bärbel Lücke's article, "Der Krieg im Irak als literarisches Ereignis: Vom Freudschen Vatermord über das Mutterrecht zum islamistischen Märtyrer": "Und die Antwort kann auch nur eine mögliche sein, wenn sie die Kraft des Ereignisses gerade in der ironischen Erzählhaltung und damit der Subvertierung aller scheinbar übernommenen Positionen verortet: Genau das, alle Positionen zu subvertieren, ist die Funktion der verschiedenen Stimmen, des 'Chors' in *Bambiland*" (365).

¹²³ See, for example, Andrea Bandhauer's article, "Ambiguity and Morality in Jelinek's *Bambiland*."

simulation...” (4). She goes on to say that Jelinek’s text is part of a “...closed universe in which the media generate circular arguments that feign diversity, but in the end only serve one purpose: to legitimize power” (4). Undoubtedly, Jelinek is successful in portraying power structures that are constructed through the media, but, more essentially, she challenges these same structures. Precisely because her work consists of disembodied theater, philosophy, and media texts, it refuses to assimilate to any preconceived configurations that would classify it as a specific type of narrative or documentary.¹²⁴ Keeping in mind, moreover, that the text and its performances are linked to various digital platforms throughout the Internet, it is difficult to argue that *Bambiland* is part of a closed universe, as Bandhauer proposes. Jelinek’s text does not just feign diversity, but employs a kind of language that resists conformity – a language that undermines, contradicts, and fragments itself, so as to remain in constant flux.¹²⁵ Before returning to this language specifically, and in order to provide evidence for this argument, it is pertinent to fast-forward again to the monologues in *Babel*.

More specifically, the three monologues examine the ways in which Jelinek disrupts the sovereign-controlled “Geschichtsschreibung” by establishing her own documentary process. Like the sovereign’s goal to create a permanent state of exception to ensure its power, Jelinek pulls her readers into, what she terms, an “Aufnahmezustand.” As a documentary technique, the “Aufnahmezustand” borders between law and lawlessness; it constructs a certain type of form through which the

¹²⁴ Unlike Benjamin’s reading of *Der Turm*, which appears in the form of a *Trauerspiel*, Jelinek text does not conform to any specific form, but stays unclassifiable instead.

¹²⁵ This argument will become more apparent, as it is revisited in the second section of this chapter in which I examine the online version of Jelinek’s text and its relationship to the Internet.

historical event (i.e. the Iraq War) may be recognized, but it also remains formless by subverting preexisting structures. In *Peter sagt*, she writes:

Sie werden kein Recht finden, das in diesen *Ausnahmezustand*, eigentlich: *Aufnahmezustand*, in dem ich mich befinde, hineinwill. Das Recht rennt als erstes schauernd davon, wenn es mich sieht. Bitte, der Staat muss, er soll, er darf sich verteidigen, aber in dieser saugenden Leere, wo die Luft durch meinen Brustkorb streicht...da gilt überhaupt nichts mehr, kein Recht, das man wiederherstellen könnte... (197).

As something that has already been established, the narrator speaks directly to his audience (using the formal “Sie” to address his readers), reiterating that they are both excluded and included from the juridical order in the state of exception. Peter points to the paradoxical nature of this state, by making a distinction between “Aufnahme” (which can be translated into both “inclusion” and “recording” and the “Ausnahme.” The “Aufnahmezustand” includes him to the force of law, which also depends on an exception to exist; he is, so to speak, admitted into, and simultaneously stripped from, the law, leaving him suspended between law and anomy.¹²⁶ At the end, Peter is left with nothing more than emptiness (“saugenden Leere”), where everything, including his rights (his “Recht”), ceases to exist. A more interesting reading of the passage emerges, however, when “Aufnahme” is understood as a “recording,” emphasizing another self-referential moment in which Jelinek alludes to her own process of documenting. Thus

¹²⁶ In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben describes this contradiction best when he writes that all laws depend on exceptions; law is, therefore, an inclusive exclusion (27). Jelinek’s narrator is, in other words, subject to the blurring of boundaries between law and anomy that Agamben mentions in *Ausnahmezustand*. Agamben describes the state of exception as neither external nor internal to juridical order; it is a threshold where boundaries blur (23).

the “Aufnahmezustand” can be read as the condition through which the reader is pulled into her recording. This occurs on a narrative level. As with a number of other instances in *Bambiland*, there is a subtle, yet significant shift in the speaker’s identity in the passage above. Whereas the first-person narrator initially describes the “Aufnahmezustand” as an external phenomenon, she later internalizes the state. Instead of wanting to escape the state, in the second sentence, the law wants to escape the narrator: “Das Recht rennt...davon, wenn es *mich* sieht.”¹²⁷ What is more, the emptiness described in the third sentence is actually not located in the “Ausnahme- or “Aufnahmezustand,” but in the “Brustkorb” of the narrator. His chest becomes the staging-ground for the state of recording, devoid of everything, including “das Recht.” With every breath of the speaker, readers succumb to the same emptiness, to a state in which there is no cohesive or recognizable language. They are, in other words, included into a documentary process that is not progressive or linear, and one that differentiates itself from the sovereign’s historiography. This theoretical process, which is explained in *Babel*, is put to practice in *Bambiland*: as soon as Jelinek establishes a recognizable language, she obscures and disrupts that same language.

At first glance, *Bambiland*’s readers are thrown into a universe in which mass media dictate their understanding of history; they are embedded in a world that is defined by what the narrators observe on television. At the same time, Jelinek’s narrators emulate embedded war journalists who mediate history, giving them the sense that history is unfolding in front of their eyes. In so doing, they create the illusion that readers are acquiring their information from television instead of Jelinek’s text: “Hier, das Bild,

¹²⁷ Emphasis mine.

