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**Politics and Community in the Work of Heiner Müller**

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**Thesis submitted for PhD at the University of Warwick**

**Department of German Studies**

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Diolch yn fawr.

## Summary

Heiner Müller has often been interpreted as a political writer. This thesis seeks to argue that the profoundly political import of Müller's work can best be understood if one understands Müller as writing about and for a community. This community is heterogeneous, finite, non-totalitarian and transgressive. It is constituted by alterity, thus making its complete realisation impossible. As such, this community can only with the greatest of difficulty be understood in Marxist-Leninist terms, that is, in that ideology under which Müller spent most of his writing life.

Müller's later plays, which are far more well-known and more often produced, have often been described as fitting uneasily into the conventional aesthetics of the GDR. This thesis argues that traces of such a non-totalitarian community are to be found in his early work. On the other hand, they bear only limited testimony to the heterogeneous community. The conditions under which he had to write accorded him only restricted means in allowing such a community to come to expression. In addition, Müller himself pulls back from carrying this heterogeneous impulse through to its radical conclusion.

It is only when he develops his drama – a development which takes the form of engagement with the dramatic tradition – that he begins to do justice to the notion of community which is present only in nascent form in his early texts. Furthermore, as time goes on, the *manner* in which Müller wrote and produced texts for the theatre can itself be seen as an expression of this non-totalisable, complex and manifold community. As such, the reasons for the change in Müller's writing can be found in his early work. It is this which the thesis sets out to examine.

The expression of community in the manner of Müller's writing might best be explained through the notion of signature. By emphasising the finitude in the relationship between himself and his texts, Müller further radicalises his work. This is primarily achieved through the use of allegory which in turn proves to be a form of writing which engenders remembrance – itself an important constitutive moment in the community.

Müller's work, in seeking to express community through its radically finite nature raises a number of questions about the relationship between author, text and the role of literary criticism. The thesis thus attempts to examine these questions and take up the challenge to literary criticism which they represent.

## Introduction

*Brecht gebrauchen, ohne ihn zu kritisieren, ist Verrat.*<sup>1</sup>

This most famous of quotes from Müller has seen much use itself this year. From posters announcing Brecht festivals to the last anecdote of the day in the *Tagesthemen*, Müller's name has been dropped as the dramatist who took over Brecht's mantle of composing German political theatre. Müller is seen by a number of critics as a socialist writer who, in spite of his problematic relationship with the authorities, broadly supported the aims of the GDR state.<sup>2</sup> The quote from *Fatzer ± Keuner*, however, itself demonstrates how careful the critic must be in according Müller a place in the Brechtian or socialist realist pantheon.

Müller makes clear in just this one quip two attitudes to theatre which will be of fundamental importance to this thesis. Firstly, that he engages with theatrical tradition; and secondly that he does so not simply because he regards Brecht's writing as the acme in any history of drama, but rather because he seeks to provide for the future of the theatre. Broadly speaking Müller might be described as sharing similar political aims to Brecht, but this thesis seeks to argue that the radical attitude of Müller's work can best be understood if one sees him as writing about and for a *community*.

Müller's better-known later work has proved to be happy hunting ground for critics seeking obviously progressive and radical political content in his plays. Müller's early works, however, have proved to be more difficult. While they might be dismissed as socialist realism by some, this thesis seeks to argue that these early works – *Die*

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<sup>1</sup> Heiner Müller, *Fatzer ± Keuner*, Rotwelsch, p. 149. For full details of works referred to, see bibliography.

*Umsiedlerin*, *Der Lohndrucker*, *Philoktet* and *Der Horatier* – provide the critic of Müller with the means to understand why and how the later drama – such as *Hamletmaschine* – came to be written.

This is, therefore, the reason why this thesis concentrates on early plays of Müller. The reasons for the development of Müller's drama are to be found in examination of the early work: in the manner in which it allows community to show itself but equally in the way it retreats into the arms of the GDR state. In other words, one of the most profound acts of heterogeneity in the community – the particular subject writing literature – is betrayed for the totalising force of the regime.

Many of these ideas and concepts are taken for granted by literary criticism. What could be more obvious than a statement such as "Müller wrote in the GDR"? Yet it is precisely such self-evidence and comfort which Müller undermines *in* his writing and *by* writing itself. Few critics have attempted to carry through the radical consequences for literary criticism of such writing which expresses community through the singularity and finitude of the writing subject. By including himself or autobiographical elements into so many of his plays, it becomes painfully clear who wrote Müller's work, but it is precisely in the particular nature of this relationship of Heiner Müller to his texts, I will argue, where once more the work of community is to be seen. This will be especially clear in the way in which he, as man, addresses a particular other which is woman. Indeed it will be seen that the *gendered* other in Müller's writing of community plays a constitutive role.

The first chapter of the thesis, before looking closely at any of Müller's dramatic work, seeks to lay the theoretical foundations for an examination of Müller's writing. It

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<sup>2</sup> See discussion of other interpretations of Müller throughout the thesis.

will argue that Müller's relationship to his work throws up problems of an absolutely fundamental nature for literary criticism. The chapter then attempts to go on and address these problems. Simply put, Chapter One seeks to investigate what is involved in the act of literary criticism on a writer whose *signature* was so pronounced in his work. This will lead to a consideration of the profoundly finite nature of the structure of that relationship, a finitude that is in the end defined by the witnessing of the death of someone else, a particular "other". In order to do this, Chapter One contains an extended discussion of those philosophers, writers and theorists (Derrida, Benjamin, Heidegger and Nancy) whose work is essential to grasp the issues which spring forth from *Müller's* writing and from *Müller writing*. Such an understanding of what is involved in his writing brings us back to the definition of community with which this thesis will work, for it will be defined in a remarkably similar way.

One of the aspects of the relationships examined in the thesis –those between Müller and (variously) his writing, the community, the other, his death – is that it will be impossible to define absolutely. This impossibility should not be understood or experienced as a defeat but as an aporia which is liberating for the community in that it provides a future for the latter. Once again, this aporia will be seen to be treated by Müller in his work as well but it must also be examined for what it means for literary criticism. Vital for this stage of the argument will be a reading of Walter Benjamin's *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, an exceedingly difficult but profoundly important essay which examines the finitude of the work of art, its consequences for literary criticism and the manner in which the latter regards the author as such.

To this end, and throughout the thesis, I have chosen to illuminate, contradict or confirm points of my argument through quotes from interviews given by Müller on

politics and his work. Sometimes of course, this gives weight to that argument, other times it will be seen that Müller saw things differently. The aim of these quotations is also, however, to illustrate the precarious nature of the relationship between Müller, his writing and literary criticism which is also the subject of this thesis and especially what concerns Chapter One.

Having established this theoretical framework, I then turn to a detailed and close reading of *Die Umsiedlerin*. In so doing, it will become clear that the glimpses of the community which Müller allows to peek through the text need further explanation in order to understand fully their import. This is addressed through the nature of transgressive behaviour, something which finds its expression in *Die Umsiedlerin* through the comedy of the piece. The introduction of a theoretical understanding of such issues in this and the following chapter is thus an attempt to understand the *effects* of Müller's writing, even if he had only a cursory knowledge or understanding of such theory.

A shorter reading of *Der Lohndrucker* seeks to ground the argument of Chapter Two more fully while providing the link to *Philoktet* in Chapter Three, which I suggest represents a certain turn in Müller's writing. Once more, the issues at stake in the latter play can only be adequately examined by reference to particular theory, in this case, the nature of myth and allegory which will bring us back to the work of Walter Benjamin, in particular *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*.

It is *Philoktet* and *Der Horatier*, I suggest, where Müller's engagement with theatrical tradition can be clearly seen for the first time, but this concern is undertaken for the future of a theatre which might not be political in the conventional (or perhaps, Brechtian) sense of the term, but which is made politically. Finally, and regrettably in

all too brief a fashion, I discuss through *Hamletmaschine* what such a political theatre, made and written politically for a heterogeneous community, might look like and, once again, what this means for literary criticism.

Indeed, this is intended to be the guiding thread of the thesis: I hope to examine how one might understand Müller's expression of a heterogeneous community, but also, and equally importantly, to examine what allows this particular author, as literary critic, to make such assertions about Müller, and what a writer like Müller means for literary criticism itself.

**Chapter One**

*Heiner Müller and the Stasi*

If literary criticism has a task, it is to resist the transformation of author into hero. In the case of Heiner Müller, this should not be too difficult. The revelation of his contacts with the Stasi over a long period of time leading up to the dissolution of the GDR, although presented in a remarkably sensationalist fashion by some elements of the German media, serves in this regard as a trenchant reminder of the fallibility not only of authors, but, in a manner to be discussed in this introduction, of authorship itself.

Rumours had been circulating for some time through the community of Feuilleton readers in recently unified Germany that Heiner Müller, erstwhile radical, pure communist of the Rosa Luxemburg school, whose work had always been interpreted as critical of the Stalinist regime, had been registered for some time as an *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (IM) of the state security service (*Stasi*). A number of prominent public figures, notably Lothar de Maizière and Manfred Stolpe from the political classes, and Sascha Anderson and Christa Wolf from the country's literary elite had either been proven to be, or were accused of being in the *Stasi's* employ. The accusations surrounding Müller seemed to originate from a little known, and even less published writer Dieter Schulze, who circulated leaflets at a number of social or public occasions in the latter half of 1992, accusing Müller of having co-operated with the Stasi and of having effectively approved Schulze's expulsion from the GDR.<sup>1</sup> On

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<sup>1</sup> Heiner Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 431. For full details of works referred to, see bibliography. See also pp. 484-5: "[Schulze] bekam ein Strafverfahren, ich hatte ihm einen Verteidiger besorgt. [...] Dann haben wir, das heißt Christa Wolf, Fühmann und ich, Briefe an Hager und Honecker geschrieben. Daraufhin wurde das Urteil vom obersten Gerichtshof kassiert, und dann war Schulze wieder frei. Nun war er ein schwer berechenbarer Faktor, und irgendwann drohte ihm ein neuer Prozeß. Und da fragte mich Girod ganz direkt: Es gibt nur eine Alternative. Zuchthaus oder Ausweisung. Und da habe ich zur Ausweisung geraten. Das kann man mir übel nehmen, aber ich hielt ein DDR-Zuchthaus nicht für eine Dichterakademie."

January 5th of the following year Schulze faxed a press release to scores of editorial offices across the country revealing the fruits of his research into Müller's activities to which he had been guided by an anonymous phone call.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of "sechs Monaten Arbeit und viel Geld",<sup>3</sup> Schulze claimed to have discovered a IM code name ("Heiner"), a registration number and the address of a flat where conspiratorial meetings were said to have taken place.

The following Sunday (10.1.93) the news magazine programme *Spiegel TV* ran an interview with Müller where he admitted to having had regular contacts with the Stasi.<sup>4</sup> Throughout the interview Müller admits freely to having spoken to Stasi, indeed he claims it is unthinkable that a figure with such a high profile as himself would not have done so.

[E]s ist ganz schwer in dieser Gift-geschwollenen Atmosphäre, überhaupt darüber zu reden. [...] Ich weiß nicht, mit wievielen hundert Mitarbeitern ich gesprochen habe, ohne zu wissen, daß sie Mitarbeiter der Staatssicherheit waren. In jeder Theaterkantine saß da einer, mindestens einer, und es gab auch direkte Gespräche. Ich wußte, ich rede nicht mit der Heilsarmee. Ich mußte immer wissen, was ich sage und was ich sagen kann. Und ich mußte auch immer wissen, wenn ich lügen muß. Das gehört zu solchen Gesprächen.<sup>5</sup>

Müller goes on to justify his actions by claiming that he tried "zu beraten und Einfluß zu nehmen auf Dinge, weil es war ab einem bestimmten Zeitpunkt ab [sic] nicht mehr möglich, mit Parteifunktionären vernünftig zu reden, gerade in den letzten Jahren."<sup>6</sup> As to whether, four years after the wall came down, Müller suffered any pangs of guilt, he

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<sup>2</sup> "[ein] anonyme[r] Hinweis", *ibid.*, cf. Robin Detje, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 3, 15.1.93, p. 49: "Die Quelle: ein anonymes Anruf. Der Absender: ein sichtlich überreizter Mensch."

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> "Der Dramatiker Heiner Müller ("Die Hamletmaschine") hat regelmäßig Kontakte zu Offizieren des Ministeriums für Staatssicherheit zugegeben." *Spiegel TV* press release, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 435.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 436.

goes on to say, "Das war die Situation. Ich habe da überhaupt nie ein moralisches Problem drin gesehen, sehe ich auch heute nicht."

Four days later, and one day before the first commentary on the affair appeared in *Die Zeit*, Müller's lawyer released an affidavit, stating,

Ich kann versichern und beeiden, daß ich im Zusammenhang mit der Staatssicherheit kein Papier unterschrieben und kein Wort schriftlich formuliert habe. Ich war naiv genug, nicht zu wissen, daß Gespräche mit Mitarbeitern der Staatssicherheit als "IM-Tätigkeit" registriert wurden. Schon der Begriff "IM" war mir und meinen Freunden in der DDR-Zeit unbekannt. Was in mir unbekanntes Akten steht oder stehen kann, ist Stasiliteratur.<sup>7</sup>

Despite such assurances, and despite the fact that the only material which came to light was the existence of a card file, whose contents were published, the suspicion deepened, at least on the part of the Feuilleton editors, that Müller was more deeply involved. Schulze had originally attested that "belegbares Material wurde in Aussicht gestellt"<sup>8</sup> which was then presumed to be evidence of further, more incriminating files. Müller himself seems to confirm the possibility by suggesting, "Vielleicht sind Akten im Handel."<sup>9</sup> This supposition became in the following weeks so firmly established that on 22nd January, Iris Radisch felt able to write in *Die Zeit*,

Auf dem Tisch liegen Karteikarten, Vorgangshefte und Quittungen, die beweisen, daß die Staatssicherheit Heiner Müller zehn Jahre lang als Inoffiziellen Mitarbeiter "Heiner" geführt hat. Die Akte ist verschwunden, wie damals im Fall Sascha Anderson. Den Vorgangsheften ist zu entnehmen, daß es neben dem üblichen Personalband einen Aktenteil des Mitarbeiters gegeben haben muß.<sup>10</sup>

The next few weeks saw a heated debate between the Feuilleton editors of a number of national publications, most notably *Die Zeit* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ).

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 438.

<sup>9</sup> Detje, *op. cit.*, and *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 431.

<sup>10</sup> *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 438.

<sup>11</sup> Iris Radisch, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 4, 22-1-93, p. 47.

Finally, Müller gave an interview to the *Frankfurter Rundschau* on 22nd May which discussed the accusations as well as the media event earlier in the year.

The four articles by four different authors in successive editions of *Die Zeit* are all to a greater or lesser extent critical of Müller and range from cynicism or outright condemnation (Robin Detje on 15th January and Fritz Raddatz on 29th January) to seeing the affair as symptom of a wider problem between East and West Germany (Iris Radisch on 22nd January and Ulrich Greiner on 5th February). The accusations in all four articles, however, can be divided into two forms. Firstly: excoriation for any suggestion of contact with the Stasi for whatever reason, in whatever context; secondly: censure for the betrayal by such surreptitious acts of Müller's theatre, itself regarded as radical and political in its opposition to the GDR regime. The two accusations are, however, intimately linked in the argumentative logic in the four newspaper articles. It is because Müller is an *artist*, and furthermore one who produced pieces of resistance, that his contacts with the Stasi are to be particularly strongly condemned. The works of art which Müller produced are seen morally to disqualify him from anti-social behaviour in the wider political arena. I hope to show in the brief discussion following that such an identification of life and work brought about precisely that state of affairs which prevented Müller from making any response which might have been seen as adequate to the accusations made in the Feuilleton. Or further - and this is the problem that will guide the thesis as a whole - that Müller's texts themselves operate against such a symbolic identification, even though they seem to be distinctly personal to him, and that this itself is a profoundly *political* attitude of Müller's work.

The argument of Fritz Raddatz's article can hardly be clearer from its title, "Von der Beschädigung der Literatur durch ihre Urheber".<sup>12</sup> Raddatz begins with an unsourced quote from Thomas Mann ("Ein Künstler ohne Lebenssittlichkeit ist nicht möglich; der Werkinstinkt selbst ist ihr Ausdruck, ist "Tüchtigkeit", ist Sozialität, und zeitige er das lebensabgewandteste Werk") and accordingly goes on to argue that both Müller and Christa Wolf "haben nicht nur ihrer Biographie geschadet; sie haben ihr Werk beschädigt. Sie haben uns verraten; nicht im Sinne von "angezeigt", sondern in einem viel tieferen Sinne[.]" This is because the artist owes his/her audience "Ernsthaftigkeit" and the work of art itself, as social act, demands social responsibility and fundamental human decency on the side of the artist or author: "Das ist nicht wahr, daß Kunst nichts zu tun habe mit Gesittung [...]: ohne Humanum keine Kunst."<sup>13</sup> At the end of the article, in a personal entreaty to his erstwhile acquaintances, Raddatz pleads, "keine Mogelpackungen und Placebos mehr. Halten Sie der Würde Ihres Werkes die Treue. Erklären Sie."<sup>14</sup>

Müller has often been quoted as questioning the transparent link between the act of writing or producing art and morality. Detje interprets Müller as saying, "Ein Dichter [...] steht jenseits aller Moral: 'Kunst hat und braucht eine blutige Wurzel. Das Einverständnis mit dem Terror gehört zur Beschreibung.'"<sup>15</sup> It is this moral atrophy which Raddatz seeks to oppose, for if the work of art is in its core essentially innocent and humanitarian, then the artist must do this justice by acting in such a manner away from the work's composition or performance. Artist and work are seen as symbols of

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<sup>12</sup> Fritz J. Raddatz, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 5, 29-1-93, pp. 51-2.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> Detje, *op. cit.*, quoting Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 290. For further references in interviews with Müller on this subject, see below.

each other and moreover symbols that hardly undergo time. It is thus that Raddatz can write with incredulity on pieces written in 1961 and 1977 respectively,

"Heiner Müller's Arbeit - ob 'Philoktet' oder 'Hamletmaschine' - ist bohrende Parabel von Macht und Verrat, Lüge und Erniedrigung. Wie kann man das ausbreiten - also: sich häuten - und zugleich dickfellig mit den Häschern plaudern?"<sup>16</sup>

It is this mythic identification of past and present, or rather as this introduction will go on to argue, this mythic suppression of finitude, which is associated elsewhere in the series of articles with the position of Müller and Wolf, explaining their inability to utter a satisfactory response to the probing of West German intellectuals.

Ulrich Greiner notes after weeks of debate that the argument over artists' links with the Stasi "nicht der Aufklärung dient, sondern der Verwirrung, nicht der Vernunft, sondern der Legendenbildung."<sup>17</sup> Greiner is more careful than Raddatz not to argue for a direct contradiction between the moral probity of particular works of art and the turpitude of their authors, seeking instead to pin down Wolf and Müller through their role in the GDR as public figures with an equally public responsibility.

Denn neben dem Werk, das der Kritik und der Diskussion offensteht, und neben der privaten Existenz des Autors, die ebenso wie die anderer Menschen ein Recht auf Unversehrtheit besitzt, gibt es ein Drittes: die öffentliche Person, die moralische Instanz. Wenn und insofern der Schriftsteller eine öffentliche Person ist, dann darf er in dieser Rolle befragt und kritisiert werden.<sup>18</sup>

This may or may not be a general truth, but Greiner sees it as being especially applicable with regard to the GDR.

Weil es in der DDR eine demokratische Öffentlichkeit nicht gab, übernahm der Schriftsteller öffentliche Aufgaben. [...] Insofern der Schriftsteller diese Rolle akzeptierte, geriet er unweigerlich in die Rolle einer moralischen Instanz mit

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<sup>16</sup> Raddatz, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ulrich Greiner, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 6, 5-2-93, p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

sinngewandter, gewissenstlastender und vorbildhafter Funktion, auch und gerade dann, wenn er mit den Direktiven der Partei nicht konform ging.<sup>19</sup>

Greiner thus makes it clear that it is not simply the fact that societies turn artists into public figures (for reasons perhaps of adoration, commerce, religion or ideology) which confers upon them moral responsibility, but rather also due to the role of the artwork in a particular society. He argues that the social practices in the GDR were structured in such a way as to make the work of art itself an important method of communication. What is however not clear is how these practices then make their authors "moralische Instanzen" in day-to-day life even if this is "public life". Indeed, Greiner can only come to this conclusion if he, like Raddatz, affirms a symbolic identity of the life and work of the artist. The work must, according to this logic, continue to belong to the artist, be *proper* to him or her, and his or her actions accordingly remain a faithful or perfidious symbol of the work.

Greiner notes that Wolf and Müller have only been able to respond to their critics through recourse to a mythical notion of the GDR, that is, one which continues to see particular virtues incorporated within that society as not having been subject to the decay which befell the rest of the state, and which are worthy of defence even now. The primary quality of the GDR is apparently seen by Müller and Wolf as the maintenance of the anti-fascist tradition.<sup>20</sup> This defence, however, takes the form of silence, of refusing to have written about contacts with the Stasi for fear of besmirching the redeemable elements of GDR society.

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Müller discussed the legacy of anti-fascism at length in interviews. See in particular Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 74: "Die einzige Legitimation der DDR kam aus dem Antifaschismus, aus den Toten, aus den Opfern. Das war eine Zeitlang ehrbar, aber an einem gewissen Punkt fing es an, zu Lasten der Lebenden zu gehen." See also my discussion on the treatment of death by the community later in this chapter.

Das Feuilleton hat Fragen gestellt. Die Befragten sahen darin einen Angriff. Sie parierten ihn mit der Verteidigung des Mythos. Über den Mythos aber läßt sich nicht diskutieren. Man kann ihn nur zur Kenntnis nehmen. Deshalb ist die Debatte über die Vergangenheit der DDR gescheitert.<sup>21</sup>

Iris Radisch two weeks earlier was more forthcoming.

Der Fall Heiner Müller zeigt, wie tief selbst die klügsten Ostköpfe inzwischen im Sand stecken. Sie träumen von einer post festum ideologisch gesäuberten DDR und verteidigen ihren Traum, ihre Wahrheit furios gegen die Wirklichkeit. Es kann doch nicht alles umsonst gewesen sein! Die Denkfalle [...] besteht in dem wackeren Pioniersglauben, nach dem jeder, der den Sozialismus kritisiert, den Kapitalismus stärkt. Das Schweigen über die Stasi mutiert in dieser aparten Dialektik zum Angriff auf Kohl. Die klamme Verteidigung der DDR zur feurigen Attacke auf die westliche Wirtschaft.<sup>22</sup>

This adherence to a mythic view of the GDR is, however, only the result of an analogous belief on behalf of the four Feuilleton critics in *Die Zeit*. It is demanded of Müller that he respond in a non-mythical manner to the charge that he has "betrayed" his works on the basis of symbolic identification of his works with his life. This is itself, as I hope to demonstrate in the course of this thesis, primarily that mythic relationship between art, politics and community which Müller attempts to transgress.