es erscheint und leuchtet hell, wir haben es im Kasten, wir haben was auf dem Kasten, ich habe das gemacht” (82). Significant, here, is the play on the word “Kasten” – a term that can be translated as “box” in conventional English, but also as “television” or “intelligence,” if used as part of an idiomatic expression. Only the prepositions “in” and “auf” before “Kasten” signify the term’s value (i.e. “im Kasten” translates as “television” and “auf dem Kasten” as “intelligence”). If the preposition is taken into account, the quote suggests that all things “auf dem Kasten,” our intelligence, are based on what is observed on television. Important to point out as well is that the television screen is not just a place of knowledge, but also a place of familiarity and relatability that inevitably lures in its viewers: “Wenn wir ins Haus gekommen, dann drehn wir das Bild sofort auf. Das muss funktionieren. Und es funktioniert auch. Sofort. Nie spurlos fort unserer Gottheit Bilder, die wir dort sehn, die nur wir dort sehen auf dem leuchtenden Schirm” (19). As with the previous citation, the narrators in this passage speak in the style of a chorus, a collective voice, in order to conflate the identities of the speakers, readers or audience members, and television viewers. Readers are integrated into Jelinek’s language on a structural level and are, as regular media consumers, drawn into the lure of the “leuchtenden Schirm.” They, too, experience the desire to rush home to turn on the television as quickly as possible, so that they can watch the latest news; we are, as Baudrillard explains best in *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, “...strategic hostages in situ; our site is the screen on which we are virtually bombarded day by day...” (25). Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that Jelinek’s text can only imitate the screen that Baudrillard describes, by representing it through language; that is, “das Bild” in *Bambiland* is only a term, a mere construct in Jelinek’s language, and that her television

viewers are actually the readers of her text. We become hostages, so to speak, of the information that Jelinek provides, of what we read on the page.

To this end, Jelinek is successful in creating in language what the media accomplishes on screen, which is to legitimize power – something that Bandhauer has already pointed to in her reading (4). In *Bambiland* it is the US and the UK, as the primary leaders in the Iraq War, who control the media to keep television viewers embedded in their historical account. Names such as George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Perle, Tony Blair, and Tommy Franks emerge throughout Jelinek's piece, and are often associated with propaganda and misinformation.¹²⁸ Politicians and military officials not only distort or withhold information, but they also embed the information in an inalterable language. This is demonstrated, for instance, with the metaphor of burying, through which narrators express a fear that Bush will “Begräbt auch uns gleich mit” (26). If read literally, from the perspective of an Iraqi, the pronoun “uns” may refer to the civilian casualties of the war, whose bodies are buried from a misguided missile. Perhaps the pronoun also signifies the play's spectators who face the consequence of a misguided war; they remain buried in the dark, so to speak, from the lack of information. In any case, the act of burying can also be read as a strategic attempt to embed information in an inalterable rhetoric, so as to solidify the sovereign's historical account. Once it has been buried, it remains concealed from us, and we become increasingly aware that we are at the mercy of what the media discloses. Readers are told, “...da müssen Sie schon auf die Pressekonferenz warten, die Tommy Franks uns gibt, sonst gibt er uns nicht viel. Auch diesmal nicht” (32). Jelinek neither

¹²⁸ See, for example, Jelinek 20, 22, and 25.

substitutes the information that Tommy Franks withholds, nor does she reveal some sort of final truth about the war (if there even is such a thing), but she raises the awareness that her readers are unable to venture beyond the boundaries of what the media provide. Thus the television, as it is represented in Jelinek's narrative, is not necessarily a medium through which real events are transmitted (where Žižek's notion of the Real exists), but it is a place where history is made and truths are constructed. That is, the events themselves never really exist in the Real for the spectator, but are part of a mediated reality, as the narrators note: "An unser Haus können sie den Brand legen, an unsere Götterbilder können sie auch den Brand legen, aber nicht an unser Öl und nicht an unseren Fernseher, den behalten wir, unsren Altar, der darf nicht spurlos fort, der ist doch die Spur!" (17). By describing it as an altar that projects "Götterbilder," the narrators of the passage not only deify television, but they also link it to the absent presence, to the trace. In line with the Derridean understanding, the television signifies the trace insofar as it makes the war, as a specific event in time, present in its absence.¹²⁹ Even though the war remains absent to the spectator, the television screen creates the illusion that it is always and immediately present.

At the same time, Jelinek picks up on the fact that the trace also points to a paradox. For the spectator, the war can only exist in its absence, and she uses this idea to disrupt the language of her narrative. By highlighting these contradictions, she unearths her own language that has previously been embedded (or buried). In the aforementioned passage, for example, in which television is linked to knowledge, Jelinek continues her play on words: "Sein und Schein. Schauen Sie! Das alles ergibt kein Sein an sich, das

¹²⁹ For a detailed discussion on the trace, see Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*.

ergibt überhaupt kein Sein mehr, was aber gleich ist dem Sein. Sein und Nichtsein fallen übereinander her und werden eins" (82). Whereas the multiple meanings of "Kasten" differentiate themselves through prepositions, the term "Sein" ("being" or existence") can be signified only through the trace. Paradoxically, the narrators emphasize that being belongs to non-being ("Nichtsein"), not to be confused with nothingness or simply an absence, and note that both terms fall into one category ("werden eins"). The quote reinstates that "Das alles" – which may be read as all that which is learned through the media – does not amount to "Sein" per say, but rather to "Nichtsein," to an absent presence.¹³⁰ "Das alles," however, may also refer to all of *Bambiland*, including the ways in which readers understand the text. This would be reiterated by the fact that the first-person narrator takes responsibility for her play on words, admitting "ich habe das gemacht," and insinuates that any meaning, the being in language, is signifiable through its absence. Jelinek reiterates this point in the final moments of her text, assuring that her own documentary remains unreadable. As in the beginning of the play, she reminds her readers again to scrutinize the information they have acquired from her text: "Wir stehen auf dem Gipfel der Betrachtung, schauen um uns, sehen, daß das, was ist, Schein ist, sobald es endlich geworden ist, sobald es endlich nichts geworden ist, wieder nichts, und wir wenden uns ab und schauen in uns hinein und aus uns heraus" (84). Whereas the readers are first informed that *Bambiland* stems from the media, the seeds of bad parents, they have risen to the highest perspective at the end. Yet this elevated vantage point is not necessarily privileged, for we are told that everything we have acquired from the text is mere appearance ("Schein"). In fact, we are reminded of the fact that the only

¹³⁰ The notion of the absent presence is detailed in Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference*.

knowledge we have gained is that there is no knowledge to be gained: “Wir wissen nichts...” (84).

Virtual Bambiland: Counting Bodies

Different from the hardcopy, the online version of *Bambiland* exists as a dynamic and ongoing work in progress; it is continuously being rewritten. According to the information that is provided at the bottom of her website, Jelinek started to write her report on the April 2, 2004, updating it on May 4, 2003, and May 5, 2005. As already mentioned, the most important distinction of the online text is that it includes fifteen images, most of which are linked to the Iraq Body Count project. The first of these is a picture of a plastic figurine that resembles Bambi in an artificial landscape. The second and last image display animated battle scenes of a videogame, both of which frame the narrative. All of these serve as a constant reminder that the “Geschichtsschreibung,” as it appears in Jelinek’s text, has been fabricated – her narrative is not part of an unbiased or an objective process, but one that has been constructed. Jelinek also includes various photographs of stone tablets that display ancient civilizations, tomahawk missiles, and more disturbing torture scenes from Abu Ghraib. Rather than trying to derive meaning from these images, however, I would like to focus on their relationship to the text and the Internet. Because they are hyperlinked, they allow Jelinek’s readers to venture beyond the boundaries of her written narrative. With one click, readers instantaneously travel to a virtual world that is constantly changing, a world that is always fragmented.

Instead of burying or concealing the victims of war, the IBC exposes information that has been left omitted in the sovereign’s account of history. Much like Jelinek’s text,

it uses the same words and images from this account to disrupt the current “Geschichtsschreibung.” Thus, the IBC is paramount to Jelinek’s project. Not only does it disclose what the sovereign has already buried, but it also disperses a history that has previously been embedded. This already becomes apparent on the site’s homepage, displaying an image of a military plane dropping bombs.¹³¹ The plane is framed by a quote from General Tommy Franks at the top and the total number of Iraqi civilians killed since the conflict began at the bottom of the page. Several visual metaphors are important here: the virtual bombs falling on the IBC casualty number, for example, represent not weapons designed to bury, but rather tools to unearth their victims; and the transition from darker to lighter colors from top to bottom is another obvious symbol of revealing information that the sovereign has omitted. Perhaps more striking are the different sizes and colors of the text on the homepage. Tommy Frank’s quote, “We don’t do body counts,” which appears on the same height and color as the warplane, stands in stark opposition to the much larger and lighter colored font that spells out “Iraq Body Count.” Appearing in a solid black, the quote can be read as a catchphrase that has already been embedded into the “Geschichtsschreibung,” whereas the more transparent gray color of the site’s name defuses the sovereign’s words. That is to say, the IBC project does not re-embed another history in a preexisting language – the language of Tommy Frank – but rather it wants to dislodge and weaken that same language.

With the help of the IBC, *Bambiland* does not simply want to document and commemorate the deaths of Iraqi civilians who have been forgotten, as others have

¹³¹ An image of the homepage of *iraqbodycount.org* is found in Figure 3 at the end of this chapter.

argued.¹³² Rather it aims to destabilize previously embedded documentaries, by presenting information that is in constant flux. Some scholars point to the revolutionary potential in the play, claiming that Jelinek's text gives voice to the dead and functions as a place of, what Bärbel Lücke calls, "archaic remembrance."¹³³ By reminding its readers of the reoccurring wars and suffering throughout the ages, so the logic runs, this type of commemoration memorializes the dead. Picking up on Lücke's analysis, Kristin Vander Lugt makes a similar argument that Jelinek wants to remember "real" bodies outside of the text. She is also one of the few scholars to examine the online component of *Bambiland*, pointing out that "...the status of the play as a virtual text is in itself a commentary on the virtualization of bodies and the 'disappearance' of materiality, to which the Internet has in part contributed" (222-3). Jelinek not only comment on the virtualization of the Internet, but she also uses its immateriality precisely to undermine the coherency of the sovereign "Geschichtsschreibung." Jelinek accomplishes this, in part, by presenting her audience with information and images that are incomprehensible and even unreadable at times – a technique that evokes a momentary shock through which another type of historical understanding might emerge. This point becomes clear

¹³² See, for example, Kristin Vander Lugt's, "'Necropolitics': Reading the Revenant Body in Elfriede Jelinek's *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* and *Bambiland*."

¹³³ Being primarily a Freudian analysis of *Bambiland*, in "Der Krieg im Irak als literarisches Ereignis: Vom Freudschen Vatermord über das Mutterrecht zum islamistischen Märtyrer," Lücke writes: "Aber es ist nicht allein die Wiederkehr des Immergleichen im Ereignis, es sind nicht die inhaltlichen und formalen 'Anleihen' (archaisierender Ton, Funktion eines 'eingelagerten' Chores), die den Text so eindringlich machen. Es ist vor allem das immer wieder beschworene Leid – eine quasi-anthropologische Konstante in allen über die Jahrtausende erlittenen Kriegen – mit dessen Benennung in diesem ersten Satz über alle Disney-Bambiland-Szenarien hinweg an die Toten gemahnt wird – in einem Akt gleichsam archaischen Eingedenkens" (364).

when one explores the moments where the online text is interrupted by a hyperlinked image – a type of gateway through which readers are able to depart from Jelinek’s text.

As soon as they click on the image, readers are no longer confined to the universe of the text, but are instead thrown into the borderless world of the web in which information remains in constant flux. More precisely, they are redirected to IBC database of civilian casualties, which records the sex, occupation, nationality and, in some cases, the name of the victim or the name of the person who identified the body. It claims that all casualty figures are not estimates, but individually documented deaths, taken from local Iraqi as well as international media and NGO-based reports.¹³⁴ The idea behind the project is to provide a continuously updated database for civilians killed in Iraq, for which there have been no official public records since the war began. Such records, consumers of Western media were told, would undermine the US efforts in Iraq. Only recently, in October of 2010, leaked Pentagon papers indicated that civilian casualties figures in Iraq were much higher than previously thought – information that the US government may have intentionally classified, according to an article that appeared in *The Guardian* (Leigh). As citizens of the United States and Great Britain, the editors of the IBC note that, “voters and tax-payers of these countries share in the responsibility for their governments’ actions.”¹³⁵ Despite their intentions to document “actual” lives of non-combatants killed since the start of the Iraq War, Jelinek’s text is more interested in highlighting the virtualization of the bodies that the IBC is trying to memorialize. The editors catalog the dead in the database using a reference code that consists of a letter and

¹³⁴ For detailed information on the methodology of the IBC project, refer to the methods section on *iraqbodycount.org*.