Müller elsewhere demonstrates his distance from these critics by rejecting the idea that one can indulge in remembrance of the GDR's past on the basis of historical consensus. East and West will not be able to have dealt with the legacy of the GDR, according to Greiner and Radisch unless there is agreement on the terms of remembrance.

Niemand kann in dieser Debatte recht haben, solange es für dieses Recht keinen Grundlagenvertrag gibt, solange jede Tatsache nur so viel wiegt wie ihre wechselnde politische Bedeutung, solange Ostmensch und Westmensch keine gemeinsame Sprache sprechen.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Greiner, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>22</sup> Radisch, op. cit. p. 52

<sup>23</sup> ibid.

Greiner then explains exactly what this consensus must consist of; "daß erstens der Sozialismus verdienstermaßen gescheitert ist und daß zweitens die reale DDR nichts war, dem man ein längeres Leben hätte wünschen dürfen."<sup>24</sup> In other words, the very pre-conditions for the debate in the first place - the differing views and understandings of the legacy of the GDR - should cease to exist in order for the debate to take place. It is perhaps as potent an example of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as could be conceived: the past must be seen as being overcome in order for a debate to take place (whose conclusion is preordained). Ironically, Greiner claims to be avoiding precisely that when he writes,

Mehrfach und mit Recht ist die Häßlichkeit solcher Begriffe wie "Vergangenheits-bewältigung" oder "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit" bemerkt worden. Versuchen wir es mit dem Begriff Erinnerung.<sup>25</sup>

However, Greiner imagines that such remembering can only be achieved by a present consensus at the cost of a particular past's understanding of itself; in other words, the past has to be infused, overcome, *bewältigt* by the present. Memory and remembering must surely, however, involve a constellation of the past and present, a becoming present again, a repetition of the past as past which undermines the presence to itself of the present. Remembering must take into account the passing of time, the structure of finitude which inhabits time.

Such a structure might thus be seen as inimical to a community identical to itself, or to consensus. Indeed, this thesis will hope to show that it is precisely a community riven by splits, struggles and its essentially heterogeneous nature, that is, a community fissured and structured by politics, which is the only basis for memory and

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<sup>24</sup> Greiner, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

remembrance of the past. Furthermore, this political community is the lifeblood of Müller's work. The work speaks community, be it in writing, watching, reading, or in criticism.

One problem remains, however. Why did Müller remain silent on his contacts with the Stasi until 1993? Was not the long silence on the matter, as well as the much publicised excision of passages relating to the Stasi in the first edition of his autobiography *Krieg Ohne Schlacht* almost bound to symbolise the refusal of East German intellectuals to come to terms with their role in the maintenance of a totalitarian regime?<sup>26</sup>

It must be emphasised once more that Müller should not have been expected to explain his actions simply because his plays were seen as in opposition to the regime. Accusations of hypocrisy based on the symbolic identity of work and life have no place here, as will be explained later. Simply as a public figure, that is one with a degree of influence, one might however expect some form of response. It is also perhaps questionable whether Müller's contacts for the Stasi are the proper subject for a work of literary criticism. Indeed, as will be argued later, the task of robbing Müller of any heroic stature takes the form of a differentiated approach to the relationship of life and work rather than investigating his activities away from the theatre in the GDR. However it is perhaps still of interest to examine the accusations upon which a literary critical stance was based in order to discover whether these accusations, at least, have any basis in fact.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, p. 127: "Die Schuld der Intellektuellen in der DDR, zu denen ich gehöre, besteht darin, daß sie Privilegien akzeptiert haben; die meisten wissend, daß die Privilegien sie von der Bevölkerung trennten und damit im Sinn des Regimes unschädlich machten."

Müller's explanation for his reticence after 1989 is threefold. Firstly, that his contacts with the Stasi were innocuous;<sup>27</sup> secondly, that he did not see himself as having the right to retreat from a position of influence when he could achieve a number of small victories;<sup>28</sup> and thirdly, that the West German press misrepresented such activities,<sup>29</sup> and any justification of them, by insisting on a simple schema for opposition to the regime - either one was against, in which case no contacts should have been entered into, or one supported the regime, possibly becoming an informant for the Stasi.<sup>30</sup>

Müller's silence on his activities is thus perhaps best accounted for by distinctly unheroic attributes: naivety, cowardice and opportunism, all of which he admits or even affirms.<sup>31</sup> In the heated atmosphere of the time, some might find it reasonable not to want to run the risk of denunciation and pillory for activities which Müller saw rather as helping the victims of the regime as well as ensuring that his work was performed as much as possible. That Western commentators regarded all contacts with the Stasi as equal - someone who spoke about world politics being placed on the same level as the

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<sup>27</sup> "Ich habe das einigen erzählt, weil ich es nicht so ernst genommen habe. Aber es galt für die Stasi als konspirativ. [...] Man hat über Kulturpolitik gesprochen. Das kann man mir zum Vorwurf machen. Aber warum sollte ich nicht versuchen, Einfluß zu nehmen, wenn ich dazu die Möglichkeit hatte?" Müller, Krieg Ohne Schlacht, p. 484.

<sup>28</sup> "Ich war nicht erpreßbar. Ich habe es bewußt getan. Ich dachte, da kann ich etwas erreichen in konkreten Dingen, wenn es um ein Visum geht oder um die Verhinderung einer Verhaftung." *ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>29</sup> "Was mich verblüfft hat, war die Geschwindigkeit und Selbstverständlichkeit, mit der Journalisten, gerade in der *Zeit*, annahmen, ich hätte Leute observiert oder denunziert und dafür noch Geld gekriegt." *ibid.*, pp. 477-8.

<sup>30</sup> "Ich weiß, daß alle meine Freunde ihre Opferakten durchgesehen haben wegen dieses Spitzelvorwurfs. Keiner hat etwas entdeckt, und keiner kann auch etwas entdecken. Das beruht einfach auf dem Klischee, wer mit der Staatsicherheit redet, ist ein Verräter, ein Schwein" *ibid.*, pp. 483-4. See Detje, *op. cit.*: "Ist der Dichter ein Schwein? Ist Heiner Müller ein Sascha Anderson im Großformat? Müller ist in die StolpeKantAndersonmaschine geraten. Und es sieht nicht so aus, als käme er unten unbeschädigt wieder heraus." p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> "Es gibt ein Menschenrecht auf 'Feigheit vor dem Feind', von dem habe ich Gebrauch gemacht in der Situation, in der Atmosphäre damals. [...] Denn eines habe ich bei der *Umsiedlerin*-Affäre deutlich erlebt: Wie schwer das ist, als einzelner gegenüber einer Masse von Andersdenkenden kein ungutes Gefühl zu haben, wenn man bei seinem Standpunkt bleibt. Das ist nicht leicht." Müller, Gesammelte Irrtümer III, pp. 488-9. See also Müller, Gesammelte Irrtümer III, p. 149: "Ich habe mich aber gelegentlich verhalten wie jemand, der im Besitz der Wahrheit ist. Der Kernpunkt ist vielleicht: Opportunismus."

informer – is also clearly seen in the press coverage of the Müller-Stasi affair. Whether the discourse as a whole would have been so structured to the disadvantage of those with differing contacts of a singular nature to the Stasi had these persons revealed earlier the nature of their own singular intercourse is another matter. The silence of Heiner Müller prevented a real debate from taking place in that the presumptions of Western commentators remained unchallenged. We must, given the strictures against identification of author and work mentioned above, leave the following observation at the level of wry irony: that Müller's works produce and promote debate and the promise of future interpretation and debate, as will be argued, precisely because they are singular, can only have been written by, and are signed by Müller himself.

Finally, and although these observations are once more to be seen as marginal to a work of literary criticism, it should also be pointed out that Müller was vindicated of being an IM (though not, it must be emphasised, of naivety, cowardice and opportunism) in the following months by the research of Andreas Schreier and Malte Daniljuk for the magazine *Horch und Guck*.<sup>32</sup> They point out, with some cynicism, that the debate over Müller lasted just over three weeks, "dann war der Ofen aus. IMS "Heiner" hatte seinen Marktwert verloren. Das Merkwürdige an der Sache war nur: Es tauchten keine Beweise auf, die Heiner Müller unmittelbar belasten konnten."<sup>33</sup> Müller had been the object of Stasi surveillance since the *Umsiedlerin* affair in 1961<sup>34</sup> and after protesting about the expulsion of Wolf Biermann in 1976 had been registered under "Operativen Personenkontrolle" (OPK), with the codename "Zement". As had already been explained in the *FAZ* of 21st January this was "die stärkste Form der Überwachung

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*. pp. 433-4.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Two.

durch die Stasi."<sup>35</sup> and meant that "Müller über viele Jahre zu der Gruppe 'Feindlich negativer Schriftsteller' mit höchster Priorität gezählt wurde."<sup>36</sup> Two years later nothing more had been undertaken, primarily because the Stasi officer, Oberleutnant Holm, responsible for Müller's file admired his work and did not regard him as a political threat. In 1978, however, Müller was threatened with criminal proceedings for having written a reference for Thomas Brasch for the Suhrkamp publishing house in the Federal Republic, for which he was to be charged with currency offences. Holm, instead of handing Müller over to the authorities, turned the file into an "IM Vorlauf", thus protecting him from any action brought by any other arm of the state on the basis of preparatory proceedings being undertaken to gain Müller as IM. In order to legitimate such proceedings, some form of conversation had to be recorded with the object as well as possible uses, from the point of view of the appropriate Stasi officer, for the potential IM in the future. These appeared in the Stasi files revealed in early 1993, described by Müller as "Pläne und Wunschzettel"<sup>37</sup> and "Stasiliteratur"<sup>38</sup> One year later, after the deadline for securing the services of an IM had been passed, the IM-Vorlauf was converted into a full-blown IM. There was never any evidence for anything other than conversations initiated from the side of the Stasi, perhaps misguidedly understood by Müller as an opportunity to exert influence. Indeed as Schreier and Daniljuk point out, "[a]lle diese Informationen wären der Öffentlichkeit jederzeit zugänglich gewesen. Es bleibt die Frage, warum erhobene Anschuldigungen so unkritisch wiedergegeben werden."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> FAZ, 21-1-93, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 477

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 438

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 476.

One might speculate on the economics of the media industry, the increasingly swift commodification of news "stories", or, like Schreier and Daniljuk, to a perceived inferiority complex of West German intellectuals over and against their East German counterparts<sup>40</sup> as explanation for the manner in which the debate on Müller progressed in the Feuilleton pages of the Bundesrepublik. It is, however, incontrovertible that the initial interest in Müller and the subsequent urge to condemn him issued from the supposed contradiction between the political, progressive content of his work and the self-serving, reactionary act of conversing with the Stasi. In other words, the interpretation of Müller's work as political led to a symbolic identification of that work with his life.

The argument of this chapter is the exact inverse. It is rather that the nature of the relationship between life and work can be characterised by signature - undermining any simple symbolic relationship of propriety or ownership - and it is this which must be understood as political. I will go on to consider how the nature of the identity of writer, signature and work of art forbids any simple association of the three, but also that *Müller's writing itself* (that is, in both senses - the text and the act of writing *per se*) seeks to display this problematic as the political response of the work of art.

### *The Imperative of Writing*

The political bravery of Heiner Müller, as writer, was that he never claimed to be a hero. The hero dissident of Western eyes who remains untainted by the machinations of totalitarianism remains utterly unassimilable to Müller. In response to an accusatory

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

statement that he accepted literary prizes and honours from the state, he replies, "Und das Geld. Geld nehme ich immer. Geld verschafft Freiheit."<sup>41</sup> But this seemingly egoistic stance is revealed as no less so than some other alternatives. The self-centeredness of political purity, of non-compromise, of not compromising oneself was usually not something which Müller felt he could cling to:

Warum macht man sich da die Hände schmutzig? Ich habe nie behauptet, daß ich ein "reiner" Anarchist bin. Ich rede mit jedem, wenn ich es für notwendig und für praktisch halte.<sup>42</sup>

Das war eigentlich für mich meine Rechtfertigung auch für die Kontakte mit der Staatssicherheit: Ich habe nicht das Recht, rein zu bleiben in einer schmutzigen Welt.<sup>43</sup>

This agenda of personal political intervention (whereby its effectiveness in the context of the GDR, together with the self-delusory belief in this efficacy might deserve some hard questioning) makes the silence *post Wende* about such actions all the more surprising. There is perhaps no better example of the confusion into which Müller had fallen than the following comparison to a German thinker whose political history is nothing but obscene.

Deswegen verstehe ich so gut, warum Heidegger über seinen Abgrund nicht gesprochen hat. Denn jedes Gespräch führt zu neuen Mißverständnissen, das ist nicht auszuräumen.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Müller, Gesammelte Irrtümer III, p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> Müller, Krieg Ohne Schlacht, p. 488.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 497.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 489. There are a number of errors, misjudgements and absurdities in Müller's interviews which display variously the fallibility of Müller; the problematic status of the interview, especially in a totalitarian environment (see also Chapter Three); or simply the different status of the written work and the oral extemporisation. One example on Adorno's criticism of lyric poetry which Müller evidently understands as a censoring of poetry rather than a particular lyric tradition: "Adornos These ist völlig kapitulantenhaft. Das Gegenteil ist richtig – nach Auschwitz nur noch Gedichte." (Jenseits der Nation, p. 43.) See also Müller, Gesammelte Irrtümer, p. 157: "Wenn ich dann über die Stücke geredet habe, habe ich oft stark schematisiert. Das hatte oft auch taktische Gründe. Oder ich hinkte mit meinen Gedanken hinter meinen Texten her, auch möglich. Ich habe mit meinen Kommentaren nie das Niveau meiner Stücke erreicht."

Thus it might be more accurate to state that Müller's political bravery consisted not so much of not claiming to be a hero, but rather of claiming and affirming the fact of not being a hero. The difference between the two lies in the act of silence or acquiescence of the first possibility. The "cowardice in the face of the enemy" was a reaction to the Western press' demand for Müller to act as a hero adequate to his writing, the silence being effectively a statement of denial: "I never said I was a hero". Compare, however, how the affirmation of non-heroism on Müller's part is inextricably linked with the demand to write and the problems of signature:

Ich bin kein Held, das ist nicht mein Job. Ich meinte: Es gibt einfach Prioritäten. Ich bin Schriftsteller zuallererst. Das Wesentliche ist, die Möglichkeit zu finden, das zu schreiben, was ich schreiben will und was nur ich schreiben kann.<sup>45</sup>

Müller's first and only moral priority was to write. This led to acts of surrender to the regime if such cowardice allowed him to continue writing. On being forced to write a statement of self-criticism after the first performance of *Die Umsiedlerin*, Müller remembers,

Ich wußte ja auch, daß zum Beispiel Eisenstein immer Selbstkritik geübt hatte. Er hat als Künstler dadurch überlebt. Dann war sicher auch Angst vor dem Gefängnis mit im Spiel. Mir war das Schreiben wichtiger als meine Moral.<sup>46</sup>

In that sense, the only moral sense of writing consists in the act of writing itself, in writing as well as one possibly can, that is, in expressing as far as possible the singularity of the work of art:

Man kann als Künstler nur eine Moral haben, nämlich die, seine Arbeit so gut zu machen, wie man kann. Denn was ich mache, kann nur *ich* machen. Also muß ich es so gut wie möglich machen.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, pp. 130-1.

<sup>46</sup> Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 180.

<sup>47</sup> Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, p. 167.

This would express what some would regard as writing's immorality, its separation from everyday moral concerns, but Müller makes clear that he understands his imperative as that of writing. Hence he can say on the one hand, "[a]ußerdem bin ich nie konsequent gewesen, *außer beim Schreiben*, denn das ist eine andere Existenz"<sup>48</sup> and on the other that the text and the work of art itself cannot answer to any notion of integrity from the moral realm: "Kein Mensch ist integer. In keinem guten Stück."<sup>49</sup> Indeed as will be seen in this thesis, Müller regards, this culpability as the writer's privilege: "Die Privilegien waren eine wichtige Arbeitsbedingung. Mir ist nur wichtig, was ich schreibe und was von mir übrig bleibt. Meine Person ist da sekundär."<sup>50</sup>

The work of art or literary text demands to be written, not simply in the sense of being produced, but demands that which might be regarded as the condition of possibility of writing: the singularity and finitude of the writing subject, his/her signature. Writing is thus a singular and particular occupation, its effects and results cannot, for Müller, be subscribed under a universal morality. The demand for writing itself, however, is that which the literary work demands of the author and (given a certain understanding of the dynamics of writing and signature) is a quasi-universal demand on the writer. To express this in other terminology would be simply to write that the work of art is autonomous.

It is for these reasons that Müller has occasionally found the third person repulsive for the purposes of writing.

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129, my emphasis.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136. See also Müller, *Der Schrecken die erste Erscheinung des Neuen: Zu einer Diskussion über Postmodernismus in New York* in *Rotwelsch*, p. 94: "Schreiben unter Bedingungen, in denen das Bewußtsein von der Asozialität des Schreibens nicht mehr verdrängt werden kann. Schon Talent ist ein Privileg, Privilegien müssen bezahlt werden: der Eigenbetrag zu seiner Enteignung gehört zu den Kriterien des Talents."

[...] I was writing a short prose text dealing with the suicide of my former wife.<sup>51</sup> (She killed herself in 1966). First I wrote in the third person: "He came home and he saw..." Then I realized that this was the attitude of a coward so I switched to the 'I'.<sup>52</sup>

The imperative appears to writing which carries its signature, no matter how shocking or morally reprehensible. Ten years later, Müller remembers the scene of writing once more.

[P]lötzlich schreibe ich: "*Ich* erstach ihn." Das war ein Schock, eine ganz andere Erfahrung. Ich hatte angefangen, das in der dritten Person zu schreiben, dann habe ich gemerkt, das ist kein Ausweg. Daher die abschreckende Wirkung auf viele, auch auf mich. Ich war erschrocken über das, was ich da schreibe, aber das gab mir nicht das Recht, es nicht zu schreiben.<sup>53</sup>

If Müller does write, if his texts can only come from him and only his signature appears at the foot of the text and between every line, then he is also quite clear on the question whose property the text remains.

Die Intentionen fürs Schreiben werden beim Schreiben verheizt. Dann entsteht was, was man nicht kennt. Oder jedenfalls etwas, an das man nicht gedacht hat. [...] Das gilt für jede Kunst. Wenn man es vorher weiß, kann man's lassen. [...] Was ich meine, ist ganz konkret. Man geht mit konkretem Material um: mit der Sprache. Die Sprache setzt sich letztlich durch gegen den Autor. Gegen die Intention des Autors.<sup>54</sup>

Müller insists that it is precisely the signature of the author, so long as this author does sign his/her "name" that the text becomes autonomous. In other words, in autonomous, or perhaps simply "good," "meaningful," "authentic", art, other considerations are not relevant, be they moral, commercial or ideological. Replying to a suggestion that authors are generally regarded as authorities, Müller says, "Die Autorität ist der Text, nicht der Autor. [...] Nur wenn [der Schriftsteller] schreibt, kann er nicht litgen."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Müller, *Todesanzeige* in *Germania Tod in Berlin*, pp. 31-4.

<sup>52</sup> Müller, *Walls* in *Rotwelsch*, p. 34. See also the discussion of *Todesanzeige* in Chapter Three.

<sup>53</sup> Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 211.

<sup>54</sup> Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 161.

Thus we return to the propriety of writing. The demand for moral writing, symbolic identification of the morality of the author with that of the text and finally the question of ownership of that text are all closely interlinked. The demand that life should not contradict the work or that the work should reflect a moral life (the former was the case in the Stasi debate, whereas the latter was dominant within the cultural politics of the GDR) demonstrates that propriety itself is seen as proper to the relationship of life and work; furthermore it can only operate on the basis of the work of art belonging to the author, its being his/her property.<sup>56</sup> In other words, at least as far as the specific economy of literary or artistic production is concerned, the moral question of ownership of the literary text is treated in a similar way in the liberal capitalist context as in that of the former totalitarian command economy. The vociferous liberalism of the writers in *Die Zeit* does not succeed in distancing itself from that which it proclaims as having been overcome or superseded (the GDR) thanks to the demand to treat the relationship of artist, text, aesthetic or critical act as one determined fundamentally by propriety. The fact that Müller fell foul of such moral stricture before and after the dissolution of the GDR demonstrates that the political nature of his texts cannot so easily be pigeonholed as anti-Stalinist or anti-Western polemic. It is rather the case that the import of his works bears witness to a radical conception of politics and community which is always to come, always yet to arrive and that his work of art itself bears within it an imperative - stemming from his particular *signature* through the work - which almost does justice to such a conception of community.

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<sup>56</sup> See discussion of Derrida and signature below.

### *The Time of Writing, the Time of Criticism*

Most commentators on Müller have remarked upon the way in which events, names and material from Müller's life reappear in his literary and theatrical texts. Most often commented upon has been his writing himself into the text of *Hamletmaschine*<sup>57</sup> but Müller's signature - the claim and confirmation that he wrote the piece being read or performed - can be seen and read in texts which appeared throughout his productive life. Obvious examples of autobiographically influenced texts include *Bericht vom Grossvater*<sup>58</sup> and *Todesanzeige*,<sup>59</sup> but certain events in Müller's life occur repeatedly - especially in the later texts - most poignantly the suicide of his wife Inge, but also the arrest of Müller's father by the SA. It is not, however, the aim of this thesis to point out autobiographical elements in Müller's work, not least because Müller has pointed these out himself, most thoroughly in the series of interviews which go to make up his "autobiography", *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*. The thesis seeks rather to investigate the political effect of Müller's signature, extending the understanding of signature beyond inclusion of such autobiographical details. (One would, for example, in the context of Heiner Müller, have to mention the constant re-working, re-writing or re-translation of dramatic texts - be they his or of other writers - as inscribing the singular signature on the dramatic tradition.)<sup>60</sup> Or again, the concept of signature could also be usefully employed to understand the development of Müller, especially after 1989, into a media figure whose primary form of expression took the form of the public, published interview (almost always on the subject of himself) as opposed to further works of

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<sup>57</sup> See discussion in Chapter Three.

<sup>58</sup> in Müller, *Geschichten aus der Produktion*, pp. 7-10.

<sup>59</sup> in Müller, *Germania Tod in Berlin*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter Three for the discussion on this point.

dramatic art.<sup>61</sup> The political significance of emphasising the process of writing a literary text will be seen to go beyond the simple but very real risk of being a dissident element in totalitarian society. In excess of this risk I hope to show that the deeper political, communitarian stance of Müller's work resides in the expression of a radical sense of finitude and singularity which one might term a political understanding of time and subjectivity within the work of art. The finite and singular nature of the signature must thus be investigated more deeply in order to reach an understanding of the community which I claim Müller is writing or signing.