¹³⁵ More information on the IBC rationale can be found at: <<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/about/rationale/2>>.

number. Instead of memorializing the casualties by embedding them in a comprehensible language, however, the code seems to further obscure the victims: how can it memorialize (i.e. materialize) bodies that persist outside of language? There seems to be an insurmountable chasm between the “hyperreal” code and the “real” bodies that exist outside of the IBC database; if anything, the code sheds light on the fact that meaning cannot be ascribed to death, which becomes unreadable.

For similar reasons, Jelinek often refers to Iraqi civilians simply as the “anderen” or “Fremden,” as faceless beings that remain meaningless to the reader. Before her online text is interrupted by the hyperlinked image of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, she writes: “Da machen wir jetzt welche weg, Sollen schlafen gehen, auf ewig. Da brauchen Sie nicht mitzuzählen, wir zählen Sie ja auch nicht mit! Sie zählen ja selber nicht, warum sollen Sie also andre mitzählen?” (38). Using the pronoun “Sie,” the narrators seem to be speaking directly to the readers, making it clear that they do not count “andre,” the victims of war. By also questioning the necessity of us to participate in the count (“warum sollen Sie also andre mitzählen?”), the narrators provoke readers to click on the image that follows the passage. Although we are linked to a site that is committed to counting the victims of war, we are not provided with information that allows us to understand the “andre.” On the contrary, we end up with an unintelligible code, a mere fragment.

The fact that the others remain incomprehensible is what jeopardizes the “Geschichtsschreibung,” which organizes and embeds information in an organized narrative. Without becoming part of our mediated reality, the “Andre” remains in the realm of the Real. Taking the perspective of television viewers, Jelinek’s narrators

suggest that we feel the need to insert the other, what seems strange, into a familiar language: “Die Straßen der Fremden, nur das Kameraauge, das unbestechliche, sieht sie. Die Straßen der Fremden... Ehrfurchtsvoll, wies der Brauch gebeut, lasst uns mit Worten um uns werfen und mit andren Worten sie grüßen, weil was andres zum Werfen haben wir nicht. Die aber schon. Und, sagen Sie mal, was haben derweil die anderen?” (47).

Another hyperlinked image of a stone panel from the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud (from 883-859 BC) follows the passage. Without an explicit explanation, the only discernible link between the photograph and the text is that both are mediums of documenting an event. The camera in the passage serves a similar purpose: it documents images through which journalists construct an account of history; it mediates reality.

Even though the camera eye itself is described as being incorruptible, the television viewers are cautious, even fearful (“Ehrfurchtsvoll”), about the images they observe.

From the comfort of their living rooms, they see images with which they feel uncomfortable, such as the “Straßen der Fremden,” who speak an unintelligible language.

At this point in the passage, Jelinek’s narrators seem to adopt the perspective of journalists, trying to communicate with and greet the “Fremden” with words they cannot understand (“mit anderen Worten sie grüßen”). They attempt to integrate them into the comprehensible language of the media (and ultimately the sovereign) not only to understand, but also to subjugate them. It is particularly curious that the narrators suggest that assimilation is the only weapon that we possess, whereas the “anderen” retain something else that Jelinek cannot describe. Precisely because this something remains unrecognizable, Jelinek’s text refuses to participate in the same language with which the

sovereign writes history. Like an incomprehensible force, they exist outside of language, inevitably posing a threat to the sovereign.

Aside from inundating her text with signs and symbols that have been stripped of their signification, Jelinek shocks her readers with disturbing images, questioning their status as passive observers. In an article devoted to the media coverage of September 11th, Samuel Weber points out that television viewers desire an easily localizable, self-contained, and meaningful media image: “[they] must comprehend the catastrophes that thereby appear to be intelligible in and of themselves, without requiring the spectator to look elsewhere” (332). He goes on to argue that this allows the media consumer to remain static, “to remain the same indefinitely” and thus passive to the War on Terror (332). Yet Jelinek’s online text is anything but static, surprising its readers with hyperlinks to a dynamic virtual world, in which information is no longer localizable and self-contained. What is more, readers are confronted with several unsettling images of prisoner abuse from Abu Ghraib that were leaked to the media shortly after the Iraq War began. Many of these pictures may seem familiar, but it is exactly the lack of their contextualization in *Bambiland* that makes them so unsettling. They appear as unhinged and nonsensical pieces of information in the text that seem to serve only one purpose: to shock.

The end of the online version underlines this last point most clearly, when Jelinek subverts the impression that her text ends on a hopeful note. As noted earlier, she concludes by stating that all information from her text is mere “Schein,” but she also leaves this ending open-ended, emphasizing that we have not yet won: “Aber bald haben wir gewonnen. Bald kaufen wir wieder ein Los, bald sind wir uns los, einer wird uns

schon helfen, ich bins nicht, noch nicht, aber bald, aber bald. Aus. Aus. Aus. Na endlich spritzt der ab. Ich hab schon geglaubt, er kommt überhaupt nicht mehr. So. Jetzt ist auch das erledigt” (84). These last words never explicitly mention what the reward for winning is, or what can be taken away from the text. Whether or not it refers solely to the narrators, or includes the readers as well, the pronoun “wir” clearly expresses a need for someone to rescue us. From what we need to be rescued specifically is up for interpretation. Do we need to be saved from our own understanding of history, which the sovereign has fabricated? Is there a need for another history? Possible answers may be found the image of the male orgasm (as emphasized by the terms “abzpritzen” and “kommen”), which can be read as the moment of conception, a mere instance in which new life is bred and another text (and history) is written. It is unclear if this orgasm is analogous to the same bad seeds at the beginning of the play, but the image of the orgasm stands in sharp contrast to the last photograph that follows the passage. As perhaps the most provocative image, it shows a group of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib in explicit position, recalling the unmentionable sexual abuse that took place in the American-led prison.¹³⁶ It is also a piece of information that was once systematically excluded from the sovereign’s historiography – information that military officials wanted to censor.