Clearly, any signature, be it concrete or implied, dates and signs the text which it signs - a text was written at a particular time by a particular author. However, as argued above, it is the very singularity of a signature which opens up considerations concerning who a literary text belongs to. The remainder of this chapter will thus attempt to describe a particular literary critique which responds to the challenge of the work of art which is signed in this political way, and which in so doing, demonstrates its distance from a more philosophical attitude to the literary text. In order to do so, however, literary criticism in its theoretical guise must engage itself in philosophy, as all theory must. The argument of this chapter is that the *practice* of literary criticism must differentiate itself from this theoretical moment as well as from philosophical use of literary material for the latter's own philosophical ends.

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<sup>61</sup> This tendency reached its peak with the publication of a book by the Berlin publishing house Schwarzkopf und Schwarzkopf of pictures and "aphorisms", simply quotes from interviews, in coffee-table format: *Heiner Müller, Bilder eines Lebens*, Berlin, 1996.

### *The Signature*

The preceding comments on signature and the literary text have been informed primarily by the work of Jacques Derrida, in particular his essays and papers *Signature Event Context*,<sup>62</sup> *Signsponge*, *Shibboleth: For Paul Celan* and *The Law of Genre*<sup>63</sup> as well as his discussion of signification and repetition in *Of Grammatology*. In *Signsponge* Derrida seeks to differentiate between three different understandings or "modalities" of signature. The first is that usage most generally understood: a proper name which has been represented in writing, not merely printed out in block capitals, but rather authenticating the relationship of writer and written, "the fact that it is indeed he who writes: here is my name, I refer to myself, named as I am, and I do so, therefore, in my name. I, the undersigned, I affirm (yes, on my honor)."<sup>64</sup> The second form of signature is described as those marks which are left "by accident or intention" in a real signature itself, or analogically, in any text or object produced by the signing subject, which help to emphasise the singularity of that text, the subject and their particular relation.

These marks would have no essential link with the form of the proper name as articulated or read 'in' a language. [...] We sometimes call this the style, the inimitable idiom of a writer, sculptor, painter, or orator.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, Derrida describes the third modality as "general signature" that is the manner in which writing points to itself as writing, and indeed, to itself as having been written by someone, somewhere, sometime.

[T]he work of writing designates, describes, and inscribes itself as *act* (action and archive), signs itself before the end by affording us the opportunity to read: I

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<sup>62</sup> in Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*. pp. 307-330.

<sup>63</sup> Collected in Derrida, ed. Attridge, *Acts of Literature*. pp. 344-369, 370-413, 221-252, with introductions by the editor. Quotes are taken from this edition.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 362.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

refer to myself, this is writing, *I* am a writing, this is *writing* - which excludes nothing [...].<sup>66</sup>

Thus when I refer to Müller's signature, I seek to emphasise the particularity of Müller's writing, that certain characteristics of his writing draw attention to the singularity of its production, that is, by Heiner Müller at a particular time, but also, to follow Derrida, that this is a general condition of writing itself.

What one might term the singularity of the signing event can only attain such a status if it can be repeated. This seeming contradiction - that an event is singular and repeatable, indeed, only singular *if* repeatable, only repeatable *if* singular is at the very core of Derrida's thought. I can only affirm that I am right here, right now if my signature can be reproduced in the future (thereby allowing for the possibility of forgery or copying). Any signature that is too whimsical, capricious, or too playful is not recognised as a signature. Thus, "I will have failed to affirm the uniqueness and genuineness of my attestation by, paradoxically, attending too fully to the singularity of the event."<sup>67</sup> In other words, it is the very possibility that a signature is not absolutely singular, confined to one event in space and time, which allows signature in the first place.

The effects of signature are the most ordinary thing in the world. The condition of possibility for these effects is simultaneously, once again, the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, in order to be legible, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, in altering its identity and singularity, divides the seal.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>67</sup> Attridge in introduction to *Signsponge*, p. 345.

<sup>68</sup> Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-9.

It is vital to understand the "iterability"<sup>69</sup> of a signature as constitutive. Anything which is meaningful has to have the ability to be repeated in order for it to be meaningful at all. However, since it will be repeated in a different context (if no other than simply a different temporal context) it cannot be said that it has been completely repeated, with some putative unchanged essence having been carried over into this new context. In other words, a meaningful item, such as a signature, must be originally repeatable or simply "iterable".

The fact that I and only I have signed my signature at a particular place and time does not mean that I must be present in order for this signature to remain legible. On the contrary, the logic of the signature demands that for it to belong to me, I must lose ownership over it.

To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance in principle will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and writing. [...] For the written to be the written, it must continue to "act" and to be legible even if what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, whether he is provisionally absent, or if he is dead, or if in general he does not support, with his absolutely current and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his meaning, of that very thing which seems to be written "in his name."<sup>70</sup>

Derrida also insists within the context of the debate on speech act theory that writing must continue to function beyond the disappearance or death of the addressee in order to function as writing.

Iterability structures writing and communication as such, makes it possible, but also causes it to break down. Indeed, it is only because of the possibility of breakdown or representation in other countless contexts that language can communicate at all. Once

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<sup>69</sup> "[I]ter, once again, comes from *itara*, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity." Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 316.

again, the iterability of a signature allows it to represent the singularity of an event but disallows it from representing that event as purely single, self-identical or present to itself. The second is a condition of the first.

How does then this signature, which lacks the authenticity of full self-identity, become in any way authenticated? Just as some documents demand the presence of a countersignature to authenticate the first, the logic of the signature calls upon others to confirm its iterable authenticity. A signature is only a signature if another signature can countersign it, indeed, the signature must be open to, and is structured by this otherness which dwells in the concept of iterability. But this countersignatory response also obeys the logic of the signature and itself then seeks the signature of the other, and so on *ad infinitum*. The other already inhabits the one who has signed, it is the other which makes signature possible at all:

The identity of the same, of [...] the *auto*, is generated by the very thing - iterability, the power-to-be-repeated, which prohibits its stability and autonomy. [...] The mark of the *auto* is that which allows it to be altered or othered in repetition, and this is the very first guarantee of its "existence".<sup>71</sup>

The signature is thus thrown into a fury of other countersignatures, others countersigning. Derrida calls this the *mise-en-abyme* to recall the heraldic practice of representing or repeating the shield as a whole within the part of the same shield, thus repeating it again and again. (The obvious pun is with *abîme*, an abyss "proper", denoting its bottomless depths.) The term is also used to describe how the operations of reading and writing are already placed within the text, already referring to itself, one might say countersigning itself. But this only operates on the basis of the vital alterity of the countersignature.

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<sup>71</sup> Smith, *Derrida and Autobiography*, p. 100.

The structure of the placement in abyss [...] seems to me to repeat this scene every time: every time, but every time in a necessarily idiomatic fashion, the "differential quality" affecting the very form of the signature, this latter remaining *the other's*.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, even the most personal text, the most candid autobiography, the most self-referential post-modern nightmare is placed into the abyss of the other. Indeed, it is precisely those texts that seem to be most singular, such as those of Müller I will argue, which demand more than any other the countersignature of the other reader, interpreter or critic to affirm that not only did the *signatory* write, but that the signatory *wrote*. This is perhaps what Derrida might mean when he writes, "It is therefore in the abyss of the proper that we are going to try to recognise the impossible idiom of the signature."<sup>73</sup> It is when writing shows and represents itself as writing, or, which amounts to much the same thing, the act, date and author of writing is signed through the text, that the other is most forcibly called upon. To repeat and continue a passage quoted earlier:

I refer to myself, this is writing, *I* am a writing, this is *writing*- which excludes *nothing* since, when the placement in abyss succeeds, and is therefore decomposed and produces an event, it is the other, the thing as other, that signs.<sup>74</sup>

As noted before, however, writing can only function as such if it can operate in the "radical absence" of the addressee or writer him/herself.

And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, "death" or the possibility of the "death" of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark. [...] What holds for the addressee holds also, for the same reasons, for the sender or the producer.<sup>75</sup>

Writing can only function, the signature can only be signed and countersigned because of the possibility of its complete interruption - death: "The name is made to do without

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<sup>72</sup> Derrida, *Signsponge*, op. cit., p. 360.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 348.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 363.

<sup>75</sup> Derrida, *Signature Event Context*, op. cit., p. 316.

the life of the bearer and is therefore always somewhat the name of someone dead."<sup>76</sup>  
That is, the more singular the signature, the greater is the engagement with the inevitability of the end of the possibility of that signatory's writing.

[D]eath reveals the power of the name to the very extent that the name continues to name or to call what we call the bearer of the name, and who can no longer answer to or answer in and for his name. And since the possibility of this situation is revealed at death, we can infer that it does not wait for death, or that in *it* death does not wait for death [...], speaking and bearing his death each time it is pronounced in naming or calling, each time it is inscribed in a list, or a civil registry, or a signature.<sup>77</sup>

The literary text where the signature or style of the author is so displayed as to emphasise the singularity of the act of writing and of the author itself expresses similarly a strong sense of finitude - not only of the act of writing itself (that it is now over) but also that of the author. In the knowledge that the end will come, the literary text, which more than any other demands the signature of the author, is inhabited from the very beginning by decay and de-composition. As such it differs from some other discourses which seek to mask the date of their signature.

For what philosophy attempts, in its most fundamental mission, is a writing without a date, a writing that transcends the here-and-now of its coming-into-existence, and the heres-and-nows of the acts which confirm, extend, and renew that existence.<sup>78</sup>

The literary text, on the other hand, as a more openly signed and authored discourse, states the date of its inception, or alternatively the different dates of its origin through re-working. But in order to do so, the time of the signature must follow the same logic of iterability as the graphic flourish, as set out above. In order to proclaim a "now", the date must be able to be repeated. Once more, it is this iterability that allows re-working

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<sup>76</sup> Derrida, The Post Card: from Socrates to Freud and beyond, p. 39 quoted in Smith, Derrida and Autobiography, p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> Derrida, Mémoires: for Paul de Man, p. 49. (Also quoted in Smith, *ibid.*)

<sup>78</sup> Attridge in introduction to Shibboleth: for Paul Celan in Derrida, ed. Attridge; *op. cit.*, p. 371.

of a text over time, that allows the "I" to write as "I" again. The future must be able to repeat or cite the date of writing - the moment of writing and signing can only display its relative moment of uniqueness by having that uniqueness undermined, not least in the alterity of the signature of the same author at an *other* time. The subversion of uniqueness is its condition of possibility. It is thus, and only thus, that the birthday of the text can be celebrated. It is only because of its anniversary (that is, its repetition) of the signature that we can reach back to the uniqueness of the historical event of writing.

### *The Dated Text*

Derrida writes of the date and its singularity and of "the resistance which 'once' may offer thought"<sup>79</sup> and links it to the particularity of poetic discourse which more than any other addresses the other, the reader across time who reads on the anniversary, as it were, of the event of writing. The work of art as a singular piece only becomes legible as such if it allows this singularity to be undermined.

One must, while preserving its memory, speak of the date which already speaks of itself: the date, by its mere occurrence, by the inscription of a sign as memorandum, will have broken the silence of pure singularity. But to speak of it, one must also efface it, make it readable, audible, intelligible *beyond the pure singularity* of which it speaks.<sup>80</sup>

This legibility, the act of reading itself thus takes place not only in time (the time of narrative) but across time. The poetic text, in simultaneously asserting and foregoing its uniqueness, that is, by being dated, opens itself up for commemoration.

Assigning or consigning absolute singularity, they must mark themselves off simultaneously, *at one and the same time*, and from themselves, by the

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<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 373.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 382.

possibility of commemoration. In effect, they mark only insofar as their readability enunciates the possibility of a recurrence.<sup>81</sup>

But this takes place not just within any putative essence of poetry or a particular singular poem, but rather because the poem across time opens itself up to a reader: "No doubt that *despite* the date, in spite of its memory rooted in the singularity of an event, the poem speaks; to all and in general, to the other first of all."<sup>82</sup> The encounter with the other reader is the possibility of remembrance or commemoration, remembrance not only of the singularity of the work of art, but of the finitude of the act of writing and even writing generally itself.

A date [...] effaces itself in its very readability. Effacement is not something which befalls it like an accident; it affects neither its meaning nor its readability; it merges, on the contrary, with reading's very access to that which a date may still signify. But if readability effaces the date, the very thing which it offers for reading, this strange process will have begun with the very inscription of the date. The date must conceal within itself some stigma of singularity if it is to last longer - and this lasting is the poem - than that which it commemorates. And so what must be commemorated, *at once* gathered together and repeated, is, *at the same time*, the date's annihilation, a kind of nothing, or ash.<sup>83</sup>

This encounter with the date takes place of course in time on a date, an "effacement faced with another date, the one to which it speaks, the date of an other strangely wed or joined in the secrecy of an encounter with the same date."<sup>84</sup> Just as the signature and countersignature engage in a "coitus" of signing, so will the date call forth another date, and another, each of which are reduced to "a kind of nothing, or ash".

Both the writing of the signature and its dating are thus structured by the finitude, death or perhaps the ashes of those that write and read. Not only, as argued above, does the singularity of the signature, the here and now of artistic composition

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<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 381.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 396.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 382.

express finitude as such, but the dating of the art work and the attendant possibility of reading it in the future can only be undertaken *if time passes*, that is, if death inhabits the very structure of writing and reading. In addition, as will be argued below, this death must be that of the other. As far as the work of art is concerned, its identity as such is promised in the future, in death, through the death of the other.

### *The Problem of Time*

If reading and writing are structured by a form of temporality where the finitude of those acts of reading and writing must be emphasised, then it would be equally important to assert that such an attitude to time goes fundamentally against the grain of historical thought or philosophy on the subject. Considering that one could characterise the history of philosophy as one long battle with the problem of time, any summary of that history can only be regarded as brutal and inadequate. It is, however, important to sketch very briefly the contours of the attempt to deal with the intractable problem of time which runs through modern (continental) philosophy, starting with Nietzsche and ending, for my purposes at least, with Derrida.

Ever since the Greeks, philosophers have been confronted with the enigma of the identity of time as every descriptive method chosen always seemed to present difficulties and contradictions. If the present moment existed then it also could not exist because it was immediately a past or future moment. Yet no other identity seemed to present itself which did not conform to an idea of a series of "nows" - single discrete moments - following one after the other, thus allowing for the universal human conception of "the present" as well as the passage of time, the unfolding of the series of

"nows". This is less a social structure than one deeply embedded in our thinking about and intercourse with the world around us and is reflected in the language which we use to signpost our way through time. The words "once", "then" and "now" refer to a moment that can be grasped as such, where the first two merely describe a past and future "now".<sup>85</sup> Nothing can be conceived as being able to put a stop to this linear sequence of present moments, and hence the notion of infinitude takes shape, grounded in the privileging of the moment, the "now", which is present to the human subject. This basic concept of time might be organised into a number of oppositions (subjective/objective, existential/cosmic)<sup>86</sup> but these are merely different forms of reference to an underlying unity, a fundamental value as regards time: that its essence is the present moment, or rather that time can best be conceived as being determined by *presence* itself.

Derrida points out, however, that such a conception of a series of nows following on from each other is contradictory.

But if the present now were not annulled by the following now, it would coexist with it, which is impossible. [...] A now cannot coexist, as a current and present now, with another now as such. Coexistence has *meaning* only in the unity of a single, same now. [...] Not to be able to coexist with an other (the same as itself), with an other now, is not a predicate of the now, but its essence as presence.<sup>87</sup>

That is, the now cannot exist at the same time as other nows, but must also do so in order that the conception of time as a series of nows retains its coherence. This notion of time is experienced as the "possibility of the impossible".

This impossibility implies in its essence, in order to be what it is, that the other now, with which a now cannot coexist, is also in a certain way the same, is also a

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<sup>85</sup> See David Wood's discussion on Heidegger's description of the "ordinary" concept of time in The Deconstruction of Time, pp. 236-240. The German equivalents of the three signpost words are *dann*, *zuvor*, and *jetzt*.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Derrida, *Ousia and Grammé: Note on a Note from Being and Time*, Margins of Philosophy, pp. 54-55.

now as such, and that it coexists with that which cannot coexist with it. The impossibility of coexistence, of a certain *simultaneity* of the nonsimultaneous, in which the alterity and identity of the now are maintained together in the differentiated element of a certain same.<sup>88</sup>

The notion of co-implication of nows falls into contradiction, indeed this notion of time can only function on the basis of this form of contradiction. Derrida points out that it is not just a simple case of Aristotle or any other philosopher "getting it wrong". The fact is that any attempt to think time non-contradictorily can only be achieved on the basis of contradiction. Time is resistant to all human attempt to organise or conceive it, or in other words, time displays an excess over human organisation. As such, any attempt to conceive time will necessarily display itself as an *aporia* - the best endeavours of human judgement will find themselves exhausted.

Nietzsche made one of the first and most powerful moves to maintain and yet undermine the general and ordinary conception of time. In the idea of the eternal recurrence, where everything one does or undertakes is repeated eternally, the experience of nows and their succession can only be conceived as being structured by their ability to be, or rather necessity of being repeated. At least as far as the ethical demand of eternal recurrence is concerned, the now is only made possible by repetition. This is, of course, an argumentative move familiar to readers of Derrida. Just as in the case of the signature of the date, for any unit (be it phoneme, word, letter) to have meaning, it must be able to be repeated, but repetition is impossible without difference. Thus the possibility of the unit maintaining its identity, its "sameness" is dependent upon the fact of difference.

Absolute repetition is impossible in its possibility, for there can be no repetition without difference. The concepts of identity and difference form the precipitate

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<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 55.

of the metaphysical dissolution of an originary aporetic structure of repetition which Derrida calls "arché-writing" or the "trace".<sup>89</sup>

Any conception of time reveals an "impossible possibility", an aporia which is intractable. Thinking about time can only involve the experience of this aporia, the frustration of judgement, the *finitude* of that judgement and the signature with which it was made.

The absolutely vital step, which Derrida then takes, is to insist the following: that aporia does not put an end to judgement; it rather makes renewed judgement possible. The experience of aporia should not be thought of as running up against a brick wall or the co-presence of two contradictory statements but rather as the condition of possibility itself of judgment. When faced with the aporia of time, of law<sup>90</sup> or of the literary text, *one must judge*.

An aporia demands decision, one cannot remain within it; at the same time its essential irreducibility to the cut of a decision makes the decision which one makes contingent, to be made again.<sup>91</sup>

When faced with the originary repetition of the signature in the aporia of time, that is, with the impossible possibility of finitude (where the finite is only possible if it can be repeated), the critic or philosopher must judge. The aporia is, once again, the condition of possibility of judgement, not its end. It is only because the judgement or interpretation fails (that is, it does not reach the status of a final word on the matter) that judgement or interpretation can take place at all. Interpretation can only claim to be

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<sup>89</sup> Beardsworth, Richard, *Derrida & the Political*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>90</sup> The aporia of time and law, and time and law *as* aporia, govern the discussion and argument of Beardsworth's remarkable book. While he is concerned with attempting to define the "political" in Derrida as the recognition of the experience of aporia, this chapter deals more with the implications for literary criticism. That there might therefore be "political" implications (in the sense just described) for literary criticism should be clear.

<sup>91</sup> Beardsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

singular or original if it allows the possibility of repetition, otherwise it cannot be an act of judgement, dealing with that which makes possible the literary text - its signature.

In judging and interpreting, a certain amount of violence is always necessary. The judgement, in order to make any sense at all of the experience of aporia, or in order to say anything worth hearing, must exclude. Thus one can only do "justice" to the literary text, and to what is excluded in the act of critique, in the future and so the interpretation must always leave not only room for another interpretation, but more significantly, *time* for another. In sum, the response to the finitude of the literary text, (that is, to that which has been signed) is to produce the finite interpretation, itself dated and signed, proclaiming its relationship to the aporia of time and thus the future of interpretation itself.

This is the *promise* that interpretation of the literary text can give: that interpretation will always return in the future. Richard Beardsworth, in assembling Derrida's thoughts on this subject from across a whole range of his writings in the late 1980's and 1990's, summarises the promise as

the remainder of the necessary undecidability of thinking and action upon which any *act* of thought (or) language (philosophical, political, juridical, literary) will fall and fail to untie. This remainder is an absolute past (it cannot be recalled in any act, being this act's very possibility) which "gives" the "chance" of the future.<sup>22</sup>

The promise is thus, to a certain extent, a tribute to the undecidability of thinking which always leaves an excess upon which the future will feed. To put it another way, the interpretation must be originally repeatable and is thus always and already a commemoration of itself, not so much thanks to a circle of self-exclusivity, but because it allows the future commemoration to take place. This can only happen because each

judgement or interpretation is finite, each is made at a particular time and place and because *each can only decay*.

The decay of the judgement, signed and dated, is thus the condition for the promise of interpretation, but accordingly also its undoing. Finitude as such inhabits all intercourse with the literary text and, to repeat a passage from Derrida quoted earlier, "since the possibility of this situation is revealed at death, we can infer that it does not wait for death, or that in *it* death does not wait for death."<sup>92</sup> It is death itself, the most certain fact in my future, which makes possible the future itself. There is, however, an imperative corollary to this argument: the death which makes the future possible cannot be mine, since I cannot experience my death. The future of interpretation is guaranteed by the death of the other. This link of time and signature to death can be made more clear by examining the Heideggerian tradition in which Derrida is working when discussing the signature. This tradition will also prove to be important in any consideration of the link between signature and Jean-Luc Nancy's work on the community. We will then be closer to understanding the link in Müller's work between his signature and his writing of and in community.

#### *Heidegger, Time and Death*

Heidegger's thoughts on time and death as they are set out in *Sein und Zeit*, represent those which preoccupy Derrida and Nancy most of all in any discussion of signature and community.<sup>94</sup> Heidegger seeks to lay out the structures of being without falling into the

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>93</sup> see note 78 above.

<sup>94</sup> This brief summary is partly indebted to Beardsworth and Wood, *op. cit.* as well as Hubert. L. Dreyfus' *Being in the World*.

trap which has defined the history of philosophy. The being of an entity is not to be found outside in some universal category or inside the entity in an essence, but rather its relationship with the rest of the world *as* an entity. In other words, one might say that the being of an entity is to be sought in the way in which it "behaves" in the world, necessitating therefore an understanding of how all phenomena are articulated with each other in their being - an existential phenomenology. This "as" structure - an entity always and already behaves "as" something in the world - is, however, only possible given a particular understanding of time. Temporality is to be thought of as "ecstasis", that is, as originally coming out of itself in order that time may exist at all. Put simply, temporality has a structure of anticipating and remembering which allows any perception of the "present" to take place.

Zukunft, Gewesenheit, Gegenwart zeigen die phänomenalen Charaktere des "Auf-sich-zu", des "Zurück auf", des "Begegnenlassens von". [...] *Zeitlichkeit ist das ursprüngliche "Außer-sich" und für sich selbst*. Wir nennen daher die charakterisierten Phänomene Zukunft, Gewesenheit, Gegenwart die *Ekstasen* der Zeitlichkeit. Sie ist nicht vordem ein Seiendes, das erst aus *sich* austritt, sondern ihr Wesen ist Zeitigung in der Einheit der *Ekstasen*.<sup>95</sup>

The fact that we must constantly busy ourselves with objects which always operate *as* something means that we are constantly engaged in a certain teleology as regards these objects; they are, as it were, always a project and as such their "as-structure" can only be realised in the future.