Readers are shocked by the juxtaposition of the image of the orgasm and the torture scene, especially since Jelinek’s text does not provide any further explanations. Rather than embedding the image in a comprehensible language, as other media reports have

¹³⁶ See, for example, an article that *The Telegraph* published in May of 2009, which points out that the US government has attempted to censor images from Abu Ghraib that portray sexual abuse. The article claims that the government’s rationale behind censorship is to curtail anti-American sentiment and protect its troops abroad (Gardham and Cruickshank).

done, Jelinek disrupts the illusion of cohesion and historical progress. She does not rescue her readers, but leaves them in fear. And we realize that the new history we can win lies beyond representation.

Performing Bambiland: Insurgency on the Streets

As the Internet has become a crucial staging-ground for *Bambiland*, a number of recent street performances of the piece have become equally important to Jelinek's documentary theater. Most notably, the experimental theater group, *theatercombinat*, has put on several interesting productions on the streets of Vienna, pushing Jelinek's project beyond the boundaries of her written text. The group has been successful in turning the city into a space that appears, similar to Jelinek's text, contradicting and unintelligible at times. Almost in the style of a science fiction thriller, Vienna is transformed into an uncanny space that the common city dweller no longer comprehends. Aside from disrupting the rhythm of the city, these performances construct another type of history, meticulously documented on the interactive website of the *theatercombinat*.¹³⁷ Using both text and video to record each production, the site represents Vienna as "Bambiland" – a place that does not follow a comprehensive history – and further disseminates Jelinek's already fragmented documentary.

As noted on the website of the *theatercombinat*, the primary goal of the experimental theater group was to turn Austria's capital into "Bambiland." The group explains its rationale behind the 2008 production: "bambiland ein text, der sich dreht, attackiert, versteckt und windet. permanentes einhämmern und adressieren und befragen.

¹³⁷ Visit theatercombinat.com for more information.

festsetzen und wieder auflösen. keine front, keine gegner. verseuchtes gelände.
 verseuchte wahrnehmung. der krieg ist kein ereignis sondern ein schwall, ohne moral.
 wien wird bambiland.”¹³⁸ Emulating Jelinek's fragmentary and convoluted style, the
 passage is written from the perspective of a Viennese citizen watching the performance.
 With the exception of the last two, all sentences in the document remain grammatically
 incomplete, making it difficult to discern a definite subject. However, the term
 “bambiland” appears to signify more than just the title of a play in the passage; it refers to
 a text with both a poisoned perspective and terrain. The act of poisoning, here, is not
 necessarily interpreted negatively, but rather understood as the process of dismantling
 boundaries. Similar to Jelinek's documentary technique throughout her work, the act
 refers to the systematic alteration and eventual elimination of “fronten” and “gegner.”
 That is to say, it deconstructs a type of language that is able to derive meaning only
 through oppositions – precisely the kind of language that the sovereign-controlled
 “Geschichtsschreibung” seeks to uphold.

Between 2008 and 2009, the *theatercombinat's* performances used Vienna as a
 type of sound stage for Jelinek's play. Although Christoph Schlingensiefel put on the first
 stage production of *Bambiland* in 2003, the experimental theater group was the first to
 explore the relationship between Jelinek's text and the city. From mid-October to
 November in 2008, a cast of hooded performers in trench coats transported twelve
 identical-looking electronic devices on trollies through Vienna's streets.¹³⁹ All
 performances are documented on digital media platforms, which show actors who

¹³⁸ For more information on the specifics of the *theatercombinat* and the 2008 production
 of *Bambiland*, refer to *theatercombinat.com*.

¹³⁹ Refer to Figure 4 at the end of this chapter.

resembled terrorists, moving from *Schwarzenbergplatz* to the *MAK-Gegenwartskunstdepot* and stopping at seven stations along the way. Each of the twelve devices contains an attached satellite bowl and loudspeaker, transmitting the chorus of voices that is reciting the monologue of the various narrators in *Bambiland*. The satellite dishes are reminiscent of live media coverage, suggesting that the transmission occurs in real time. There are no individual speakers, however, but an aggregate of one synchronized voice: the *theatercombinat* explains that, “ein mediendor aus einer einzigen stimme, als übermacht, autorität. eine frauenstimme (anne bennent) bespricht chorisches mit sich den öffentlichen raum, grenzt und dehnt ihn aus, überschreibt ihn.” Individual performers are removed from the authoritative voice of the text and become mere vessels through which the Jelinek's documentary is communicated. This may be seen as a symbol of the ways in which individuals are excluded from participating in the current “Geschichtsschreibung”; that is, all actors are always already part of a preexisting history. They are only able to alter the physical location of the transmission, which communicates with and rewrites (“überschreiben”) the public spaces of Vienna. Thus the city not only serves as a kind of sound stage for Jelinek's play, but it is also systematically rewritten into another text. Yet the question as to what this new text looks like still remains.

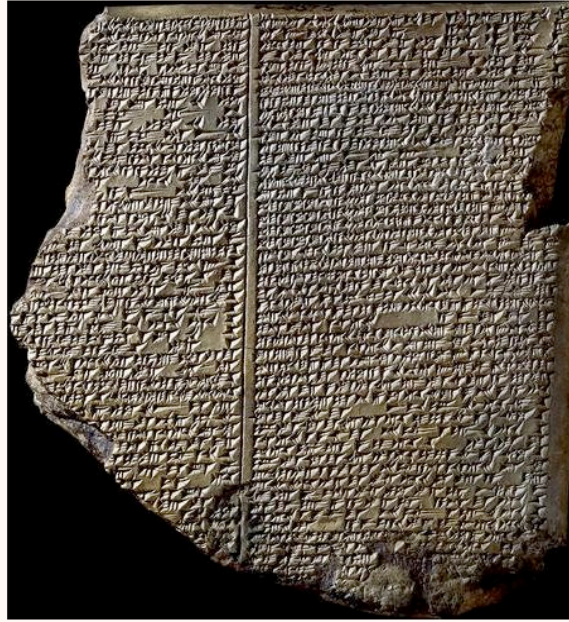
Not unlike *Bambiland's* goal to shock its readers, the aim of the *theatercombinat* is not only to disrupt, but also to re-document the urban landscape of Vienna, to turn it into an unfamiliar and even uncanny place. Whereas Jelinek seeks to disrupt the sovereign “Geschichtsschreibung” by randomly piecing together preexisting historical information with a fictitious narrative, the group expresses the need to re-document the

city as a science fiction: “absurde gebilde beschreiten und überschreiben den stadtraum. menschen steuern geräte, die mit einer stimme sprechen, die zu sich spricht. menschen verschmelzen und tanzen mit objekten. objekte einer vintage science fiction, aus gebrauchsgegenständen zusammengebaute und umfunktionierte ton- und bildträger” (*theatercombinat*). As people dance with mechanical objects that are constructed from everyday household items, the absurdity of the whole performance is clear. What makes the performance science fiction is the uncanniness in the way in which humans melt with inanimate objects. They are transformed into strange automatons, human and machine hybrids that no longer communicate individually, but with one unified voice. Moving rhythmically through the streets of Vienna, their humanity is completely indistinguishable from their lifeless mechanical nature. Symbolically, they are mere instruments through which sounds and images are transmitted, turned into malleable tools of the media.