Bei der Aufzählung der Ekstasen haben wir immer die Zukunft an erster Stelle genannt. Das soll anzeigen, daß die Zukunft in der ekstatischen Einheit der ursprünglichen und eigentlichen Zeitlichkeit einen Vorrang hat [...]. Die ursprüngliche und eigentliche Zeitlichkeit zeitigt sich aus der eigentlichen Zukunft, so zwar, daß sie zukünftig gewesen allererst die Gegenwart weckt. *Das primäre Phänomen der ursprünglichen und eigentlichen Zeitlichkeit ist die Zukunft*.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Heidegger, Martin, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 328-9.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p. 329.

Thus Heidegger can state with morbid clarity that our being concerned with objects with an "as-structure", termed *Sorge* (that is, the way in which we behave with all other objects in the world around us), is governed by that to which all projects lead, where all teleologies end: "Die Sorge ist Sein zum Tode. [...] Es [Das Seiende] hat nicht ein Ende, an dem es nur aufhört, sondern *existiert endlich*."<sup>97</sup>

This is an argument of fundamental importance. Derrida's "inference" that because my name will exist after my death, then my name must be inhabited by death is perhaps a leap that demands a large dose of generosity on the reader's part (or a complicit knowledge of the tradition with which Derrida is working). Heidegger, however, expresses the idea more clearly. One should not think of the human entity (*Dasein*) as something which progresses through life only to have it cut short by something external to it. *Dasein* rather "existiert endlich", it exists finitely,<sup>98</sup> its whole existence is governed, structured and made conceivable by the fact that it will one day be no more, that it will die.

Death as the future unifies the ecstasies of temporality and if death is grasped resolutely, that is, if the entity affirms and acts on the fact that it will die, the possibility of *Dasein* existing authentically, of grasping its "place" in the world is allowed.

Die hinsichtlich ihres zeitlichen Sinnes charakterisierte Entschlossenheit repräsentiert eine eigentliche Erschlossenheit des Daseins. Diese konstituiert ein Seiendes dergestalt, daß es existierend sein "Da" selbst sein kann.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 31: "Identität ist doch Fiktion, alles Lebendige verändert sich in jeder Sekunde. Die Verewigung des Augenblicks ist nach Lukács die Todsünde." "Verweile doch, du bist so schön" ist seine Formel für Dekadenz. Es ist die Herausnahme des Augenblicks aus dem Zeitablauf, der wesentlich Zerstörung bedeutet. Wer mit sich identisch ist, der kann sich einsargen lassen, der existiert nicht mehr, ist nicht mehr in Bewegung."

<sup>99</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, p. 335.

It is death which allows the present to have any temporal structure at all, but according to Heidegger Dasein must recognise and resolutely grasp its death as its absolute limit in order for this process of temporalisation to occur at all. For Heidegger, my death must be seen, by me, as my ownmost possibility, that which allows me to exist finitely. This seems to run into a contradiction, however. If my death is only my own, if only I undergo it, it must be absolutely singular, only occurring once. If that is the case then any attempt to represent my death to myself (to present it to myself more than once) in order to grasp it resolutely must be self-defeating. Neither can I experience my death as such, for I will be dead and thus obviously not able to experience anything. This would thus throw into doubt the ability of Dasein to regard death *as* its ownmost possibility; the very "as-structure" of death - that death can be seen *as* death is threatened and along with it the opportunity for Dasein to act authentically in relation to death and thus temporality.

Derrida sees Heidegger as having attempted to close the aporia of time and death by allowing death to appear "as such".

Heidegger would thus say that for *Dasein* impossibility as death - the impossibility of death, the impossibility of the existence whose name is "death" - can appear as such and announce itself [...]. And it is only in the act of authentic, resolute, determinate, and decided assumption by which *Dasein* would take upon itself the possibility of this impossibility that the aporia *as such* would announce itself *as such* and purely to *Dasein* as its most proper possibility [...].<sup>100</sup>

This possibility of the aporia of death appearing as such (that is, representable as aporia and thus not as aporia anymore at all) would mean that death appears *as* death to Dasein. It has, however, already been established that my death cannot appear as such if

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<sup>100</sup> Derrida, *Aporias*, pp. 74-5.

it is to be my death. The only deaths that can appear are those of others that I have witnessed or *miterlebt*.

[M]an as *Dasein*, never has a relation to death as such, but only to perishing, to demising, and to the death of the other, who is not the other. The death of the other thus becomes again "first," always first. [...] The death of the other, this death of the other in "me", is fundamentally the only death that is named in the syntagm "my death," with all the consequences that one can draw from this.<sup>101</sup>

These consequences include the fact that that which would seem most improper to me - someone else's death - is that which makes my death conceivable and which allows me to live finitely, perceiving my existence as demise and decay: "From the most originary inside of its possibility, the proper of *Dasein* becomes from then on contaminated, parasited, and divided by the most improper."<sup>102</sup> Similarly, that which seems only mine, my death, cannot belong to me in any strict sense since it only has meaning through its effect on, and interpretation by others.<sup>103</sup>

#### *Nancy, Death and the Community*

The fact that death must be seen as an irredeemable limit, but that also this death can only be recognised or experienced through the death of someone else leads Jean-Luc Nancy to investigate its political-philosophical consequences in *The Inoperative Community*. Nancy's work will provide the means to understand how Müller's texts are situated in the community through his signature as well as how that community is itself defined in a singular and finite way.

Working out from the failure of Eastern Bloc communism to live up to its own claims of representing historical progress, Nancy focuses on the idea of the "closure" of

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p. 76.

philosophy and metaphysics first to be found in Heidegger and adopted by Derrida. The closure of philosophy does not mean its end, but rather that state where philosophy is in a constant state of closure, where the limit of traditional metaphysics has been reached and where one could only continue writing by transgressing that limit. However, because philosophy and thought itself are determined by that metaphysics, a complete transgression, a destruction of the limit, cannot bring about a "new" philosophy, but would rather make philosophical thought, as philosophy, impossible. Instead one must think on that limit, in the closure, transgressing the limit of metaphysics while remaining "merely" a transgression because of the necessity of returning within the limit. Similarly, a "new" philosophy and economics of progress and innovation has not been found to supplant the failure of the programme of Marxism-Leninism, (indeed any development of theory worked out in the closure of metaphysics would have to resist labelling itself as "new") and thus the social collective and any conception of its politics must be rethought away from any notion of transcendence (such as progress of the "new") and instead within the limits of finitude. Nancy attempts to do this by arguing that finitude can only be thought within a concept of community which does not present itself as goal, end of history or archaic origin. This aporetic concept of community, on the other hand, simultaneously can only be experienced through the finitude, in the death, of the other.

The human subject, argues Nancy, cannot find its identity within itself. Death brings the subject out of itself; death makes the subject, like time in Heidegger, *ecstatic*.

Death irremediably exceeds the resources of a metaphysics of the subject, [...] the phantasm of a dead man who says "I am dead" – *ego sum mortuus*. If the I

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>103</sup> See discussion in Chapter Three on the death of Philoktet.

cannot say that it is dead, if the *I* disappears in effect in *its* death, in that death that is precisely what is most proper to it and most inalienably its own, it is because the *I* is something other than a subject.<sup>104</sup>

As also argued by Derrida, Nancy insists that the only possibility of witnessing "my" death is at the death-bed of the other, when it is not mine. The experience of my finitude, of my living finitely, that is, of what I am, is only effected by the other and through the other. I am, in the only sense there is of "to be" only in the other." If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can subsist only *outside itself*.<sup>105</sup> Thus, when the only possibility of representing my death, the limit of my existence, is through the other, the possibility of self-presence and full self-consciousness is lost. Each person shares the loss of this possibility with his/her other; but what is shared is a singularity and finitude and an inability to be most immanent to what ought to be most proper to the subject: his or her death. The basis of this sharing is the sundering of the human subject. I not only share the *fact* of being sundered (that is, the fact that my identity is to be sought in the other) but sharing itself, the fact of having something in common with others necessarily sunders me *and* makes me singular.<sup>106</sup> The sharing of which Nancy writes is therefore not merely one of attributes but is also a dynamic which allows the human subject to be thought of as a singular finite being whose identity must be thought of as always being deferred onto an other.

These singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather *spaced*, by the sharing that makes them *others*, [...] engulfed in the ecstasy of sharing.

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<sup>104</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 14.

<sup>105</sup> Bataille, Georges, *Oeuvre Complètes*, 7:245-6, quoted in Nancy, *ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>106</sup> French, German and Welsh, amongst others, express this linguistic twist in *partage*, *teilen*, and *rhannu* respectively. In English, as Andrew Benjamin has suggested (in personal discussion), the interdependency of sharing and splitting/sundering can be expressed through the play of meaning in "apart" and "a part".

The similitude of the like-being is made in the encounter of "beings toward the end" that this end, *their* end, in each case "mine" (or "yours") assimilates and separates in the same limit, at which or on which they compare.<sup>107</sup>

The consciousness and communication of this "ecstasy", an ecstasy which is also loss (of pure self-consciousness or alternatively the experience of loss through the death and subsequent absence of the other), can only be thought and experienced in community. Community is thus the condition of possibility of the human subject but simultaneously undermines that subject's claim to autonomy and ontological sovereignty over others. "The relation (community) is, if it *is*, nothing other than what undoes, in its very principle – and at its closure or on its limit – the autarchy of absolute immanence."<sup>108</sup>

Community ruptures the absolute subject who would be immanent to the world and to itself in that the thought of the absolute betrays its own condition of possibility:

The absolute must be the absolute of its own absoluteness or not at all. In other words: to be absolutely alone, it is not enough that I be so; I must also be alone being alone – and this is of course contradictory. The logic of the absolute violates the absolute.<sup>109</sup>

If then we experience community through the "failure" of the absolute and the impossibility of immanence to the world and to others or of complete communion with them, then the concept of community itself shows a resistance to being held as an object of knowledge. For if the impossible possibility of community is revealed by the death of the other which remains an irredeemable excess, then it is equally impossible to produce a state of community which is equal and adequate to the death of the other. We can never put community "to work" or realise it in some future economy or imagine that it ever existed in some mythic past of nostalgia. It is always to come, always in decay.

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<sup>107</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc, , op. cit., pp. 25 & 33.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*

Perhaps we should not seek a work or concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt another *praxis* of discourse and community.<sup>110</sup>

To answer to the demand of community, something other than theoretical discourse is needed, precisely because the experience of community is one of radical finitude, or (as seen in Heidegger and Derrida) of time as *aporia*. Community can thus only be experienced in a manner which treats the *aporia* of community *aporetically*, unlike Heidegger's treatment of death. This involves, along with other problems, recognising that community "is" simply a sum and condition of a whole host of singular articulations which cannot be totalised into a whole and therefore community can only be experienced and accounted for in finite, singular moments in time and space. Thus while the death of the other might be described as the truth of community and vice versa in that both reveal themselves in each other, the radical finitude which inhabits both can only be experienced in their singular articulations or products. In other words, they can only be experienced finitely. When Nancy mentions in a footnote<sup>111</sup> that the affirmation of community which he engages in through his work is not based in optimism but the *truth* of the experience of the limits of existence, he does not simply seek to postulate the irrevocability of his philosophy, but rather emphasise the problem that the truth of community will never be grasped and turned into a project. If the truth of community is finitude, *then this can only be experienced finitely* – in a moment which passes and decays, and by subjects who affirm their own mortality, experienced through the death of the other. In order to raise the rigour of this argument to the next degree, it must then

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<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25-6.

<sup>111</sup> "There is perhaps no better testimony to this essential, archi-essential resistance of the community – whose affirmation does not stem from any "optimism" but from truth and whose truth stems from the

be insisted upon that the experience of the death of the other is not be thought of as a universal totalisable condition, but as the finite experience of the death of a *particular* other. If community and the death of the other, as the non-grounding ground of human culture must be experienced in order to understand and act (politically) upon that culture, then this can only be accomplished by affirming this finite experience as an infinite task, as one which can never reach its goal. The political community, for Nancy, could then be woven from experiences which regard themselves as adequate to the trace of the death of the other in that they see that death as non-totalisable, non-programmatic and utterly excessive. In other words, adequacy to the problem of death is witnessed through laying bare one's inadequacy in representing death itself.

A community [...] is the presentation of the finitude and the *irredeemable* excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth, and only the community can present me my birth, and along with it the impossibility of my reliving it, as well as the impossibility of my crossing over into my death.<sup>112</sup>

The attempt to redeem, sublimate and *use* death is most often expressed in the interpretation of a death as justified, be it in the interests of a state or in the service of a past or future idea of community:

no dialectic, no salvation leads these deaths to any other immanence than that of...death (cessation, or decomposition, which forms only the parody or reverse of immanence).<sup>113</sup>

History provides us with innumerable instances of citizens who have imagined, or been told, that their lives and deaths were the sacrifice either for the community that would come in the future or for the lost originary community that needs to be re-established. In the case of the latter, as Nancy himself points out, Nazi ideology provides the worst

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experience of limits – than Robert Anselme's account of his captivity in a Nazi concentration camp." *ibid.*, note 31, p. 158.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

example of a society where those who did not conform to the idea of pure, racially prelapsarian community of the past – the Aryan nation – were sacrificed as victims whose deaths were understood as a necessity, simply understood, for the establishment of a pure community which would not be structured by the loss and contradiction or racial and genetic impurity. In the Stalinist totalitarian states, on the other hand, where the legitimacy of those states was based upon the deaths that were the price for their existence (for example, those who died in the anti-fascist struggle in order to found the GDR) all deaths in the future are seen as tribute to those *founding* deaths for the benefit of the originary community *to come*, where humans are returned to their species-being. In their difference and disparate degrees of obscenity, such societies hold one thing in common – the community and death of the other are immanent to, that is, are present to the temporal present itself. Death *as* death is recaptured and each single death becomes simply the *symbol* of death as purposeful death. Singular deaths therefore do not and cannot undergo reinterpretation, they cannot be regarded finitely. Instead, death, the limit of finitude, becomes the very means for transcendence of the present moment, for interpretation in the future is deemed unnecessary or a betrayal of the incontrovertible meaning of death. The present is thus given precedence over the future through its capture of death (a problem that sheds light on the contradiction of Heidegger's privileging of the future in the ecstasis of time and his insistence on the authenticity of *Dasein* grasping its death *as* death). Nancy, on the other hand, seeks to guarantee the future, perhaps to *promise* it, through the insistence on the opacity of mine and the other's death to a final interpretation that would ground community. In other words, community demands a constant re-interpretation of itself through the recognition of the

death of the other as singular.<sup>114</sup> That singularity, according to Derrida, can only be understood as being so because of its iterability, its ability to be repeated and re-interpreted in the future. The future is thus guaranteed by remembrance of the past, not as a homogenous block, but of particular victims from a time that has been, remembered from a particular time *now*. This form of remembrance will form the bedrock of Müller's later work (as discussed in Chapter Three): firstly of victims of social and economic conditions in the community, and secondly, of the victims of theatrical representation.

Community, for Nancy, is made up of finite, singular subjects – who die. That they each die their own death means that a communion and unity of and in community is not possible, but that impossibility of communion is the very possibility of community itself. Some political systems seek to replace that loss by regarding deaths as the necessary sacrifice to regain communion, but as just argued, that loss *is* community in the first place. Thus, the sacrifice that is made in Nancy's community is the particular death of the other that will be remembered in the future, rather than the sacrifice as the symbol of the one form of death that would re-establish communion. In the latter, the death of the other remains trapped in its identity with the present, in the former the death of the other provides and guarantees the future.<sup>115</sup> What will increasingly concern Müller, in this respect, is *theatre's* culpability in this sacrifice.

As sketched out above, the communication of singularity and finitude, or the interpretation of community and the death of the other cannot take the form of

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 31: "Was man braucht, ist Zukunft und nicht die Ewigkeit des Augenblicks. Man muß die Toten ausgraben, wieder und wieder, denn nur aus ihnen kann man Zukunft beziehen."

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Müller, *ibid*: "Nekrophilie ist Liebe zur Zukunft. Man muß die Anwesenheit der Toten als Dialogpartner oder Dialogstörer akzeptieren – Zukunft entsteht allein aus dem Dialog mit den Toten."

knowledge. They are, for Nancy as for Bataille,<sup>116</sup> communicated through a range of social practices which resist representing community as an object of a project, and indeed actively undermine such tendencies through their engagement with finitude and loss. These practices do not *achieve* anything in the sense of being useful, they are instead an exercise in an expenditure of energy for which no return is sought or gained. They re-enact and re-experience that loss which Nancy has already established to be at the heart of a community of split and sharing subjects.<sup>117</sup> In past times, most of these practices were linked to religious and sacred ceremonies, whose purpose (retrospectively and anthropologically speaking) was to enact a particular theatre where the death of the other and the shared and sundered subject was experienced. While the external power represented in such ceremonies (usually a supernatural deity) was then accorded the position of ground of the community, the collapse and death of God succeeded only in transferring the ground of community from God to Man or *Geist*. With such a movement, a hint of the ineffable nature of that which "unworks" community – in other words, of that which communicates the finitude of human existence – is lost as the divine becomes human. Nancy, however, rethinks the nature of the divine as being what is,

only inasmuch as it is removed from immanence, or withdrawn from it [...]. Perhaps we will come to see that community, love, death, freedom, singularity are names for the "divine" not just because they substitute for it – and neither sublimate nor resuscitate it under another form – but equally because this substitution is in no way anthropomorphic or anthropocentric and gives way to no becoming-human of the "divine". Community henceforth constitutes the limit of the human as well as of the divine.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> See Chapter Two for a fuller discussion on Bataille and the nature of transgression.

<sup>117</sup> See note 105 above.

<sup>118</sup> Nancy, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

Such names are whispered in the sacred practices which communicate the "passion of singularity", but remain only approximations to those archē-traces of subjectivity whose effects can only be witnessed and experienced rather than being discovered themselves.

Nancy goes on to mention explicitly literature as one of these practices where such communication takes place.<sup>119</sup> References to the "passion" of singularity - of its shared and sundered subjectivity - emphasise its narrative nature, its finite quality which can only be experienced in its singular articulations, that is, in particular passions. Each passion is signed and dated and literature allows a certain correspondance with this trace of finitude by being itself necessarily a signed, dated and written text. Ironically, literature's power to interrupt and undermine the homogeneity of communion has been itself weakened by one of the most enduring myths of artistic creation, that author and text are tied together in a symbolic relationship.<sup>120</sup> As I have argued, Derrida's writings on signature aim to re-frame this relationship in such a way as to emphasise the slackening grip of the author over his/her text precisely through the affirmation of that author's singularity. Nancy takes a similar step when describing a possible *modus inoperandi* for what he terms "literary communism".

What is in fact involved is the following: that there is an inscription of the communitarian exposition, and that this exposition, as such, can only be inscribed, or can only be offered by way of an inscription. [...] While lover's speech seeks a duration for their joy that joy eludes, "writing", in this sense, would on the contrary *inscribe* the collective and social duration of time in the instant of communication, in the sharing. [...] But what is inscribed, and what passes to the limit in inscribing itself, exposes and communicates itself (instead of trying to accomplish a meaning, like speech): what is shared is the unworking of works.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseit der Nation*, p. 23: "Die gesamte Geschichte und Politik reduziert sich auf die Verdrängung der Sterblichkeit. Kunst aber stammt aus und wurzelt in der Kommunikation mit dem Tod und den Toten. Es geht darum, daß die Toten einen Platz bekommen. Das ist eigentlich Kultur."

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Müller, *ibid.*, p. 24: "Gibt es diese Einheit, dann ist das das Ende der Kunst: Oder aber es geht darum, die Differenz von Kunst und Leben zu behaupten, zu artikulieren und auszubauen."

<sup>121</sup> Nancy, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

Literature, like love, cannot be totalised without losing its *literary* or *lovely* quality. Both literature and love are moments of radical loss, over in a moment of ecstasy – in both senses – in that it is finite and exists finitely, and it brings the subject out of him/herself into community. This moment of ecstasy, of finite loss is what we share with others and what thereby makes us singular. Literature and love, finally, are moments where that singularity and sharing, where signature and community, most powerfully come to pass: in my reading the signature of a particular other, or in declaring "I love you" to the particular lover.

#### *The Task of Literary Critique*

Community and signature thus demonstrate the same concerns, indeed the one cannot be thought without the other. Both are intimately concerned with the finitude of the human condition, but each can only be thought aporetically. There will never be a solution to the aporia of community and signature, grounded as both are in the aporia of time. Both signature and community are always to come, always return in the future, always promise themselves again: signature through its structure of originary repetition (it only is what it is if it can be repeated indefinitely in the future) and community through its similar inability to be realised. If both can only be thought aporetically then the only relationship one has to them is to "perishing, to demising, and to the death of the other".<sup>122</sup> Both return judgement and in promising the future right to judge, promise also the maintenance of the political and the democratic, *providing that they are thought aporetically.*

For literary critique<sup>123</sup> the judgement that it returns on a text is that of a signature in community, or a text which "writes" community, and given the concerns of both signature and community outlined above, it is through the judgement of this writing that the aporetic relationship to the other can be revealed. In other words, one of the defining constitutive relations of the human subject, and thus what especially concerns us here, of the *writing* subject as well, is to the death of the other. It is through this relation that the finitude of the human condition (that time passes and that one will die) can be experienced. However, this can only be experienced aporetically, that is, in community. Any attempt to represent the aporia or claim it as absolutely unrepresentable simply succeeds in destroying it, as indeed was the result of Heidegger's presentation of death as graspable by Dasein. The alterity of the other's death, even if it is constitutive of my possibility of conceiving my finitude, must remain other. Not only must the other who dies remain other, but its otherness itself must similarly be treated as resistant to subsumption by the ego. The other and its quality of otherness must remain impenetrable, otherwise the critic or philosopher is doomed to replace aporia with "piety":

Just as one will lose the aporia if one recognizes it, so will one lose it if one does not recognize it. One's relation to aporia must consequently be *itself* aporetic, if the experience of aporia is to remain an impossible one. Otherwise one will end up as much in the piety of the "other" as in the piety of "being".<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See note 102 above.

<sup>123</sup> As will become clear in the following discussion on Benjamin, there is perhaps a difference which can be drawn between commonplace notions of literary commentary and Benjamin's notion of critique. Although I have used criticism and critique interchangeably up until now, an incorporation of Benjamin into my argument might suggest the term "critique" as more suitable, from now on, in describing that operation which I argue literary criticism should become and whose characteristics I hope to set out in this chapter.