Instead of being seen as mere puppets, however, the automatons enforce their own “Geschichtsschreibung”: being “ton- und bildträger,” the hybrids are the signifier and signified of Jelinek’s language, which is no longer controlled by an outside force. As this language reverberates off the walls of the facades of buildings, Vienna and its various sounds becomes an integral part of the performance: “akteure bedienen die geräte in realzeit. die stadt bewegt sich in realzeit. die objekte als akustische funktionsgegenstände werden mittel der realtime-komposition des textes mit der akustik der stadt. die stadt und der zufall komponieren mit jelineks text” (*theatercombinat*). The performance not only disrupts the familiar sounds of the city, but it also interacts with the unpredictable rhythm of the urban landscape. Yet the random, often erratic nature of the city, and the

choreographed performances are brought together in real time. Digital videos of the production, which are found on various Internet platforms, record Jelinek's documentation of the Iraq War. They have, in this sense, written a new kind of history, dispelling the notion that the sovereign is in complete control of historiography. In the age of YouTube and other social networks, however, the audience is already well aware of that fact.

bekommen es nicht. Was auch immer. Sie bekommen es sowenig wie die Lippen von Schlafenden Wasser bekommen. Da machen wir jetzt weiche weg. Sollen schlafen gehen, auf ewig. Da brauchen Sie nicht mitzuzählen, wir zählen Sie ja auch nicht mit! Sie zählen ja selber nicht, warum sollen Sie also andre mitzählen?



The Flood Tablet, relating part of the Epic of Gilgamesh -Nineveh 7th Century BC

So wie ich es mache, geht es nur, wenn beide das gleiche wären. Aber beide Menschen sind verschieden. Darauf basiert überhaupt unsere Zivilisation, daß die Menschen verschieden sind. Die wollen das nicht einsehn, die Sandneger. Stehen wie

Fig. 1. Hyperlinked image of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in the online version of *Bambiland*.



Fig. 2. First image of a plastic figurine in the online version of *Bambiland*.

The public record of violent civilian deaths following the 2003 invasion of Iraq

"We don't do body counts"
General Tommy Franks

Download an IBC counter for your website or blog

IRAQ BODY COUNT
112,635 - 123,220
WHAT IS THIS?

Iraq Body Count is an ongoing human security project which maintains and updates the world's largest public database of violent civilian deaths during and since the 2003 invasion. The count encompasses non-combatants killed by military or paramilitary action and the breakdown in civil security following the invasion.

Data is drawn from cross-checked media reports, hospital, morgue, NGO and official figures to produce a credible record of known deaths and incidents. (more in [About IBC](#))

You can [contribute](#) to IBC's work in several ways, including with a donation.

Key IBC publications
Civilian deaths in "noble" Iraq mission pass 10,000

Documented civilian deaths from violence
112,635 - 123,220
Further analysis of the WikiLeaks' Iraq War Logs may add **12,000** civilian deaths.

Latest incident
Apr 11: Sahwa leader by magnetic bomb in his car in Al-Aitha or Jamila, Shirqat, north of Tikrit [Details](#)

Latest identified
Hussein Taha Adult; Male; Awakening Council member [Details](#)

The War in Iraq: 10 years and counting

Analysis of deaths in a decade of violence 19 Mar 2013

Contains Flashing Images

10 years in Iraq, by Lily Hamourziadou 19 Mar 2013

Iraqi deaths from violence in 2012

Iraqi deaths from violence 2003-2011

Casualties of suicide bombings in Iraq 2003-2010

The unexamined Iraqi dimension of UK involvement in Iraq

Analysis by perpetrator, weapon, time, and location

Iraqi deaths from violence in 2010

Iraq War Logs: What the Numbers Reveal

Iraq War Logs: The Truth is In the Detail

Fig. 3. Screenshot of the homepage of *iraqbodycount.org*.

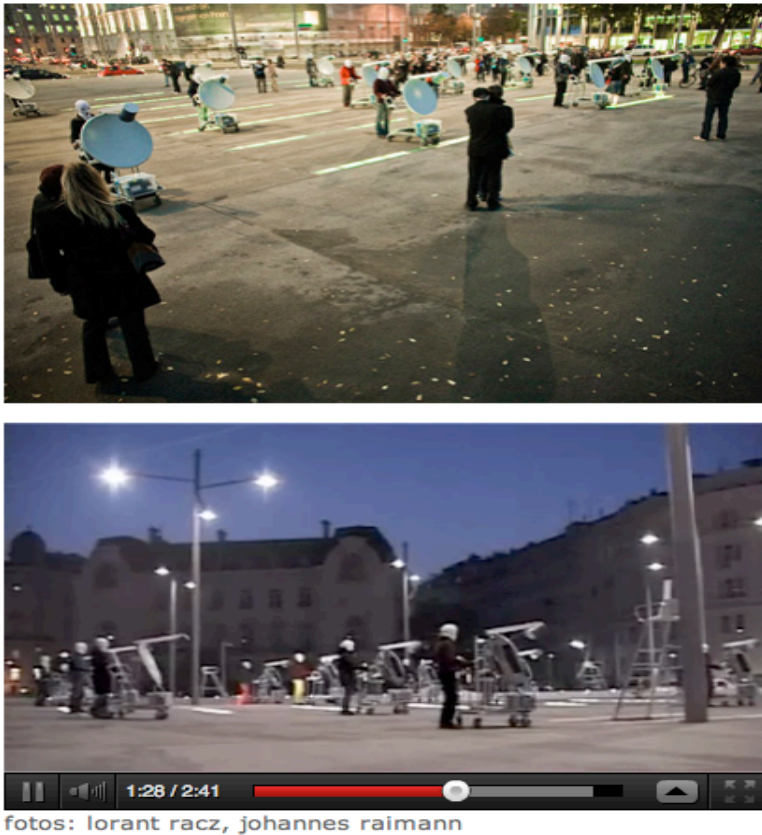


Fig. 4. Recorded street performance of *Bambiland* on *theatercombinat.com* in 2008.

Epilogue

We are Anonymous
 We are Legion
 We Do Not Forget
 We Do Not Forgive
 Expect Us.¹⁴⁰

-Anonymous

Jelinek is not the only one to recognize the revolutionary potential of digital media. In recent years, the discussion has shifted from coming to terms with the loss of the Real to finding ways to disrupt the virtual reality in which we reside.¹⁴¹ This debate, of course, addresses the same challenge that confronted Hofmannsthal at the beginning of the 20th century, who was forced to accept the “Sprachleben” in which he lived – a world that existed, for him, only as signs and symbols. What Hofmannsthal would have simply called German is now the programming language of computers; alphanumeric systems have merely been replaced with more basic digital systems in the 21st century. While digital systems may have simplified the symbolic world, they are still part of a collective structure, a community of speakers, through which humans acquire information. Even the term “digital” has an etymological link to the Latin word for “fingers,” which are

¹⁴⁰ Unofficial slogan of the hacker’s collective, Anonymous, in Parmy Olson’s *We Are Anonymous* (7).

¹⁴¹ Among these is Professor Cathy Davidson, for example, who sees hacking as a form of political activism in today’s digital world, what has been termed “hacktivism.” For a detailed discussion on Davidson’s views and the relationship between hacktivism and the emerging field of digital humanities, please refer to Elizabeth Losch’s article, “Hacktivism and the Humanities: Programming Protest in the Era of the Digital University,” which I examine below.

inevitably connected to the hand, the ability to grasp language. In the context of my study, a digital system could be metaphorically understood as an extension and continuation of Basilius's hands, of the sovereign's law. To put it differently, the digital stage has become the new stage for Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. As Jelinek points out at the beginning of *Bambiland*, the question is no longer whether digital media generates our reality, fabricating our conception of history out of zeros and ones, but how to interact and creatively engage with our virtual world. If the sovereign-controlled media, or the language of the sovereign, continue to dictate history, then are there ways to use digital media against them? The question, in other words, should be: how can digital systems be used to stage a revolution in the same spirit as Jelinek's online text has? In trying to find answers, the prospects for manipulating and deconstructing digital media seem endless.

Scholars in the digital humanities have already asked similar questions. As an emerging academic field, the digital humanities explore, among other things, the potential for political activism in today's digital world. What has commonly been referred to as "hactivism," or cyber activism, looks at ways not only to expose, but also to exploit sovereign-controlled systems. In "Hactivism and the Humanities: Programming Protest in the Era of the Digital University," for instance, Elizabeth Losh looks at ways in which the digital humanities could become a place for protests and political engagement. In one of her examples, Losh points to the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a collaborative and interdisciplinary project cofounded by Ricardo Dominguez, an Associate Professor at UC San Diego. Relying on tactics used during the African-American Civil Rights Movement, the project stages virtual sit-ins to draw attention to

certain political movements.¹⁴² By repeatedly accessing and eventually overloading the websites of their oppressors, the participants of these sit-ins have the potential to block and disrupt digital systems that the sovereign controls. Their intention is to silence the language of the sovereign and momentarily interrupt the communication of their oppressors. The EDT may have more far-reaching applications than *Bambiland*, as merely a place to spread and disseminate information, but it shares the revolutionary drive of Jelinek's project. Theater is once again a place to stage a revolution. Similar to *Bambiland*, the EDT uses a virtual stage not simply to raise political awareness, but also to evoke the traumatic moments outside of representation, moments that could perhaps recover Žižek's notion of the Real.

Not only does Losh use the EDT as an example of hacktivism, but she also evaluates, more broadly, the role of the humanities in today's digital world. One of the things that make the humanities relevant, according to her, is its capacity to engage in political activism on the digital stage. What is more, hacktivism has the potential to bring the humanities into the public eye. She argues, "Hacktivism brings university scholarship into the headlines and makes it possible to articulate arguments about the relevance of the digital humanities that go beyond cultural heritage claims that rarely get much public attention." The relevancy of the humanities that Losh mentions is what Dominguez accomplishes with the EDT, by exposing political movements and human rights abuses. Any scholar in the digital humanities, moreover, has the ability to become a hacktivist like Dominguez. Merely exposing oppressive systems, however, does not have to be the

¹⁴² For a detailed description of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, please refer to the UNESCO Digital Arts Portal (<http://digitalarts.lmc.gatech.edu/unesco/internet/artists/int_a_edtheater.html>).

only goal of hacktivism in the digital humanities. At the end of her article, Losh writes: “In thinking about the relationship between forms of symbolic representation that humanists care about and forms of political representation that activists care about, perhaps we need to break some systems to understand how they are made.” Any political and symbolic representations are part of the language of the sovereign, as the reoccurring language of history. If the digital stage has become the new stage of exception, then Losh’s call to break systems is a call to destroy digital media – the fingers, so to speak, of the king’s hands. In her analysis, Losh is, nevertheless, reluctant to call for a complete destruction of the law, which seems to exceed the scope of the academy.