<sup>124</sup> Beardsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

The consequences of such thought for literary criticism are immense. In order to take seriously the problem of signature - *that a work has been written at all* - the critic must engage him/herself with the finitude not only of the work of art, but of the work of criticism as well. This in turn would demand an engagement with the literary text which does not subsume the finitude of the life of the work (and its criticism) under a present critical act which produces a symbol of the essence of the text. It must instead, in simple terms, explain the effects of a text on the contemporary reader. In other words, criticism which takes into account the aporia of time will not be authored by an ego which attempts to write or critique without a signature. Instead, the excess of any critical judgement must remain its very condition of possibility, in turn undermining any claim that the critic might lay to an absolute judgement on what the work is "about". It will be my contention later in this introduction that philosophy itself, in its treatment of literature, sometimes falls into this trap. Literary critique, on the other hand, if it is to treat the work of art as signed writing must regard what is left over in its own judgement on the literary text as providing the space for the future of criticism. That the critic countersigns the work of art is only possible through the delay of this countersignature - it will only have any meaning when it can be countersigned in turn. This delay is the decay, and promise, of the work of art and of literary critique.

This demand on literary critique is made even more acute when faced with the work of art which attempts to open up judgement to itself, introducing the audience to the impossible experience of the work of art.<sup>125</sup> In Müller, this endeavour to prevent a

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<sup>125</sup> This "opening-up" of the work of art or presentation of itself as *signed* ends up ironically in the realisation that such a work presents itself as "in closure" (see discussion of Nancy above), that is, constantly demanding re-interpretation, a transgression and re-establishment of its limits. This in turn reflects the simple fact that the closure of philosophy finds itself thus because of the inability of the history of metaphysics to deal with the aporia of singularity and generality, once again of finitude and of

homogenisation of judgement leads, in the early 1960's, to the introduction of allegory in his work in the form of reworkings of classical drama. It will be argued in Chapter 3 that allegory is particularly well suited to any engagement with the problems of finitude and the aporia of time. Allegorical works are particularly subject to signature, they are particular acts of writing and thus subject to decay. The allegorisation of an object works much like signature, introducing that object to the work of narrative, history and decay.

In his later works, in particular the avant-garde theatre of the 1970's and 1980's, Müller introduces autobiographical elements with abandon and any exercise in tracing the work of signature in these texts is thus immediately made a simpler task. As argued above, the allegorical works will also be seen to be structured by the operation of signature which opens up the reception of the play to the demands of finitude. How can, however, the earlier works be seen as signed, *other than through claiming, qua philosophy*, that those works, as all works, are subject to the logic of signature? Clearly, if one agrees with Derrida, one can state that all writing is structured by this logic of signature. This thesis seeks to assert, however, that some writing opens itself up to such critique, with or without the intention of the author. The former is the object of philosophy, the latter the task of literary critique. Müller's early works demonstrate, I will argue, the work of signature as strongly as the later allegorical and avant-garde theatre, but in so doing, I will not attempt to make a straightforward continuity claim about the development of Müller's oeuvre. In fact, the signature so forcibly inscribed in

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time. This in turn might lead us onto a discussion (for which there is no room here) on how far philosophy can remain philosophy (dealing with the problems of knowledge and existence) if it remains and writes like philosophy. For to do so would mean an avoidance of *the* philosophical problem of the epoch. Philosophy re-instates itself by transgressing its limits; literary critique is just one such transgression.

the later works is only recognisable in their earlier counterparts through the passage of time, through the fact that these works are, in both senses, dated. Firstly, they are a child of their time, dealing with issues of topical relevance in the late 1950's, but they are also anachronistic in the sense that the *Weltanschauung* which emerges through these plays is, especially since the collapse of the Communist Bloc in 1989, increasingly abstruse and bewildering. Müller's later works in comparison offer themselves up to the critic as works of allegory in a reasonably straightforward way, despite their opacity. The earlier works, however, offer themselves up because of the passing of time between the moment of their writing and the moment of their critique.<sup>126</sup>

The critic could take these earlier plays as his/her object and proclaim them as demonstrating the undecideability of writing. Somehow, somewhere contradictions will be found in the text by Deconstruction which could be seen to undermine that text's pretence of unity. This would be, however, to make these plays an example or *symbol* of an economy of writing, thus reneging on the promise of signature, that is, its ability to return originally and eternally in the flurry of countersignatures. Instead, literary criticism must take as its object the decay of the work of art as seen from now, the present. If literary criticism is to deal with literature rather than a series of distilled philosophical ideas it must itself write as signature. Each thesis must thus only be possible at the time of writing and this present work can be no exception. Literary criticism is a collision of a "then" of writing which undergoes a process of decay together with the "now" of reading which in turn will also become an object which can be allegorised, or understood as having taken place in time.

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. Müller, *Verabschiedung des Lehrstücks*, Material, p. 40: "Was bleibt: einsame Texte, die auf Geschichte warten."

*Benjamin and the Task of Literary Critique*

The dynamics of this situation – of reading now the works signed by Müller – can perhaps best be understood by reference to Walter Benjamin's work on the role and task of literary critique. Benjamin was concerned with this problem throughout his writing life, but the most cogent formulations of his developing ideas appear in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften* and *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, as well as in fragments of "Konvolut N" of *Passagenwerk* and *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*.

The first of these is a long and difficult essay, often overlooked in the English-speaking world due to its never having been translated until very recently.<sup>127</sup> Benjamin's intention in the piece is to debunk canonical notions of authorship, not least the mythical presentation of Goethe as demi-god and genius, but also to examine the thoroughly mythical status of *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* itself through its portrayal of marriage, guilt and fate. What is also discussed, however, is the nature of the critical activity itself and how true critique is seen to differ from mere commentary on a text.

Benjamin sets out in the very first paragraph the difference between critique and commentary: "Die Kritik sucht den Wahrheitsgehalt eines Kunstwerkes, der Kommentar seinen Sachgehalt."<sup>128</sup> The material content of the work of art might be described as that which ties and dates the work to a particular moment in the past. The work of art uses material and resources from its own time in order to produce the finished piece; the material content of the work thus represents the contemporary building blocks of the

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<sup>127</sup> *Goethe's Elective Affinities* in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*. Vol.1 ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. Jennings' own book on Benjamin, together with Rainer Nägele's *Theater, Theory, Speculation* are exceptions to this dearth of analysis.

<sup>128</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften* in *Gesammelte Schriften*. I,1, p. 125.

work of art – *die Realien*. One might give as examples the interior decor and the familial dynamics of the Jewish family home in Kafka's *Die Verwandlung*; the politics of 19th century democratic nationalism and the incomplete Kölner Dom in Heine's *Deutschland, ein Wintermärchen*; or the processes of collectivisation and nationalisation in the early days of the GDR in Müller's *Die Umsiedlerin*. The truth content, on the other hand, might be best described as that which shines through due to the work of the critic. It is vital to note from the outset that the truth content of the work of art cannot be presented or named as the result of the critical process for it always remains veiled through the passage of time from the work's genesis.<sup>129</sup>

The material content of the work is bound together with the truth content at the work's inception. With the passage of time, however, the material content of a work becomes clearer to the critic, the truth content more hidden.

Das Verhältnis der beiden bestimmt jenes Grundgesetz des Schrifttums, demzufolge der Wahrheitsgehalt eines Werkes, je bedeutender es ist, desto unscheinbarer und inniger an seinen Sachgehalt gebunden ist.<sup>130</sup>

It is this veiled nature of the truth content which allows its very existence to be posited - the critic only knows of it because it is hidden. But the fact that it is veiled also means that the truth content of a work can only be sought, or be experienced (it can never be seen because this would involve the lifting of the veil thus destroying the essence of truth as veiled) through the work of critique. If the truth content of the work, in the "scintillation of a constellation"<sup>131</sup> bursts through at a particular time – *the time of the signature of critique*, then it is almost as if by accident. As Benjamin expresses it elsewhere

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Müller, *Mich interessiert der Fall Althusser*, *Rotwelsch*, p. 177: "In gewisser Weise ist ja Kunst eine blinde Praxis. Ich sehe da eine Möglichkeit."

<sup>130</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, op. cit, p. 125.

Jede Gegenwart ist durch diejenigen Bilder bestimmt, die mit ihr synchronistisch sind: jedes Jetzt ist das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit. In ihm ist die Wahrheit mit Zeit bis zum Zerspringen geladen. (Dies Zerspringen, nichts anderes, ist der Tod der Intentio, der also mit der Geburt der echten historischen Zeit, der Zeit der Wahrheit, zusammenfällt.)<sup>132</sup>

Benjamin had emphasised this idea of truth as an intentionless state in his earlier works, notably *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*:

Die Wahrheit, vergegenwärtigt im Reigen der dargestellten Ideen, entgeht jeder wie immer gearteten Projektion in den Erkenntnisbereich. Erkenntnis ist ein Haben. Ihr Gegenstand selbst bestimmt sich dadurch, daß er im Bewußtsein – und sei es tranzendental – innegehabt werden muß. Ihm bleibt der Besitzcharakter. Diesem Besitztum ist Darstellung sekundär. Es existiert nicht bereits als ein Sich-Darstellendes. Gerade dies aber gilt von der Wahrheit. [...] Erkenntnis ist erfragbar, nicht aber die Wahrheit.<sup>133</sup>

Wahrheit tritt nie in eine Relation und insbesondere in keine intentionale. Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis als ein in der Begriffsintention bestimmter ist nicht die Wahrheit. Die Wahrheit ist ein aus Ideen gebildetes intentionsloses Sein. Das ihr gemäße Verhalten ist demnach nicht ein Meinen im Erkennen, sondern ein in sie Eingehen und Verschwinden. Die Wahrheit ist der Tod der Intention.<sup>134</sup>

Truth, or rather the experience of it, might thus be thought of as a transgression of knowledge.<sup>135</sup> The truth content of the work is experienced only as the excess of a transgressive moment of criticism. The moment of excess only comes to pass in the constellation of signatures that is literary critique.

It is only the critic and historian in later years who, with the passing of time, are able to achieve this moment. The separation of material and truth content cannot be witnessed by the critic or artist who live at the same time as the genesis of the work of art.

Was der Dichter als seine Technik bewußt hat, was auch schon der zeitgenössischen Kritik grundsätzlich erkennbar als solche, berührt zwar die

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<sup>131</sup> Nägele op. cit., p. 204.

<sup>132</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk (Konvolut N)* in *Gesammelte Schriften* V, 1 & 2, p. 578.

<sup>133</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 1, p. 209.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>135</sup> See also Chapter Two and the discussion on Georges Bataille's use of the notion of transgression.

Realien im Sachgehalt, bildet aber die Grenze gegen ihre Wahrheitsgehalt, der weder dem Dichter noch der Kritik seiner Tage restlos bewußt sein kann.<sup>136</sup>

It is thus the *finitude* of the work of art which brings about the bifurcation of truth and material content. United at their origin in a relationship akin to a symbol, where truth is immersed in the subject matter, their departure from each other through time allows the work of art to be seen as an allegorical object. The passing of time allows the critic to establish whether the allegorisation of the work of art is due simply to the fact that all works of art undergo time and thus can be used to express the *fact* of allegory or whether the experience of the truth content of the work of art is such that a *particular* allegorisation of the work of art is released. The difference expressed in these alternatives is, once more, that of the philosophical and literary critical treatment of the work of art. With the first, that truth content which can be experienced is dependent upon the anachronism of the material content. The *Realien* stand out for the present-day reader and the work of critique will only be able to release such truth content as those *Realien* allow, in other words the experience of the truth content of this particular work of art will be little more than the experience of the anachronism of the material content.<sup>137</sup> The work of art becomes little more than a historical curio, displaying certain facts which can, years later, be allegorised, if so desired. The second possibility portrays the work of art as allowing a form of experience of its material content thanks to the importance of its truth content. The *Realien* only maintain any significance due to the power of the truth content, which in its ability to "speak" to the readers of later

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<sup>136</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften* op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>137</sup> Michael Beddow (in personal discussion) has explained the difference by suggesting that the paradigm of such an anachronistic work is Ian Fleming's James Bond novels where any experience of the work of art is totally dependent on the communication of the *Realien*.

generations, allows those readers to establish a connection, a "correspondance" to the material content of the work of art. The basic *critical* question is thus, for Benjamin,

ob der Schein des Wahrheitsgehaltes dem Sachgehalt oder das Leben des Sachgehaltes, dem Wahrheitsgehalt zu verdanken sei. Denn indem sie im Werk auseinandertreten, entscheiden sie über seine Unsterblichkeit. In diesem Sinne bereitet die Geschichte der Werke ihre Kritik vor und daher vermehrt die historische Distanz deren Gewalt.<sup>138</sup>

Benjamin is thus setting out nothing less than the difference between great and less meaningful art. The challenge for literary critique is to respond in such a way that the experience of the truth content (the meeting of signatures of then and now) enlivens the material content. That this possibility exists is due to the history of reception of the work, but is also thanks to circumstances of its composition. The great work allows the context in which it was written to be communicated because it deals with more than just simply this communication of context.<sup>139</sup> It is rather the intercourse of a particular artist with his/her environment – and the fact that this particular intercourse itself becomes signed in the work – that allows great art to produce experiences of thundering profundity. The statements of universal importance which great works of art have traditionally been seen as producing can only come to pass through the particular signature of the work and the meeting of this signature with that of the critic in later years. As such, one might say that it is the very finitude of the work of art, the mortality of its signature which allows it to live on. Those works which are nothing more than an immortal documentation will be the ones to sink into obscurity and the nothingness of not being read.

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<sup>138</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandschaften*, op. cit., p., p. 125-6.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jetzt sind eher die infernalischen Aspekte bei Benjamin wichtig, Aber ein Sturm weht von Paradies her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin*, p. 356: "Je planer, verständlicher ein Text ist desto weniger erzählt er über die Gegenwart. Und je schwieriger, je dichter ein Text ist, desto mehr Information enthält er. Die muß man herausholen, nur dadurch wird es Erfahrung."

The problem for the philosophical treatment of the work of art is whether it automatically consigns literature or other art to this obscurity; whether by not dealing with the fundamentally finite nature of the work of art philosophy seeks to symbolise a work as either representing a particular idea or alternatively treats the work as expressing the fact of allegorisation. For philosophy to consider the question as to whether the work of art offers itself up - through its signature and history of reception - might be to enter a realm that can be no use to the dominant tradition of philosophy at all. Not only would it have to deal with the particularity of signature which authorship consists of, but it would also be obliged to recognise that the work of art can only exist through a series of critical acts through the ages, that is, through another host of signatures. Philosophy would suddenly have to become finite.

The work of art, as signed and finite, already establishes an afterlife for itself, providing a space in which the critic can work, and as discussed above the critic needs to wonder what form this takes, be it that of the death of the "immortal" work, or the eternal decay and return of its finite counterpart. This historical afterlife "is" the work through the countless meetings with readers, historians and critics down the ages.

Geschichtliches "Verstehen" ist grundsätzlich als ein Nachleben des Verstandnen zu fassen und daher ist dasjenige was in der Analyse des "Nachlebens der Werke", des "Ruhmes" erkannt wurde, als die Grundlage der Geschichte überhaupt zu betrachten.<sup>140</sup>

The only way, however, that the critic can provide the conditions for the truth content of a work to shine through is by engaging with the material content, that which stands out as the years go by, or in other words by enacting firstly a commentary on the text. The truth content might then, unintentionally, shine through the critical text

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<sup>140</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk*, (*Konvolut N*), op. cit., pp. 574-5.

through the *style* of critique. Benjamin's own attempts themselves do not obviously demonstrate a method or a teleology of narrative which might provide the truth content as a conclusion. It is rather the case that the juxtaposition of commentary and critique and continued re-reading of such juxtaposition is supposed to produce an experience of the work of art where the signatures - of reading now and writing then - come together to illuminate each other in a mutual fashion. This style of critique takes the work of art apart in such a way through its commentary on its material content that what is left is only a ruin, where the critic has stripped away that which bound the work to its epoch of origin. What is left is not, it should be emphasised once more, the truth content of the work of art. Instead one could describe the truth content as the experience (*Erfahrung*) of this particular ruination, perhaps of this particular de-construction, at the time of reading and critique.

The aim of such critical writing is to counter what Benjamin sees as mythic forms of critique. His work hopes to stand in complete opposition to myth, precisely by engaging in an aporetic way with the aporia of the truth content of the work of art.

Dieses Verhältnis [zwischen Wahrheit und Mythos] ist das der gegenseitigen Ausschließung. Es gibt keine Wahrheit, denn es gibt keine Eindeutigkeit und also nicht einmal Irrtum im Mythos. Da es ebensowenig Wahrheit über ihn geben kann (denn es gibt Wahrheit nur in den Sachen, wie denn Sachlichkeit in der Wahrheit liegt) so gibt es, was den Geist des Mythos angeht, von ihm einzig und allein eine Erkenntnis. Und wo Gegenwart der Wahrheit möglich sein soll, kann sie das allein unter der Bedingung der Erkenntnis des Mythos, nämlich der Erkenntnis von seiner vernichtenden Indifferenz gegen die Wahrheit.<sup>141</sup>

In other words, it might not be enough to seek the truth, one is obliged also to recognise that it cannot be presented as such, for to present it in such a way that it can be grasped would be to lay it bare for knowledge. A simple statement of the truth content of a work

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<sup>141</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, op. cit., p. 162.

of art, once again, making the outcome of critique a symbol of the essential, unchanging truth of a work would be accordingly a mythic presentation of truth, and thus not the truth at all. The truth content of a work of art is not only therefore finite and historical; it can also only be experienced *finitely* and *historically*, in the countersignature of the artist's signature in the work.

The archetypal mythical criticism is seen by Benjamin as that which portrayed Goethe not only as genius, but as creator. The very idea of artistic creation implies for Benjamin a natural power of artistry which comes from within, so that the work of art is identified as part of the artist him/herself. Work and life merge so that critics of Goethe are able to produce

[d]as gedankenloseste Dogma des Goethekults, das blasseste Bekenntnis der Adepten: daß unter allen Goetheschen Werken das größte sein Leben sei – [...] Goethes Leben wird demnach nicht von dem der Werke streng geschieden.<sup>142</sup>

The relation of artist and work must, for Benjamin, be seen as one of the first giving form to the second. The artist cannot create as such, s/he instead structures the work out of the formless chaos of reality.

Und in der Tat ist der Künstler weniger der Urgrund oder Schöpfer als der Ursprung oder Bildner und sicherlich sein Werk um keinen Preis sein Geschöpf, vielmehr sein Gebilde. Zwar hat auch das Gebilde Leben, nicht das Geschöpf allein. Aber was den bestimmenden Unterschied zwischen beiden begründet: nur das Leben des Geschöpfes, niemals das des Gebildeten hat Anteil, hemmungslosen Anteil an der Intention der Erlösung.<sup>143</sup>

The work of art cannot redeem; only the creature (of God) can do so. The talk of redemption is particularly characteristic of Benjamin and will be dealt with below, but the significance of this passage is also to be discovered in the difference of *Urgrund* and *Ursprung*. The author's life is not to be regarded as the primal ground of interpretation

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<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, p. 160.

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.*, p. 159.

or that to which all interpretation finally leads or upon which it depends. The author is rather the one who allows a certain content to become form, or who enables the continuum of life to be made artifice with the monogram of the artist attached. As a result, for Benjamin, it is pointless to look for clues to the meaning of the work in the life of the artist, since "der einzige rationale Zusammenhang zwischen Schaffendem und Werk in dem Zeugnis besteht, das dieses von jenem ablegt."<sup>144</sup> Such a search is the very essence of that criticism which seeks to identify absolutely the life and work of the author, presenting the latter in the form of a hero whose mythic status consists precisely in the symbolism of life and work.

Denn im Bereich des Mythos bilden in der Tat das Wesen, Werk und Leben jene Einheit, die ihnen sonst allein im Sinn des laxen Literators zukommt. [...] Dort hält es zugleich den Grund des Wesens in sich und den Inhalt des Lebens. Die kanonische Form des mythischen Lebens ist eben das des Heros. In ihm ist das Pragmatische zugleich symbolisch, in ihm allein mit andern Worten gleicherweise die Symbolgestalt und mit ihr der Symbolgestalt des menschlichen Lebens adäquat der Einsicht gegeben.<sup>145</sup>

If this were the case, however, it would be impossible for the critic to extract any meaning from the text which was not utterly dependent on the life and deeds of the author. The work of art, in other words, would not be autonomous, or more poignantly, would not live on past the death of the author. Because the critic is able to read and interpret the work of art after the passing of time, or once again, because the author, his/her signature and the work itself are inhabited by finitude, criticism can always do more than simply retell the story or pin down the work as symbol. Benjamin thus attempts to put as much distance as possible between himself and those attempts to identify Goethe's life and work:

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p. 157.

Daher ist jede eingehende Betrachtung eines Goetheschen Werkes, ganz besonders aber die der Wahlverwandtschaften, von der Zurückweisung dieses Versuches abhängig. Mit ihr ist zugleich die Einsicht in einen Lichtkern des erlösenden Gehalts gewiesen, der jener Einstellung wie überall auch in den Wahlverwandtschaften entgangen ist.<sup>146</sup>

Benjamin wants to destroy this notion of the identification of life and work not only because he objects to the ideology of the hero, but also because he has a quite different idea as to how the art work comes about in the first place. This in turn reflects his philosophy of language and of time, from which the obligation to redeem the truth content of the work of art is derived.<sup>147</sup>

The life from which the work of art emerges is not simply nothing but chaos, "bloße Schönheit, bloße Harmonie" which "muß erstarrt und wie in einem Augenblick gebannt erscheinen."<sup>148</sup> In order for it to be formed or represented, Benjamin suggests that the continuum of beauty and chaos must be interrupted - but by what he calls the inexpressive.

Was diesem Schein Einhalt gebietet, die Bewegung bannt und der Harmonie ins Wort fällt ist das Ausdruckslose. Jenes Leben gründet das Geheimnis, dies Erstarren den Gehalt im Werke.<sup>149</sup>

The pure *expressiveness* of life is interrupted by the inexpressive caesura of signification. This caesura must thus be understood as the Primal Scene of the aesthetic. Life, in its flowing, ever onward decaying nature, must be petrified in order to make it art but Benjamin's purpose seems also here to be to react to ideas of Classical aesthetics which see art precisely as the expression of life, of the Idea, turning once more the artwork into a symbol of an eternal state. The inexpressive could be understood simply

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>147</sup> The following brief summary is partly indebted to Nägele's treatment of *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften* in chapter 6 of Nägele's *Theater Theory Speculation*, op. cit.

<sup>148</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

as just the power of mimesis which gives a certain finite, decaying permanence to beauty by its destruction as pure beauty. The work of art thus automatically becomes something completely other to the life which it interrupts, this alterity being exemplified by the realm of the other *par excellence*, signification, the antithesis of pure self-expression. The work of art becomes then nothing more than a fragment, riven from its very inception by the inexpressible power of the alterity of signification.