While the EDT may be regarded as a legal form of hacktivism in the digital humanities, there are also a number of more radical hacktivists working outside of academia. Some of them have joined Anonymous, one of the more well-known hacktivist groups, in its fight against the sovereign. Instead of operating on a specific political ideology, as the EDT does, Anonymous does not follow any set rules. In *We Are Anonymous*, an extensive look inside the group, Parmy Olson describes Anonymous as nebulous and “sinister group of hackers hell-bent on attacking enemies of free-information...” (3). Although it has been responsible for a number of cyber attacks that the FBI has considered to be illegal, the group shares an ideology similar to Dominguez.¹⁴³ It has blocked and disrupted a number of digital systems that it considers to be oppressive. Like Dominguez’s objective, the ultimate goal of the group is to disrupt

¹⁴³ In order to achieve its objectives, Anonymous often relies on Distributed Denial of Services (or DDoS) attacks that jam targeted websites, similar to what the ETC seeks to accomplish, but that are also illegal under the United States Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. Olson writes that a DDoS attack is, “when a multitude of computer were coordinated to overwhelm a site with so much data that it was temporarily knocked offline. It was Anonymous’s most popular form of attack” (9).

communication, to prevent the spread of information. So as to avoid becoming part of a collective structure (and of an ideology), Anonymous does not define itself as a group, Olson points out, but rather as “everything and nothing” (7). She writes: “Their few rules were reminiscent of the movie *Fight Club*: don’t talk about Anonymous, never reveal your true identity, and don’t attack the media, since they could be purveyors of a message” (7). Anonymous’ reluctance to attack the media is significant, insofar as it illustrates its unwillingness to be part of a defined language, a message; it wants to exist in a place outside of communication. In this respect, the type of hacktivism that Anonymous practices can be seen as a kind of cyber violence that does not make or preserve the law, but operates outside of the juridical order. This further prompts the question: can hacktivism be seen as a form of pure violence that Benjamin imagined?

Yet the language of the sovereign constantly threatens forms of hacktivism that operate outside of the law, outside of representation. Governments that constantly have to amend their laws to prevent cyber activism demonstrate that Agamben was correct in his assumption that the sovereign is always beyond language. Olson points out, for example, that the forms of hacktivism in which Anonymous has engaged have been criminalized under the US Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA). Having undergone a number of amendments since it first became law in 1984, the act is responsible for prosecuting a number of Internet activists.¹⁴⁴ More recently, the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA) made headlines after receiving much criticism. The bill was designed to give the US government broad access to private information that is

¹⁴⁴ Among these is Aaron Swartz, who was accused of downloading millions of articles from JSTOR to make them available for free online. After the charges, Swartz later committed suicide. For the full story, see Ryan Grim’s article “CFAA: Internet Activists Win First-Round Victory in Fight Over Anti-Hacking Law” in *The Huffington Post*.

stored by online corporations, which includes all social networks. According to an article in the *Huffington Post*, supporters of the act argued that it would protect key institutions from cyber attacks (Carter and Siddiqui). Although the act did not pass the US Senate to become law, it passed the House of Representative on April 18, 2013, serving as a sobering reminder that the government is on a continuous mission to expand its jurisdiction. If the sovereign is language, then nothing can exist outside of this language, including those who operate on the outskirts of representation. As soon as hacktivism, like the kind Anonymous participates in, ventures beyond the realm of the law, beyond the boundaries of representation, the sovereign immediately includes it back into language, into the law.

More alarmingly, the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act is also being used to prosecute American citizens accused for sharing sensitive information with the public (Kravets). Distributing the language of the sovereign, it seems, has become as serious of an offense as disrupting it. Indicted for “aiding the enemy,” Manning, a US Army Soldier, recently appeared in court for having released classified US military documents to WikiLeaks. According to an article in *The Guardian*, Manning leaked several hundreds of thousands of pages of state secrets to the online organization responsible for publishing classified information (Pilkington). Since he cannot be considered a hacker on a mission to attack government installations, he is blamed for violating the CFAA by “exceeding his authorized access of a government computer” (Kravets). Allegedly the soldier wanted his fellow Americans to know the “true cost of war,” which includes the so-called “Collateral Murder” video, depicting a US military helicopter firing on unarmed civilians and journalists. After his arrest in Iraq in May of 2010, the British newspaper

reports that he endured unlawful and harsh treatment in a maximum-security military prison, including solitary confinement (Pilkington). Although his guilt may appear obvious to some, there have been a number of supporters who have spoken out against Manning's imprisonment and questionable treatment.¹⁴⁵ Putting aside differences of opinions, the only thing that may be said for certain is that Manning was imprisoned for sharing war documents that present a risk to the sovereign (although this risk remains largely undefined). He has violated the rule of law by revealing information that the sovereign controls – information that may contradict the sovereign's account of history. Paradoxically, he is punished for speaking the language of the sovereign power, which always exists outside of and beyond that same language; he is, according to Agamben, exclusively included into the law. Hence, the only true crime that Manning committed is that he participated in the "Geschichtsschreibung," without having first acquired permission – something against which Jelinek already warned. Yet Manning is not the first, and will certainly not be the last, individual to be imprisoned for perpetrating the same crime.

Whereas Manning distributed state secrets, Büchner's Danton dared to speak the language of the French Revolution, the language of Robespierre. Instead of receiving the "Geschichtsausweise," the proper clearance to participate in history, both Manning and Danton were deemed threats by the sovereign. In the language of the sovereign, they are "terrorists" – a generic term that has been given to an enemy of the state. Indeed, all of the authors in my study could be called terrorists, in their attempts to challenge state institutions. Critics of Jelinek, for instance, have referred to her as anti-American and

¹⁴⁵ See, for instance, the Bradley Manning Support Network, including the Bradley Manning Defense Fund (<<http://www.bradleymanning.org>>).

even pro-terrorist. In “Unnobles Dynamit: Elfriede Jelinek,” an introduction to the first published edition of *Bambiland*, Christoph Schlingensiefel jokingly asks: “Wann bekommt man schon die Möglichkeit, eine Staatsfeindin, eine Störenfriedin lobend zu erwähnen?” (7). When Schlingensiefel uses the term “enemy of the state,” he is facetiously adopting the language of Jelinek’s critics. Kristin Vander Lugt examines the more serious allegations of what these critics are saying in her article, “‘Necropolitics’: Reading the Revenant Body in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Stecken, Stab und Stangl* and *Bambiland*.” She writes that Jelinek’s critics have often painted her “as a terrorist in her own right by pathologizing her as a dangerously disturbed neurotic – mirroring attempts from the American right to equate ‘anti-war’ with ‘anti-American,’ or, indeed, ‘pro-terrorism’” (224). Vander Lugt seems to suggest that the tendency to call someone a terrorist has become far too common. Terrorism has become a label, a catchphrase, through which the sovereign not only ensures that any threats are eliminated quickly and efficiently, but also that the state of exception is upheld. Even though he was never called a terrorist per se, Danton was forced to live in the state of exception. He faced the ultimate punishment: having to endure a language that sentenced him to death. Looking at life in prison if he is convicted, Manning may share Danton’s fate.

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