Dieses [das Ausdruckslose] nämlich zerschlägt was in allem schönen Schein als die Erbschaft des Chaos noch überdauert: die falsche, irrende Totalität – die absolute. Dieses erst vollendet das Werk, welches es zum Stückwerk zerschlägt, zum Fragmente der wahren Welt, zum Torso eines Symbols.<sup>150</sup>

The violence of art is expressed in a more suggestive but brutal way by Benjamin in the following passage.

Wie die Unterbrechung durch das gebietende Wort es vermag aus der Ausflucht eines Weibes die Wahrheit gerade da herauszuholen, wo sie unterbricht, so zwingt das Ausdruckslose die zitternde Harmonie einzuhalten und verewigt durch seinen Einspruch ihr Beben.<sup>151</sup>

Language, for its part, is seen as having lost its power of pure expression since the "Fall". Benjamin conceives the Adamic power of pure expression of the object as being witnessed in the Name but since the Fall, language has degenerated into signification and the close link of man and nature lost. The truth content of the work of art, however, is only to be approached through some form of recapture of this power:

so ist abzuleiten der Gehalt der Sache weder aus der Einsicht in ihren Bestand, noch durch die Erkundung ihrer Bestimmung, noch selbst aus der Ahnung des Gehalts, sondern erfaßbar allein in der philosophischen Erfahrung ihres göttlichen Namens. Dergestalt fällt zuletzt die vollendete Einsicht in den Sachgehalt der beständigen Dinge mit derjenigen in ihren Wahrheitsgehalt zusammen.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, p. 128.

The truth content names the origin of the coming-into-being of the artwork. The origin (*Ursprung*) is thus the leap out of the flux of time and beauty into petrification, decay and history and is not to be thought of as the primal ground (*Urgrund*) of genesis.

Ursprung, wiewohl durchaus historische Kategorie, hat mit Entstehung dennoch nichts gemein. Im Ursprung wird kein Werden des Entsprungenen, vielmehr dem Werden und Vergehen Entspringendes gemeint. [...] Im nackten offenkundigen Bestand des Faktischen gibt das Ursprüngliche sich niemals zu erkennen, und einzig einer Doppeleinsicht steht seine Rhythmik offen. Sie will als Restauration, als Wiederherstellung einerseits, als eben darin Unvollendetes, Unabgeschlossenes andererseits erkannt sein.<sup>153</sup>

The incomplete nature of the origin, which can in any case only be constructed retrospectively, prevents the critic from naming once and for all the truth content of the work of art. Or rather, because the origin of the work of art is *only* thinkable through the meeting of signatures of author and critic, its re-discovery or redemption is singular and particular. As singular it therefore calls upon other critics to re-discover and redeem in a similar manner *ad infinitum*.

The truth content names the origin of the work of art, an origin which, like the signature, is only original because it can be repeated. In capturing the historic specificity of a past age (as well as its specificity in relation to the epoch of the critic) the origin can provide the experience of that particular disposition of what is at stake in the meeting of author and critic. One could thus formulate the experience or demonstration of the effects of the origin as that of the arché-trace, the condition of possibility of a particular act of writing. The issue would therefore not present itself as simply the naming of the constituent forces of the economy of writing as a whole, but rather the particular disposition of these forces in the particular act of writing. For Benjamin, however, the emphasis must remain on the meeting of writing and reading across time,

an encounter which allows the critic to free or redeem retrospectively the truth content of the work of art from the decayed ruin which it has become. As such, the work of the critic traces the particular effects of an arché-trace *in history*, not only in the sense of the contextualisation of past epochs, but equally importantly, of the present moment *as well*.

*Philosophy and Literary Critique*

Once again, the truth content cannot be seen or revealed. Just as the condition of possibility of writing (*différance*) and the aporia of time cannot be revealed and indeed may only be treated aporetically, the goal of the critic can never be grasped as an object of knowledge.

Niemals noch wurde ein wahres Kunstwerk erfaßt, denn wo es unausweichlich als Geheimnis sich darstellte. Nicht anders nämlich ist jener Gegenstand zu bezeichnen, dem im letzten die Hülle wesentlich ist.<sup>154</sup>

The beauty, the truth, which flowed through the chaos before being petrified into the work of art only ever reveals itself as veiled. If it only is truth in so far as it is hidden then the aim of criticism is to reveal in the constellation of writing and reading the veiled nature of the truth content of the work of art. This in turn is its promise: the future of criticism and thus the afterlife of the work of art – and thus the work of art itself – is assured.

Also wird allem Schönen gegenüber die Idee der Enthüllung zu der der Unenthüllbarkeit. Sie ist die Idee der Kunstkritik. Die Kunstkritik hat nicht die Hülle zu heben, vielmehr durch deren genaueste Erkenntnis als Hülle erst zur wahren Anschauung des Schönen sich zu erheben.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>154</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, op. cit., p. 195.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*

The revelation (*Offenbarung*) of the truth content has thus a deliberately apocalyptic tone in Benjamin. While such a revelation can only happen once, the uniqueness of the event is precisely that which allows it to happen again and again. The metaphor which Benjamin uses at different times to do justice to such an idea is that of the flame. In *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Benjamin describes the revelation of beauty thus:

[D]ie Schönheit [flieht] um ihres Scheines willen immer beide [...]: den Verständigen aus Furcht und aus Angst den Liebenden. Und nur dieser kann es bezeugen, daß Wahrheit nicht Enthüllung ist, die das Geheimnis vernichtet, sondern Offenbarung, die ihm gerecht wird. [...] Nicht aber tritt er [der Wahrheitsgehalt] zutage in der Enthüllung, vielmehr erweist er sich in einem Vorgang, den man gleichnisweise bezeichnen dürfte als das Aufflammen der in den Kreis der Ideen eintretenden Hülle, als eine Verbrennung des Werkes, in welcher seine Form zum Höhepunkt ihrer Leuchtkraft kommt.<sup>156</sup>

In the *Wahlverwandtschaften* essay, Benjamin compares the different approaches of the critic and commentator to the work of art, described as a "burning funeral pyre", where the former has the attitude of the alchemist in contrast to the chemist's eye of the latter.

Wo jenem [dem Kommentator] Holz und Asche allein die Gegenstände seiner Analyse bleiben, bewahrt für diesen [den Kritiker] nur die Flamme selbst ein Rätsel: das des Lebendigen. So fragt der Kritiker nach der Wahrheit, deren lebendige Flamme fortbrennt über den schweren Scheitern des Gewesenen und der leichten Asche des Erlebten.<sup>157</sup>

The task of the critic is thus very much one of destruction or ruination of the work of art, and to investigate how it can still signify to succeeding generations. This ruin is, however, not the goal of the critic. Instead, it must be perceived as the means of releasing the truth content of the work of art or the attempt to name its origin. As has been emphasised a number of times, this critical gesture is intended to ensure further critical activity and thus cannot be thought of as the telos of literary critique. The latter can only be conceived – at least if along the lines drawn by Benjamin – as an eternal

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<sup>156</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op. cit., p. 211.

return or an originary repetition, thus marking itself off, if not from philosophy itself, then certainly philosophy's use and abuse of literature and the work of art. For to the extent to which the signature of the written word is ignored or repressed – the fact that it is writing, signed and dated by someone at a particular time and place – as well as the extent to which the countersignature of reading is forgotten, philosophy turns literature from narrative, allegory and finitude into idea, symbol and death. As soon as the decay of the work of art is not seen as constitutive of its being read and re-written, that is, constitutive of its *being*, then it is no more mortal and able to return eternally but already immortal, already dead.

Benjamin, however, does seem to regard *Kritik* as an essentially philosophical task. Not only "[haben] alle echten Werke ihre Geschwister im Bereiche der Philosophie",<sup>158</sup> but also what critique shows in the work of art "ist die virtuelle Formulierbarkeit seines Wahrheitsgehalts als höchsten philosophischen Problems."<sup>159</sup> It would thus seem that Benjamin himself seeks to use literature or the work of art for philosophical ends, in order to approach and do justice to the philosophical Idea. The goal of criticism would thus be the redemption of the truth content of the work of art as the expression or manifestation of the philosophical Idea. How then would this differ from the repression of signature which was criticised earlier as partly characterising philosophy's treatment of literature?

It is important to note firstly that the task set by Benjamin in the writing of *Goethes Wahlverwandschaften* is one for *Kritik* rather than philosophy. Critique in this sense is neither traditional literary criticism or traditional philosophical writing but a

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<sup>157</sup> Benjamin, "Goethes Wahlverwandschaften", op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 173.

practice somewhere between the two. As one translator of Benjamin notes: "the term 'critique' (*Kritik*) usually designates a specific philosophically informed aspect of [art] criticism."<sup>160</sup> The difference between traditional art criticism, critique and philosophy lies in their attitude and relation to the truth content of the art work. While the first only enacts a commentary on the text, the latter two are concerned with approaching its truth content. Critique, however, behaves in such a way as if it seeks to maintain the *possibility* of the formulation of the truth content. "[W]ovor sie [die Kritik] aber, wie aus Ehrfurcht vor dem Werk, gleich sehr jedoch aus Achtung vor der Wahrheit innehält, das ist eben diese Formulierung selbst."<sup>161</sup> In other words, critique desires to keep the possibility of formulation *as* possibility – an impossible possibility - it treats the truth content of the work of art as aporia. As a concept, the *Wahrheitsgehalt* of the work of art in Benjamin's writing is, just like that of time in Derrida's works, an aporia. The condition of possibility of the truth content is its never realised possibility of being revealed and it is the *responsibility* of critique to step back from this caesura of formulation. This approach and hesitation before the work of art represents the aporetic relation to the aporia of the truth content of the work of art, it necessitates judgement not only in the present, but also guarantees it in the future. To attempt to formulate the expression of the Idea of the work of art would be to seek not truth but knowledge, and as discussed above the truth content cannot present itself as an object of knowledge or intention. Benjamin expresses this otherwise when he suggests that it will not answer to a question, but rather only respond to the demand of criticism.

Wäre doch jene Formulierbarkeit allein, wenn das System erfragbar wäre,  
einzulösen und würde damit aus einer Erscheinung des Ideals sich in den nie

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<sup>160</sup> Translator's (Rodney Livingstone's) note, Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings. Vol.1 op. cit., p. 219.

<sup>161</sup> Benjamin, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, op. cit., p. 173.

gegebenen Bestand des Ideals selbst verwandeln. So aber sagt sie einzig, daß die Wahrheit in einem Werke zwar nicht als erfragt, doch als erfordert sich erkennen würde.<sup>162</sup>

Were the truth content of the work of art able to give an answer to the question of philosophy, critique would only happen once. This might be the dream of philosophy, where its date- and timelessness eschew the possibility of repetition:

For what philosophy attempts, in its most fundamental mission, is a writing without a date, a writing that transcends the here-and-now of its coming-into-existence, and the heres-and-nows of the acts which confirm, extend and renew that existence.<sup>163</sup>

In principle, a philosophical text should not be signed. Its pretensions being toward universality any blot of specificity compromises it.<sup>164</sup>

Critique, however, in the sense used by Benjamin dares to demand of the work of art that it burn up in the "scintillation of a constellation", a constellation of signatures of author and critic that will happen again and again. Benjamin's treatment of the aporia of the truth content of the work of art is thus not only analogous to the aporia of time, it is in fact a recognition of the aporetic structure of time *within* the encounter of critic and truth content in the milieu of the work of art. Benjamin seems to insist on the radical finitude of the critical act, distancing himself thus from that form of philosophy which claims universality (and thus timelessness) not only for itself, but more relevantly for this context, for its interpretation and use of the work of art.

This is not to say that philosophy is excluded from literary critique. Not only does the theory of literary criticism have to find its home in the tradition of philosophy (as will this chapter), but in Rodney Livingstone's phrase, literary critique must understand itself as being "philosophically informed", that is, having philosophy rather

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<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Attridge in introduction to *Shibboleth: for Paul Celan* in Derrida, ed. Attridge, *op. cit.*, p. 371.

<sup>164</sup> Smith, *Derrida and autobiography*. *op. cit.*, p. 35.

than being it. Benjamin writes quite clearly in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften* that philosophy cannot approach literature or the work of art *as philosophy*, if it is to attempt to address the philosophical problem of that text. It must rather approach it as *Kritik*, the effects of which produce not simply knowledge which can be used and repeated in another philosophical text, but the experience of truth which can only be repeated eternally in further acts of *Kritik*. *The truth of the work of art is accordingly not truth as telos, but as writing*. It is only in the narrative of critique, its originary repetition, that the decay of signatures, of author and reader, can be recognised. It is thus only in the signed and dated work of literary critique that philosophy can approach its object.

Thus in this search for the relations of signatures, the role of the life of the artist plays an especially important role. Benjamin, as quoted above, maintains that the only rational connection between work of art and creative artist is what the former can say about the latter. To assert the contrary would be to subscribe to the heroic view of art – that of symbolic identification of artist and work – which this chapter set out at the very beginning to resist. There are, however, a number of modalities possible in the relation of philosophy and literary criticism and thus equally so in the relation of author and literary text. Just as philosophy can only approach the literary text as critique (as literary philosophical critique) so must literary criticism, if it is to take seriously the problem of the finitude of the work of art, approach it as philosophical literary critique. Just how far the latter has to deal with the life of the author will be discussed below, but it should for the moment suffice to point out that if the object of critique is to investigate the signature and countersignature that is the work of art, then the unavoidable consideration of the finitude inhabiting that structure leads us not only toward the death

of the critic, but to the particular real death of the author as well and from there to community.

*The Dialectical Image*

It is easy, when discussing the work of art or the act of criticism in Benjamin's writings to focus unduly on either one or the other, forgetting therefore that he insists primarily on the meeting of both, or of the signatures of both, even though they emerge from different times. The historical object, for Benjamin, can only be constructed by a "now" and a "then", each being unthinkable without the other, in what he terms the "dialektisches Bild". Much has been written about this concept in Benjamin, some of it misleadingly giving the impression that in the dialectical image either the present "breathes life" into the past, or the past "haunts" the present. In Konvolut N of the *Passagenwerk*, however, it states explicitly:

Nicht so ist es, daß das Vergangene sein Licht auf das Gegenwärtige oder das Gegenwärtige sein Licht auf das Vergangene wirft, sondern Bild ist dasjenige, worin das Gewesene mit dem Jetzt blitzhaft zu einer Konstellation zusammentritt.<sup>165</sup>

A particular "then" (*das Gewesene*) comes together with a particular "now" (*das Jetzt*) to form an image that is readable only at a particular time.<sup>166</sup> In this sense, every image is unique, and because the reader or critic has little control over their effects, success or failure, intention dies away in them. To repeat a passage quoted earlier:

Der historische Index der Bilder sagt nämlich nicht nur, daß sie einer bestimmten Zeit angehören, er sagt vor allem, daß sie erst in einer bestimmten Zeit zur

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<sup>165</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 2a,3] pp. 576-7.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Müller, *Brief an den Regisseur der Bulgarischen Erstaufführung von Philoktet*, *Herzstück*, p. 102: "Ich muß dir nicht sagen, daß Theater von Anachronismus lebt. Die Brechtsche Historisierung ist nur eine andre Benennung für die Kollision (das Drama) der Zeitebenen (des Materials des Autors der Darsteller und des Publikums), die seinen Lebensraum bestimmt."

Lesbarkeit kommen. Und zwar ist dieses "zur Lesbarkeit" gelangen ein bestimmter kritischer Punkt der Bewegung in ihrem Innern [...] jedes Jetzt ist das Jetzt einer bestimmten Erkennbarkeit. In ihm ist die Wahrheit mit Zeit bis zum Zerspringen geladen. (Dies Zerspringen, nichts anderes, als der Tod der Intention, der also mit der Geburt der echten historischen Zeit, der Zeit der Wahrheit, zusammenfällt.<sup>167</sup>

There rests upon the critic or historian, therefore, a heavy responsibility. If each *Jetzt* is that of a specific recognisability, then each equally cries out to be brought into constellation with a particular instance of what has been (*dem Gewesenen*). S/he is compelled to engage in remembrance of the past, not simply in order to mourn what is no more, for the critic must also seek "die Gegenwart in eine kritische Lage zu bringen."<sup>168</sup> With remembrance of the past through the dialectical image the nature of the present is similarly brought to the fore. Indeed, the historian or literary critic engages in remembrance *in order to* consider the present environment, the political context, of his/her work. Equally, the politics of the present, infused as it by definition must be by the *Jetzt*, becomes a site of constant remembrance. Peter Osborne expresses succinctly this state of affairs.

Benjamin redefines the political, neither as a particular kind nor a particular sphere of action, but rather as a *temporal mode of experience*: an action generating, as opposed to a contemplative, orientation towards the past.<sup>169</sup>

We thus begin to recognise the import of the structure of ordinary repetition involved in Benjamin's notion of *Kritik*. The dialectical image must be constructed in order to think *and act* finitely, in other words in a particular temporal mode of experience that is politics. While literary or historical *Kritik* remember the past, they can only do so on the

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<sup>167</sup> Benjamin, "Passagen-Werk" op. cit., [N 3,1], pp. 577-8.

<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, [N 7a,5], p. 588.

<sup>169</sup> Osborne, Peter, *Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience*, ed. Benjamin & Osborne, p. 68.

basis of an exposure to the present, becoming a continuously repeated exposure which forces critics to consider the political nature of the present from which they are working.

Part of this reconsideration of the present is based on how the present can be thought historically. If that which has been can only be thought through an exposure to the present, then equally the latter must be understood in its relation to the past – or within the context of the dialectical image, in its relation to a specific Then. The present is thus robbed of any particular mythic immediacy which might privilege it over and above that which has provided the conditions for it to be. For history to be conceived along the lines suggested by Benjamin, the role of the present, identical to itself as the next "stage" of history, has to be replaced by the *Jetzt*, an originally and eternally repeatable confrontation between itself and what has been: "Die Geschichte ist Gegenstand einer Konstruktion, deren Ort nicht die homogene und leere Zeit sondern die von Jetztzeit erfüllte bildet."<sup>170</sup>

This notion of the "now" stands in direct contrast to that concept which has been seen as the motor of history, namely the "new". The new seems to manifest change within history, one object or event replaces another which is outdated or superseded. As Peter Osborne states, "modernity antiquates to a hitherto unheard of extent."<sup>171</sup> Such an economy of change can be regarded as having accelerated under modernity, or rather under the development of capitalism into a system where the exchange value of

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<sup>170</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, 2, p. 701.

<sup>171</sup> Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 83. See also Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 41: "Was abgebaut wird, ist Erfahrung. Jeder Idiot kann heutzutage fotografieren. Die Technisierung der Sinnlichkeit führt dazu, daß man nicht mehr sehen muß. Das ist Benjamins Feststellung, daß das touristische Fotografieren das Gedächtnis auslöscht. Wer sich nicht erinnern kann, macht auch keine Erfahrung mehr."

commodities dominates their use value.<sup>172</sup> The new is desired in the modern capitalist economy (represented most obviously by the concept of fashion) simply because it is new, providing a stimulus to demand. However, this very newness is precisely that which prevents anything from really changing, the modern age becomes a never-changing hell, one eternal moment of commodity exchange:

Das Moderne, die Zeit der Hölle. Die Höllenstrafen sind jeweils das Neueste, was es auf diesem Gebiete gibt. Es handelt sich nicht darum, daß "immer wieder dasselbe" geschieht (a fortiori ist hier nicht von ewiger Wiederkunft die Rede) sondern darum, daß das Gesicht der Welt, das übergroße Haupt, gerade in dem was das Neueste ist, sich nie verändert, daß dies "Neueste" in allen Stücken immer das nämliche bleibt. Das konstituiert die Ewigkeit der Hölle und die Neuerungslust des Sadisten. Die Totalität der Züge zu bestimmen, in denen dies "Moderne" sich ausprägt, heißt die Hölle darstellen.<sup>173</sup>

If the new needs as its condition the continual expression of commodity production, then the social and economic conditions underlying that must remain the same. The new is therefore simply a *repetition* of itself as the same in this sense as well as in a second: in the modern repetition of the new, the event is repeated each time as present to itself. History is thus represented as a series of new "presences". The new provides therefore not only the condition for the stagnation of social conditions, but is similarly the *sine qua non* for the enclosed identity of the present moment as repetition of the same identity in the moment before.

The most powerful instance of such privileging of the present has been the concept of progress, an idea which sees the past as the heritage of the present, establishing a smooth continuity between the two. Benjamin's main task is to rupture

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<sup>172</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 72: "Er [Der Kunstmarkt] macht Kunstwerke zu Kulturgütern und will sie sterilisieren, sie ungefährlich machen, indem er sie in die Zirkulation des Marktes einbringt. Kunstwerke brauchen Ruhe, um ihre destruktive Kraft auszuüben."

<sup>173</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* (Konvolut G<sup>o</sup>, 17), p. 1010-11.

this homogenous continuity, replacing it with a temporality of remembrance, questioning and action.

Der Fortschrittsbegriff mußte von dem Augenblick an der kritischen Theorie der Geschichte zuwiderlaufen, da er nicht mehr als Maßstab an bestimmte historische Veränderungen herangebracht wurde, sondern die Spannung zwischen einem legendären Anfang und einem legendären Ende der Geschichte ermessen sollte. Mit andern Worten: sobald der Fortschritt zur Signatur des Geschichtsverlaufes *im ganzen* wird, tritt der Begriff von ihm im Zusammenhang einer unkritischen Hypostasierung statt in dem einer kritischen Fragestellung auf.<sup>174</sup>

Progress is thus only thinkable between two mythic points, one in the past, one in the future. The course of history becomes thus little more than the self-realisation of an idea of history and while events might occur, nothing in the Idea actually changes. Benjamin elsewhere describes this state as "catastrophe" (N 9a,1) and declares that real political experience is completely free of things remaining the same (N 9,5). Real political experience, therefore, is finite.

The catastrophe of things staying the same, of homogenous time, affects the historical object in such a way as to transform it into merely the heritage (*Erbe*) of the present epoch. In the idea of heritage the present gathers up and subsumes the past into its own identity, thus disabling the power of discontinuity that *das Gewesene* holds. It is precisely because the historical object does not belong to the present (or more properly is only constructed by the present if the latter is thought of as *Jetztzeit*) that it is, in the dialectical image, able to bring the present into a moment of "danger", that is, a flash of historical truth which must be repeated over and over. Thus historical phenomena, including literary and artistic works, are rescued or redeemed (*gerettet*) from their

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<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, [N 13,1], pp. 598-9.

incorporation into the present, through "die Aufweisung des Sprungs in ihnen"<sup>175</sup> and through such a redemption, bring with them the chance to explode the whole homogenous continuum of history. In a passage seldom quoted, Benjamin states:

Er [Der Kritiker] nimmt sie [eine Chance] wahr, um eine bestimmte Epoche aus dem homogenen Verlauf der Geschichte herauszusprengen; so sprengt er ein bestimmtes Leben aus der Epoche, so ein bestimmtes Werk aus dem Lebenswerk. Der Ertrag seines Verfahrens besteht darin, daß *im* Werk das Lebenswerk, *im* Lebenswerk die Epoche und *in* der Epoche der gesamte Geschichtsverlauf aufbewahrt ist und aufgehoben.<sup>176</sup>

The historical object must therefore be seen as being released from its position as one of a series of new events and brought together with the now. As such, while it is redeemed for the sake of a political experience of the present as now-time, it remains other to the present. In the object – described elsewhere by Benjamin as a "monad" – the historian and critic can locate the experience not only of an epoch, but the whole of history itself in its discontinuity.

In this monad, therefore, history is brought to a standstill by its being flooded with the temporality of the now. In the lightning flash of recognisability a cessation of history is occasioned where the critic sees his/her own present not as a moment of transition, but one where time has come to a standstill.<sup>177</sup> "Dieser Begriff definiert eben *die* Gegenwart, in der er [der historische Materialist] für seine Person Geschichte schreibt."<sup>178</sup> Now-time is, therefore, a dated, unique and repeatable moment, which provides an equally unique and political experience with the past.<sup>179</sup> This ability to think

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<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, [N 9,4], p. 591.

<sup>176</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, *op. cit.*, p. 703.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 40: "Jeder Versuch zur totalen Beschleunigung erfährt in den Minderheiten den Hauptgegner. Denn die Minderheiten stellen immer etwas Autonomes dar, sie stehen der Beschleunigung im Weg. Minderheiten sind Bremsen. Daraus stammt der Drang, sie zu vernichten, denn sie beharren auf ihrer eigenen Geschwindigkeit."

<sup>178</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, *op. cit.*, p. 702.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer 1*, p. 168: "Es war also eigentlich nicht die Wiederkehr des Gleichen, sondern unter ganz anderen Umständen die Wiederkehr des Gleichen und dadurch auch die Wiederkehr

in the Now and blast the object which has been (den Gewesenen) out of an ideology of progress in order to remember in a manner which is politically active on and in the present is what Benjamin terms "messianische Stillstellung".

The messianic power due to the critic which Benjamin describes is that of resurrection, of a limited ability to bring to life once more objects which had long been thought dead and buried. This might entail the dialectical imaging of the victims of history then and now,<sup>180</sup> or the recapture of the experience of reading a book now, written in a time which has been. While the real Messiah of Jewish theology will have the power to raise people from the dead, and thus whose coming, whenever that might be, will bring about the day of judgement, we on the other hand "sind auf der Erde erwartet worden. Dann ist uns wie jedem Geschlecht, das vor uns war, eine *schwache* messianische Kraft mitgegeben, an welche die Vergangenheit Anspruch hat."<sup>181</sup> The exertion of the critic's weak messianic power cannot bring about the end of historical time, it can only interrupt it with the intensity of *Jetztzeit*, the momentary, lightning shock of the dialectical image. As such, the critic must employ his/her powers again and again, "in infinitum, bis die ganze Vergangenheit in einer historischen Apokatastasis in die Gegenwart eingebracht ist."<sup>182</sup> Once again, this never-ending process of attempted redemption must come about because that which is redeemed disappears immediately, thus calling on the critic to bring together yet another now, yet another then.

Das dialektische Bild ist ein aufblitzendes. So, als ein im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit aufblitzendes Bild, ist das Gewesene festzuhalten. Die Rettung, die dergestalt –

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des Gleichen als eines Anderen. Das wäre eine Differenz. Mein Interesse an der Wiederkehr des Gleichen ist ein Interesse an der Sprengung des Kontinuums, auch an Literatur als Sprengsatz und Potential von Revolution."

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Müller, *Und vieles/ wie auf den Schultern eine/ Last von Scheitern ist/ zu behalten (Hölderlin)*, in *Rotwelsch*, p. 88: "Was für die Eliten Geschichte, ist für die Massen immer noch Arbeit gewesen."

<sup>181</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 694.

<sup>182</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 1a, 3], p. 573.

und nur dergestalt – vollzogen wird, läßt immer nur an dem, im nächsten Augenblick schon unrettbar verlorenen (sich) vollziehen.<sup>183</sup>

That the historical materialist critic feels bound to the task before him/her and that s/he carries an almost intolerably heavy burden of constant responsibility is made clear in the last sentence of *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. Likening him/her to the Jews who must at all times expect the possibility of the return of the Messiah, Benjamin expects much of those who follow him: "Denn in ihr [der Zukunft] war jede Sekunde die kleine Pforte, durch die der Messias treten konnte."<sup>184</sup> The Messiah comes to redeem the whole of humankind from a position outside history; when he comes we will exist no more in the time of history. The critic on the other hand must inaugurate splinters of Messianic time from within, over and over again.

The process of history which the critic then subscribes to and practises has little to do with dominant notions of progress. The remembrance of objects and persons that have been, their coming together momentarily with the now, is described by Benjamin as the "Grundbegriff [...der] Aktualisierung."<sup>185</sup> The commemoration of persons and works of art now is a momentary actualisation of their possibility in the lightning flash of recognisability. It is because both *das Jetzt* and *das Gewesene* are particular dated moments that their finitude allows them to meet in a constellation of signatures that is the dialectical image. The remembrance that the critic indulges in can thus be seen as a form of anniversary. Referring to the return of a date in the anniversary, Benjamin states:

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<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, [N 9,7], pp. 591-2

<sup>184</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 704.

<sup>185</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 2, 2], p. 574.

[E]s ist im Grunde genommen derselbe Tag, der in Gestalt der Feiertage, die Tage des Eingedenkens sind, immer wiederkehrt. Die Kalender zählen die Zeit also nicht wie Uhren. Sie sind Monumente eines Geschichtsbewußtseins[.]<sup>186</sup>

To recall what was mentioned earlier on the possibility of future readability of a text, it was pointed out that Derrida argues for the singularity of the written word as being the condition for its being repeated and commemorated in the future. "[R]eadability enunciates the possibility of a recurrence" so that "the poem speaks; to all and in general, to the other first of all."<sup>187</sup> The anniversary and remembrance is thus always for the other, but that which is remembered offers itself up for remembrance as such to the extent that it is signed and dated. Therefore, those instances of writing whose signature is particularly pronounced or (to recall Benjamin's analogous formulation from the *Wahlverwandtschaften* essay) whose material content relies on the veiled truth content for its existence, call out to be objects of remembrance. If, in turn, the form of *Eingedenken* encapsulated in the dialectical image aims at rupturing the bland continuity of history<sup>188</sup> then those works of literature which display their singularity and finitude as their very being will be those to blast apart empty homogenous time. The dialectical image, in response, does nothing other than open up itself to the structure of signature and thereby, in memory of those who have been, to the other. Not only does the materialist critique of Benjamin open itself up to the other, it does so to those histories which have been forgotten by the dominant historical logos, those who have been the victims of "progress". To complete a quote cited earlier:

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<sup>186</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, op. cit., pp. 701-2.

<sup>187</sup> See above, note 82.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 70: "Angesichts der totalen Funktionalisierung des Subjekts durch die Technologie macht der schön naive Satz von Jean Paul: 'Die Erinnerung ist das einzige Paradies, aus dem uns niemand vertreiben kann' erst richtig Sinn." See also p. 71: "Vergessen ist konterrevolutionär, denn die ganze Technologie drängt auf Auslöschung von Erinnerung."

In dieser Struktur [der Monade] erkennt er [der Kritiker] das Zeichen einer messianischen Stillstellung des Geschehens, anders gesagt, einer revolutionären Chance im Kampfe für die unterdrückte Vergangenheit.<sup>189</sup>

If the literary text, signed and dated, opens itself up to rescue in the dialectical image, it does so precisely on the basis of this signature. That is to say, the critic acts in order, continuously and repeatedly, to blast a particular otherness out of the continuity of that history which has forgotten this signature and finitude as such. The critic does so not to recapture this other but precisely to redeem it aporetically *as* other.

How then is the critic supposed to form the dialectical image. What might it look like? In her poignant and remarkable book, Susan Buck-Morss takes the invitation to provide images literally in a series of juxtapositions of drawings, photographs and illustrations demonstrating primarily the decay and allegorisation of the commodity over the past two hundred years. Whilst undoubtedly helpful and explanatory, Buck-Morss' project stands in sharp relief to the lack of such graphic images in Benjamin's own texts. While he insisted that the theory behind the *Passagen-Werk* "hängt aufs engste mit der der Montage zusammen",<sup>190</sup> this evidently does not mean that this montage takes the form of the juxtaposition of graphic images. The dialectical image is, instead, itself a form of writing, a signature. Already in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Benjamin had suggested that Johann Wilhelm Ritter had understood the essence of the allegorical attitude:

Mitten ins Zentrum allegorischer Anschauung trifft er mit seiner Lehre, alles Bild sei nur Schriftbild. Das Bild ist im Zusammenhange der Allegorie nur Signatur, nur Monogramm des Wesens, nicht das Wesen in seiner Hülle.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Benjamin, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*, op. cit., p. 703.

<sup>190</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 1, 10], p. 572. See also [N 1a, 8]

<sup>191</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op. cit., p. 388.

Clearly, Benjamin is not using "signature" in this context in the same manner as Derrida. It is equally evident, however, that the consequence of the monogram of essence is that the image is signed and dated, displaying the same properties as writing. As such, images are to be *read*; they are narrative.

"Das gelesene Bild, will sagen das Bild im Jetzt der Erkennbarkeit trägt im höchsten Grade den Stempel des kritischen, gefährlichen Moments, welcher allem Lesen zugrunde liegt."<sup>192</sup> Taking once more into consideration that Benjamin sought to rely solely on the written word to destroy the empty continuity of history, it thus seems that the construction of the dialectical image is a question of *style*. As Andrew Benjamin points out,

it is not that Benjaminian montage amounts to the sustained juxtaposition of chronologically separate images, it is rather that montage is a term that pertains to time. The importance of montage lies not in the chronologically disparate nature of the images but in the presence of the chronologically disparate being present.<sup>193</sup>

It is equally important to point out that the dialectical image cannot become the style itself, for that would be, for Benjamin, to rob it of its "historischer Index"; the images "sind durchaus abzugrenzen von den "geisteswissenschaftlichen" Kategorien, dem sogenannten Habitus, dem Stil."<sup>194</sup> Literary critique must then be written in such a way so as to emphasise the constellation of signatures, blasting the continuity of "progress" open by engaging in a finite remembrance of the other and in a remembrance of finitude; and then, by leaving open the obligation to continue this restoration again and again.

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<sup>192</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 3, 1], p. 578.

<sup>193</sup> Benjamin, Andrew, *Time and Task: Benjamin and Heidegger Showing the Present in Benjamin & Osborne* (eds.) op. cit., p. 242.

*Derrida, Nancy, Benjamin and Critical Writing*

The aim of the discussion on the three critics and philosophers mentioned in this chapter has been to show a certain correspondence in their writing, a certain common dynamic in their treatment of literature and their insistence on how literature's defining qualities allow it to escape any attempt to treat it as a stable object which can be plundered for objective knowledge. Each insists that the conditions which make literature possible and which govern its identity over time – signature in Derrida, community in Nancy, the origin and truth content in Benjamin – cannot be revealed as such, but can only be witnessed as effects in particular contexts and dispositions. As a result, the critique of literature is a never-ending practice, rather than the repetition of a set discipline. The result of literary critique will not be so much a philosophical statement as another narrative, which in turn will be read, judged and criticised.

These conditions of literature, which literary critique must then after all take into account if it is to treat literature *as* literature, and which are termed its arché-traces by Derrida, focus primarily on the finite nature of the work of art. The work of art was produced by a particular person or persons, at or over a particular time. The signature that they thus bear inscribes this finitude in the work of art itself. It is because the work of art is singular in this sense that it can be cited, quoted and critiqued in the future. Its originality is grounded in its ability to be repeated as citation or reading – what Derrida calls its iterability. This chapter has then suggested that this quality of the literary text or other work of art means that only insofar as it exists retrospectively – *nachträglich* – can it do so at all.

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<sup>104</sup> Benjamin, *Passagen-Werk* op. cit., [N 3, 1], p. 577.

Benjamin's critical demand represented in the dialectical image is thus principally an *effect of iterability*. Critique and remembrance can only take place in a community, an arena of finitude, and that arena is defined by our witnessing the death of the other and by recognising that we share this finitude with others, thus sundering ourselves. To be a real narrative of remembrance, however, literary critique must do more than go through the motions of commemoration. Critique cannot simply locate pure play or the symbol of otherness in all literary texts, it must instead countersign each work in such a way as to present the truth content of the work of art in its own narrative, not as a conclusive goal, but as an effect of the meeting in time of signatures from then and now. To repeat an earlier statement: the truth content of the work of art is not an idea, but an experience of writing and consequently critique must be so written to allow such an experience. The veiled nature of the truth content of literature, at least as suggested by Benjamin and hinted at by Nancy, might thus be seen as adequate to the writing through which it is experienced in contrast to that objective epistemological truth which seeks to resist the finite economy of the writing in which it is expressed.

Being "simply" writing, an overtly signed and dated document, critique must be enacted over and over again. Critique exists in the future, its identity is thus fractured and shared by its radically finite nature and is correspondingly a practice that consists of an expenditure for which there is no adequate return. As a site of loss (investigating other sites of loss) critique communicates community.

I have contrasted a number of times the concepts of literature and its critique, as discussed by Derrida, Nancy and Benjamin, with a "philosophical" approach to the work of art which I have suggested, along with Benjamin, cannot hope to read (or in the sense of critique, "write") literature *as literature* unless it ceases to be philosophy. Such a

sweeping statement needs some clarification, however. Derrida and Benjamin both seek to read literature as literature, even if this is in the name of philosophy. In "Shibboleth" Derrida hints at the possible misreading, or more properly, *unreading* of Celan that would take place if one were to read him solely with the purpose of extracting philosophical data on the problem of the date.

Celan's trenchant ellipsis requires more patience, it demands more discretion. [...] It makes no sense, as you may well suppose, to dissociate in Celan's writings those *on the subject* of the date, which name the theme of the date, from the poetic traces of dating. To rely on the division between a theoretical, philosophical, hermeneutic, or even technopoetic discourse concerning the phenomenon of the date, on the one hand and its poetic implementation, on the other, is to no longer read him.<sup>195</sup>

Derrida seeks here to resist a superficial plundering of the vocabulary of the date which might be used to make Celan a symbol of the economy of signature. Instead, he claims that all poetic writing is inhabited by such an economy and his interest in Celan stems from the manner in which the specificity of his writings open themselves up to a consideration of the temporal problem of poetic composition. It is thus in the finite signature of Celan that Derrida examines the problem of signature and finitude. Had Derrida simply been wanting to make a philosophical point on the necessary conditions of the production of the art work, he could evidently have chosen any piece in the canon, any work of art at all. Instead, he picks out one writer whose signature is especially inscribed in his work – in order to discuss just this problem of inscription.

Thus if the critique of literature is to be anything more than a simple illustration of a philosophical problem, it must address the idiomatic nature of literature, that it is signed and that the unique signature is only so because it will be repeated, and iterated in future readings, if, that is, it is to be read as literature. Literary critique is always and

already an engagement with firstly an other who signs from another time and secondly those others in the community without whom I could not countersign the work of literature in the work of critique. As such a finite countersignature it can only be recognised as an act of loss (and thus once more a writing of community).

Derrida and Benjamin are examples of critics who transgress the boundaries of philosophy in order for philosophy to enjoy the benefits of literature. In so doing, they change philosophy itself into a practice that sees itself as having to transgress the borders of knowledge and experience because of those critics' position at the closure of philosophy and metaphysics. As has already been pointed out, if literary critique is a transgression of knowledge, if the truth content itself represents in its ineffable way just such a momentary piercing of limits, then it is equally vital to recognise that critique must return within the limits of philosophical knowledge and be recaptured by philosophy itself. Indeed as Derek Attridge points out, any idea that literature (and thus literary critique) can present itself as avoiding such recapture has never really left the clutches of philosophy in the first place.

[A]ny thought of expelling philosophy from the practices of writing in the name of literary "free play" or "textuality" is doomed: philosophy will always come in by the back door – indeed, it will never have left the house. The very notion of literature as ungoverned rhetoricity, as a practice safely "outside" philosophy, is a philosophical notion *par excellence*.<sup>196</sup>

Literary critique should thus properly be regarded as a practice of philosophy which shows up all the more the inadequacy of some traditional and still dominant attitudes to the treatment of the literary text or the work of art in general which philosophers and critics such as Derrida and Benjamin have concerned themselves with undermining.

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<sup>195</sup> Derrida, *Shibboleth: for Paul Celan*, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>196</sup> Attridge, in the introduction to *Acts of Literature*, op. cit., p. 13.

Literary critique must be able to draw the distinction between the philosophical *Auswertung* of the experience of the truth content of the work of art on the one hand, and the attempt, on the other hand, to find philosophical truth directly in the work of art, be it by the illustration of a philosophical idea or the symbolisation of a theory of writing. It is this homogeneity of reception – closely linked to a mythical notion of progress within philosophy – out of which Benjamin seeks to blast the literary work. Accomplished through the dialectical image, the work of art will always appear different.

This finitude of writing and remembrance can only take place in the recognition of the finitude – the ruin – of the work of art. It is such a ruination which promises the return of judgement, critique and writing in the future while the singularity and *freedom* of critical writing, both now and in the future, is what we share and divides us in a community. It must be remembered however that critique engages with a particular practice in that community, one where the finite and sharing subject is offered up as such to the future. Literary critique interests itself therefore in the decay of the work of art, not simply as philosophical trope, but as the process of decay of the particular work of art.

The finitude of the work of art and its signature, that it was written at a particular time and place, about which much has been said, can, however, revert easily to a generalised character of the text, where instances of signature are merely illustrations of a general truth. As I have argued throughout this chapter, literary critique must focus on the singularity of that signature. In other words, it must take into account the simple fact that the finitude that signature displays is thanks to the mortality – or perhaps the death already – of one other in particular. It is because of the actual, or imminent death of the

author that his/her finitude inhabits through the signature the writing itself. It is because the author has died or will die, because the author him/herself is subject to decay, that the signature is particularly deeply inscribed, thus preventing the author from having any control of the text that has been written. *Thus, the actual death of the author is an issue for literary critique.* As has already been argued, the finitude of the human subject governs the manner in which it lives; it lives finitely. As a result, as I hope to argue, the relationship of the life and decay of Heiner Müller and that of the Heiner-Müller-text are in a certain manner of interest to literary critique. Once again, it could be argued that if such an interest holds true for all literary critique, then the manner in which the life, decay and death inscribe themselves within the literary text would apply to all authors. It is, however, once more the case that the texts of Müller offer themselves up as such, thus enacting a double interest, a twofold constellation where the aim remains not to deny the mortality of Müller by redeeming him with his work, but to investigate that very finitude that makes redemption possible.

### ***The Life, Death and Time of Heiner Müller***

The question of the actual death of the author and his/her signature throws one particular question into stark relief: what is the critical object when the trace of a particular finitude (as well as finitude in general) is the condition for the possibility of repetition of the literary text? Or to put it another way, if the actual death of the author allows the text to be read in the future, how should the question of ownership and authority over a literary text be approached?

It has been the contention of this chapter that the problem for literary studies of the object of literary critique has to be addressed through death. Not only is writing itself inhabited through and through by finitude; not only is the practice of literature within a community structured by loss and the death of the other, but the very fact that the literary texts which are the object of this thesis are signed by "Heiner Müller" means that their power of opening themselves up to be read is premised upon the death of Heiner Müller himself. The very appearance of the name of a subject, that of "Heiner Müller" is a reminder that the name is a sign of absence, of mortality and that it is perfectly capable of existing without him/her to which it refers. A thesis on Heiner Müller, or rather on a name or signature that appears in a collection of literary texts ("Heiner Müller") therefore, must occupy itself not only with death as such (as for instance a theme in his work, or as an aesthetic problem exemplified by his work) but it must deal with the very death itself. In this sense, literary critique is a movement between the name within and without quotation marks, a judgement that must enact a never-ending transgression and re-inscription of itself in one or the other. As such, literary critique distances itself from two other possibilities, that of philosophical plunder and biographical inanity. Whilst the former claims only to deal with the text signed by a figure of no importance, the latter, especially when undertaken after the actual death of the subject, completes the life through summary enclosure. The moment of death is seen as the completion of life, bringing work and life into an identity with each other in that both are cut short by a death which finally brings meaning to both. Life and work are gathered together in the moment of death, providing thereby a death akin to that of the tragic hero. Literary critique on the other hand has as its task to establish the possibility of an after-life for the literary text, one whose condition is the

continual destruction of the author's *propriety* over the text, with an attending renewal of that author's *belonging* to it. The relationship could be envisaged as a never-ending process of dragging the work from the author's clutches: the more the critic succeeds in wrenching the book to him/herself, the longer will be the scratch marks left on the text by the gnarled fingers of the author's corpse.

#### *Resistance to the Tragic Death*

The tragic death is enjoyed by the heroes of history. Through analogy to the heroes of classical tragedy, such figures are cast in their lot of having their moment of death define their life, as if fate had from the very beginning decreed how and when the final chapter of their narrative would draw to a close. Indeed, the analogy to a literary character displays exactly what is at stake in such an identification. As Benjamin pointed out so forcefully in the essay *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, it allows the life and work of author to become symbolised by each other. Life, in other words, becomes an act of aesthetics. The literary critic, however, must consider whether such behaviour threatens the very possibility of aesthetic and critical judgement in the future.

Benjamin contrasts the tragic time of the death of the hero to that expressed through the baroque *Trauerspiel*. Some critics<sup>197</sup> have located in this difference that departure from a phenomenological, and specifically Heideggerian view of time and death which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Once again, the death of the tragic hero is bound closely to a notion of an authentic death where the past is gathered up into the present at the moment of death, thus completing and redeeming that present and the

life itself. For Benjamin, however, as early as 1916, redemption of the past can only take place outside of historical time, that is, through a Messianic interruption of time itself.

Diese Idee der erfüllten Zeit heißt in der Bibel als deren beherrschende historische Idee: die messianische Zeit. In jedem Fall ist aber die Idee der erfüllten historischen Zeit nicht zugleich als Idee einer individuellen Zeit gedacht. Diese Bestimmung, welche den Sinn der Erfülltheit natürlich ganz verwandelt, ist es, die die tragische Zeit von der messianischen unterscheidet. Die tragische Zeit verhält sich zur letzteren, wie die individuell erfüllte zur göttlich erfüllten Zeit.<sup>198</sup>

It thus immediately becomes clear that the temporality of the tragic death, that of the hero, is based upon fulfilment and redemption taking place within a life, at the moment of death and that this redemption then becomes symbolic for the nation or community as a whole. Just as for Heidegger the subject must grasp his/her own death as the fulfilment of life in order to have an authentic relation to his/her existence, so must the death of any symbolic figure for the community be regarded as itself rounding off and defining that life. Death in the tragic schema is thus understood as *individual* destiny that does not lay itself open to re-interpretation and communication in the future. The works of the life can be seen only as an anticipation of their fulfilment in death; they become therefore immortalised in death, but it is precisely this which prevents an after-life for such works developing. Benjamin makes clear that the manner in which the death of the subject is treated is decisive. The manner in which the hero dies determines the relationship to his work.

In der Tragödie stirbt der Held, da in der erfüllten Zeit keiner zu leben vermag. Er stirbt an Unsterblichkeit. Der Tod ist eine ironische Unsterblichkeit; das ist der Ursprung der tragischen Ironie. [...] Wenn auf unbegreifliche Weise die tragische Verwicklung plötzlich gegenwärtig ist, [...] so ist es jener

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<sup>197</sup> See especially Howard Caygill, *Benjamin, Heidegger and Tradition* in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy, op. cit., pp. 1-31

<sup>198</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, Gesammelte Schriften, II, 1, pp. 134-5

eigentümliche Einfluß, den die Zeit des Helden auf alles Geschehen ausübt, da in der erfüllten Zeit alles Geschehen deren Funktion ist.<sup>199</sup>

In an essay written in the same year, Benjamin links the temporality of the tragic death to its use of language, where speech and meaning arise and die simultaneously to emphasise the privilege of the present moment. The meaning of the speeches and actions of the tragic hero are self-contained, fulfilled in his/her own time and passed on as *fait accompli* to succeeding generations.

In der Tragödie entspringen Wort und Tragik zugleich, simultan, jeweils am selben Ort. Jede Rede in der Tragödie ist tragisch entscheidend. Es ist das reine Wort das unmittelbar tragisch ist.<sup>200</sup>

No such certainty, no such immortality is to be found in the deaths represented in the *Trauerspiel*. There an afterlife is established by the insistence on the finitude of life and language whereas the tragic hero and his works are immortalised in stone by the manner in which his death is interpreted. Death in the *Trauerspiel*, on the other hand, is not simply a matter for the individual:

Es handelt sich nicht um eine Individuation, die mit Bezug auf den Menschen zu erfassen ist. Der Tod des Trauerspiels beruht nicht auf jener äußersten Determiniertheit, die die individuelle Zeit dem Geschehen erteilt. Er ist kein Abschluß[.]<sup>201</sup>

Death is to be understood as an yet another insignificant moment in a life without ultimate meaning, providing the establishment of an afterlife where the same play of events might continue.

Es gilt das Gesetz eines höhern Lebens in dem beschränkten Raum des Erdendaseins, und alle spielen, bis der Tod das Spiel beendet, um in einer andern Welt die größere Wiederholung des gleichen Spiels fortzutreiben. Die Wiederholung ist es, auf der das Gesetz des Trauerspiels beruht.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135

<sup>200</sup> Benjamin, *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, Gesammelte Schriften II, 1, p. 138.

<sup>201</sup> Benjamin, *Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-6.

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136

The essential difference between death as tragedy and as moment for the community is to be found in the attitude to the finite nature of time for the individual. When time goes on, when the death of that individual is constantly remembered and reinterpreted, s/he cannot stand alone above community as symbol, but only belong as one other amongst others: "In dieses Spiel entrückt der Tod. Die Zeit des Trauerspiels ist nicht erfüllt und dennoch endlich. Sie ist unindividuell, ohne von historischer Allgemeinheit zu sein."<sup>203</sup> Meaning is thus not handed down intact, but always subject to change. In contrast to the pure word of tragedy which is incontrovertible due to the manner in which the hero redeems his life at his death,

besteht ein anderes [Wort], das sich verwandelt, von dem Orte seines Ursprungs nach einem andern, seiner Mündung gewandt. Das Wort in der Verwandlung ist das sprachliche Prinzip des Trauerspiels.<sup>204</sup>

The work of complete redemption, in the temporality that was displayed by the baroque *Trauerspiel*, cannot be achieved at the moment of death, or at any one moment unless that takes place outside of history in Messianic time. "Weak" redemption is achieved over and over again because the *Trauerspiel* offers itself up to repetition and Benjamin suggests that it can hardly be read in any other way: "Die Notwendigkeit der Erlösung macht das Spielhafte diese Kunstform aus."

Typically, in the death scene of the tragic hero, the latter can, in death, declaim the significance of his life through one final speech.<sup>205</sup> This is perhaps the fullest presence that one can imagine: going to one's own funeral, giving one's own oration.

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<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> Benjamin, *Die Bedeutung der Sprache in Trauerspiel und Tragödie*, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 71: "Im Normalfall taucht die gesamte Biographie erst in den letzten Sekunden des Lebens auf, im berühmten Sterbefilm. Erst dann weiß man, wer man ist. Das ist der erste klare Blick auf den eigenen genetischen Code; damit hat man dann seine Schuldigkeit getan und kann gehen."

There is, however, as has been argued above, always an excess in death that prevents any final interpretation of its significance that would betray the finitude that dealt it. The same must then apply for Heiner Müller. Just as his work cannot explain adequately his death so does his death remain inadequate to the task of a narrative of his life. In the writing of community the texts cannot be worked to illuminate a tragic death, so neither can his death put the texts to work to create a body which is rounded off, an *oeuvre* without edges. The only body there is, the decaying corpse of Heiner Müller, stands out as the mocking remainder of any attempt to make his work and life immanent to each other.

It should, on the other hand be admitted, that a certain degree of "signing-off" did take place in the months before Müller's death, as well as immediately after it, not least in the publishing activities of a number of German houses (see note 61 above). The actual death of Heiner Müller released that economy of obituary which demands a tragic death, one where the life and work can be fulfilled in death, in order to produce a commodity which sells itself as the final word or the tribute that lays him to rest. When the death of the author is treated in such a tragic manner, when death fulfils the life and work of the artist, the meaning of that life and work is carried over and handed down to the next generation. The tragic death forgets finitude (a contradiction in itself, of course) and puts in its place immortality. In this sense it becomes a death which is preserved and lifted (*aufgehoben*) into the next stage of history. In other words, the tragic death of the author takes place within a history where death is present to and fulfilled in itself for those who are labelled as heroes. The deaths of those whose life is not seen as being completed at their end, the victims, are implicitly forgotten.

Thus is the heroic death of the author linked in a subtle way to the establishment of an idea of progress and homogenous time, for the establishment of a mythic origin and goal between which progress moves is only possible if the heroic death is brought forth at the cost of the forgotten deaths of others. Indeed, because the hero as such is a category which seeks to raise a particular class of subject (in this case the author) above others, the treatment of a death as heroic (for authors, where the life and work are seen as one and where death fulfils interpretation) is already a victimisation of the other. In other words, the heroic death is at the cost of the death of the other, the death of the other is forgotten, and we return once more to the constituent force of mythic thought, the individual as present to him/herself, at the very least finally in death.

The actual death of the author is thus a vital moment for literary critique in that it, like the *Trauerspiel*, must treat it as just another event. The only possibility of treating death as completion would be at the end of history, at and in the time of the Messiah. Until then the critic must work to provide an afterlife for the text in memory of the dead author. Only then can the constituent nature of the death of the particular other (here, the author) be fully grasped and the attempt to close off the work of signature in literature (that is, the finitude that makes literature possible in the first place) resisted. Such an attempt, as has already been argued, normally takes one of two forms, both of which produce what might be termed heroic criticism. The biographical literary commentary, such as that which Benjamin attacked so vigorously, treats the author as hero and accordingly turns literature and signature into tragedy and fate. Philosophical use of the literary text produces a different sort of hero: one which demands that the signature *des Gewesenen* be forgotten, in other words which tries to forget the actual death of the author as other. The author becomes victim, the philosopher the hero.

In producing life as aesthetics, or work as philosophy these two forms of criticism thus ignore what is most literary about the work of literature – that it is signed, and that this signature is only possible given a structure of finitude which also throws up the actual death of the one who signs. There is therefore a relation between life and work which has to be investigated by literary critique, one which avoids their complete symbolic identification as well as complete immortalising separation.

*The Participation of Life and Work*

It has been argued above that literary critique stands between philosophical use of literature and biographical commentary. The separation of Heiner Müller from the texts (Heiner Müller from "Heiner Müller") is an essentially philosophical task, whereas the myth of complete identity of text and author retold by literary commentary is sundered finally at the latter's death. Literary critique, it has been suggested, examines the interplay of the two, the decay or transgression of one into the other, or, as will now be made clear, the *participation* of life and work. The aim is thus to retain an aporetic relation to the singular finitude of Heiner Müller and his signature, treating his life, work and death in a manner which understands his death as not a tragic moment, but as sign of the participation and difference – perhaps the *différance* – of life and work.

The critic of Müller is, however, immediately faced with a problem in the form of the large number of interviews that he gave on his work, theatre in general, politics, philosophy and cultural theory. Given that Müller felt forced sometimes to disseminate

in these interviews,<sup>206</sup> can they be regarded as critical crutch, helping to explain the more difficult aspects of his work, or as performance in themselves?

The interview *as* interview, or the commentary by Müller on his work *as* commentary is not art. While the interview might be re-written as a theatrical piece,<sup>207</sup> the critic's, or rather this particular critic's task remains to trace the specificity of Müller's various utterances – the work of art *as* work of art, the interview *as* interview in order primarily to investigate the trace of politics and community in the former. While the possibility of interview merging into theatrical performance or extemporised writing can never be discounted, the critic must also acknowledge that the possibility of their merger is simultaneously the possibility of their being kept apart. Thus while any project of interpretation on Müller's utterances as a whole might present itself, the danger of homogenisation of work and life is equally apparent. The result would thus be an effacement of that signature, that is, of that which makes the work of art possible in the first place, leading back once more to a mythical humanism or a philosophy of themes in Müller's public utterances.

If literature might be defined by the signature that writes, then given the economy of the signature argued throughout this chapter, it can be affirmed likewise that art might be defined as that which solicits the non-identical, an experience of loss exemplified by the death of the other. The interview *as* interview, though also autobiographical, solicits determinate and not aesthetic judgement.<sup>208</sup> Its worth therefore lies in its ability to provide information about the signature in the work of art, the

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<sup>206</sup> See Chapter Three for a fuller discussion on the example of *Philoktet*.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. *Der Heiner wollte nicht kommen: Statt eines Vorworts: ein Stück in zwei Aufzügen* von Gabriele Goettle, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, pp 9-34.

<sup>208</sup> Cf. Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, p. 162: "Das ist das ewige Mißverständnis gegenüber Literatur und Kunst: Sie behandeln Erfahrenes nicht Begriffenes."

participation of life and work, but it is not the signature itself. This is all the more so when one considers that the signature cannot be grasped as such but only experienced in the reading of the literary text written *im Gewesenen* and read in the *Jetztzeit*.

This becomes clearer if one considers how the actual death of Müller came about. He suffered a long, slow, undoubtedly painful death from cancer, a writer in a body, or rather a writing body riven by decay, eaten up from within. Like all writers, indeed like all writing, Müller went the way of all flesh, and thus in living finitely, he lived and wrote in spite of and because of that body's mortality. The finitude that inhabits writing is thus nothing other than its embodiment, and literature only comes to pass and decay thanks to the decay of the writing body. Any complete separation of life and work would thus at worst be a complete disembodiment of literature where it sinks into a trade of pure ideas between ideal forms; or at best, admits the embodiment of literature but only as an immediate representation of the body's functioning at actual time of composition thus depicting writing as little more than a cardiogram. Instead literary critique can mark the writing of the embodied, decaying subject (in both senses, the act of writing itself and the inscription of the body in the text) by tracing the history of embodiment, the life itself. Once again, this would never mean that this history could explain the literary text, indeed it must necessarily emphasise the finitude of that embodiment's participation not only through the mortality of the writing hand but in the equally finite critical moment. Furthermore, if the embodiment of literature, the participation of life in work is a characteristic of its finite character as writing, then as argued in this chapter, the embodied signature is only so through the participation of the

finitude of the other – its death – in the author's life.<sup>209</sup> In order therefore to follow the trace of community in the literary text (that is, following Benjamin, the manner in which the work articulates its particular origin in a particular community at a particular time) as one aim of literary critique, this can only be done by considering the signature of the author which countersigns the death of the other, in other words, through the history of the embodiment and finitude of the signature – the life.

At the same time, however, the conditions for this reference to life, if based in the aporetic relationship to the community and death of the other, only allow a similarly aporetic attitude to the relationship of work and life. The work of art for critique bears the trace of signature only on the basis of that signature's singularity and repeatability and thus on the basis of signature's character of being simultaneously a condition for and subversion of identity. The primary identity of concern to literary critique in this regard is that of work and life. As argued above, while the complete identification of the two grounds humanist mythology (for example those critics in *Die Zeit* quoted at the beginning of this chapter), the absolute rupture of participation of work and life in each other is the practice of pure philosophy.<sup>210</sup> The aporetic relation of work and life, *which can only be experienced in the finitude of the critical practice*, may only be presented in a manner which respects that aporia. Just as with other arché-traces which the work of

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. Müller, *ibid.*, p. 194: "Der Körper ist nun einmal die Realität des Theaters im Gegensatz zu den technischen Medien, und schon immer deswegen interessant. Der Körper ist immer ein Einspruch gegen Ideologien."

<sup>210</sup> The reason's for Müller's low productivity after the *Wende* might be sought here. In the society of commodity production, where art and life come together in order precisely to produce the artistic commodity, the deferring work of signature is repressed. Cf. Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, p. 117: "Philip Roth [...] sagte: Im Osten kann man alles schreiben und nichts publizieren. Im Westen kann man alles publizieren und nichts schreiben. Weil es keine Erfahrung gibt. Hier gab's sehr viel Erfahrung, positive und negative." The demand to identify Müller with his text, the wait for the "new Heiner Müller", might be understood, together with his unfamiliarity with the environment ("Unter Kohl kann man gewiß [schreiben], bloß nicht über Kohl" *ibid.*, p. 131.) as reasons why Müller turned to interviews and direction.

literary critique attempts to bring to light in the constellation of then and now, this too can only be done if it remains as merely signature, merely performance then in the signed, performed critical act now. Literary theory or a theoretical chapter of a thesis cannot therefore produce a definitive statement on how Heiner Müller's life participates in his work or vice versa. It is only thinkable as an undecidability in the present and past constellation of a moment that *is* literary critique.

I have argued through this chapter that literary critique should examine and address the finitude of the work of art, its being signed as writing, in order to treat literature as literature. Critique thus produces an afterlife for the text which allows it to exist as that afterlife, governed always by the fact of its finitude and of its decay. In so doing it prevents an attitude towards the author and text which would place them in a relationship of tragic hero and fateful deeds. This in turn is guaranteed by the singular treatment of life and work which exemplarises the singular finite work of critique itself. The literary critic can thus only read literature in a way in which it produces the promise of further critique by others and s/he can regard such singularity and repeatability of critique as the experience of the shared character of community. Critique, in finitude, is always and already for and through the other and seeks primarily to do justice to this obligation by remembering those others for and through whom literature was written.

Such is the universal claim of literature which has been so powerfully expressed in humanist terms. Literature's worth, which critique seeks to promise for the future in the continuation of an afterlife for the literary text, is to be found in the simple fact that it is writing. The singularity of signed writing only comes to be through the author's shared and singular identity in community, that is, through a particular other whose death was witnessed. Literature can sometimes recognise this debt and literary critique

can help bring about its remembrance. That remembrance can only be accomplished, finally, by remembering the other *as* other and the fundamental alterity of the primal scene of literature can only be approached and retreated from as aporia. The approach of literary critique makes such remembrance possible, it is only the retreat into philosophy which can represent it.

### *The Failure of the Thesis*

Literary critique, if it is to do its job, must fail on at least two counts. Firstly, in producing images of the constellation *des Gewesenen* and *des Jetztts*, it can only do so momentarily if the finitude which is the condition of possibility of these images appearing is treated seriously, in other words, *as* finitude. In addition to this, literary critique's necessary restoration of its philosophical foundations after the moment of transgression can only be achieved on the basis of exclusion. That which is excluded, in other words everything else that could have been said about the text as well as that which resists being formulated in the concepts and narrative of philosophy, allows a body of a book, essay or thesis to take form, but simultaneously disallows any claim to an absolute, transcendental judgement of the text at hand. The failure and decay of criticism might thus be regarded simply as another means of expressing its promise. In this schema all literature and all criticism affirms the future simply because its decay can always be traced (and deconstructed).

This chapter has argued, however, that the aim of literary critique is not simply to pick on any text, be it literary or critical, and display the inevitability of its collapse under the weight of its finitude and decay. Such an exercise would simply reintroduce a

denial of that same finitude and decay in the critical act itself. Literary critique seeks instead the manner in which particular literary texts decay, how that decay affects the reader or spectator, and in the case of Heiner Müller's works, how they offer themselves to decay. These works are organised around an aporia (of time and of the other through displaying themselves as writing and as signature) which produces a promise. The critic can only focus on this promise, however, if s/he handles the aporia delicately as aporia. This entails, finally, critical writing being expressed in a style in which it writes as promise.

It could, on the other hand, be argued that critical writing should not any more feel obliged to spout a Derridean mantra if it is to be understood as taking seriously the fissured identity of the text and the metaphysical tradition of criticism itself. In this sense, the rhetoric of deconstruction, its self-imposed compulsion to display the slippage of the signifier and signified, might once have been necessary to emphasise the philosophical content but is now increasingly redundant as the reception of Derrida and other theorists and philosophers inches towards critical doxa. We can take it for granted that the basics of such theory are understood so that it does not have to be continuously displayed and experienced. This may indeed be the case for philosophy (although it cannot be the intention of this thesis to lay down rules of conduct for philosophical writing).

Literary critique, however, is doomed to consideration of its style if it is not to slip back into commentary or restore philosophy too early to its operation. While this might not necessarily mean following pun with quip, and neologism with hyphenated pre-fix, it does involve deliberation on the manner in which critique transgresses philosophy in order to enable that experience of the literary text which evades

philosophical knowledge. This is, after all, what makes literature be read as literature and is why literary critique was called to life in the first place.

Critique aims to account for the effects of a work of art written in the past on the audience in future generations and the singularity and repeatability of critique is the manner in which the literary itself and the passing of time between then and now is addressed. As emphasised throughout the chapter, critique illuminates the present as much as the past, and the promise of future critique is simply an admission or affirmation of the present as a site of conflict, debate and politics, in other words of community. It would thus be self-defeating to enact the form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that was seen in the work of the writers in *Die Zeit* discussed at the very beginning. Instead critique is a remembrance that disturbs the present by confronting it now with the deaths of particular others from the past. It is thus not merely the case that community then is brought together with community now, but rather the community in a horizon of history and tradition is brought to light in an instant. It is the work of art which is, for those reasons argued in this chapter, best placed to authorise such a revelation precisely because it offers itself up as such in its enjoyment as art. Critique would then aim, following literature to enact not so much an overcoming of the past as its release and redemption from that temporal ideology which consigns it to a homogenous oblivion which forgets those others who have died. Instead critique indulges in acts of *Vergangenheitsvergegenwärtigung* which remember that time is full of death and victimisation and that art is their primary witness.

If the remembrance of the victims to which art gives witness might be described as the generalised aim of this work of literary critique, then the particular instances of it will only become clear in the passage of the thesis as a whole. In order to do so, each

subsequent chapter moves from a close reading of the Müller text to a theoretical and philosophical explanation of some of the issues at stake in order to return to and repeat the critique of the text itself. As stated earlier in this chapter, the chronological treatment of the work does not reflect a straightforward continuity claim. While I am concerned on the one hand to display the complexity of Müller's earlier work and its treatment of those problems for which his later pieces are more well-known and thus more often discussed, I am also concerned to demonstrate what such a claim entails. The earlier plays can only be redeemed from a simplistic label of socialist realism by an act of critique that lays the work bare as a ruin which might then display the similar concerns of early and later Müller work. Any putative continuity is thus on the basis of the critical act, of its being brought into constellation with the present and can hardly be said to represent an empirical development of an *oeuvre* over a period of decades which is rounded off by his death. An *oeuvre* which is given definition by the author's death – the so-called "complete works" – is in effect the denial of the after-life of the text. The sort of continuity which I hope to argue for, the form of development which takes place in Müller's drama, is thus only brought about by destroying the notion of an *oeuvre* in the first place by insisting on the existence of the after-life of a text. The simple fact that the critic can propose any development in Müller's writing is a sign of the finite nature of his work and life as well as of the critique which deals with both. Once again, this is, I will argue, a particular quality of Müller's work: that because each work demands so forcibly the activity of the now (be it because of its avant-garde status or, as with the earlier work, the passing of epoch in the geo-political environment) the origin of the work of art which can be revealed (the manner in which the community and the other then and now is articulated) is always itself a particular constellation of then and now.

Any continuity between Müller's earlier and later works is therefore premised on the explosion of those works out of that other homogenous continuity of artistic development and progress which implies that Müller's death was the telos or the heroic fate to which his writing life was leading. Instead, reading Müller provides the demand to remember the other, and the opportunity that the critique (and theatrical performance) of Müller presents is precisely this singularity of remembrance, a remembrance that is signed. The other in Müller can always surprise, and it might finally be suggested that this *Überraschungseffekt* is at the heart of democracy itself,<sup>211</sup> another instance in the attempt to prevent the transformation of author into hero.

Although it might therefore seem contradictory to signpost what sort of surprise is to come, it is perhaps not betraying the operation of literary critique too much to point out where the next chapter will lead us. The origin of Müller's work in the early adolescence of the GDR will focus upon the representation of transgression, excess, comedy and labour in *Die Umsiedlerin* and to a lesser extent *Der Lohndrucker*, thus setting the scene for an understanding of the general economy of the GDR and its relation to alterity as such.

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<sup>211</sup> Cf. Beardsworth, op. cit., p. 92: "Thus to go through the experience of the aporia of time, letting it inform one's judgements and inventions implies recognising [...] that the other will never be quite there where and when one expects. This surprise is what democratic politics is all about."

## Chapter Two

Ermutigt durch die zielstrebige Agitation der KPD, machte sich eine wachsende Zahl werktätiger Bauern und Landarbeiter die Losung "Junkerland in Bauernhand!" zu eigen und forderte eine demokratische Bodenreform. KPD und SPD einigten sich über die Grundsätze einer revolutionären Umgestaltung der Landwirtschaft und gewannen auch Vertreter der bürgerlichen-demokratischen Parteien dafür. Reaktionäre Führungskräfte dieser Parteien, die gegen eine durchgreifende Bodenreform auftraten, isolierten sich und wurden von ihren Funktionen abgelöst.<sup>1</sup>

If Heiner Müller were not a problem, if the events surrounding the writing and production of *Die Umsiedlerin* did not tell quite a different story, then Heinz Heitzer's brutal summary of the process of land reform in the GDR would provide a sagacious overview of the themes and reception of the play. Evidently for Heitzer, history is a process of reflexive verbs, of conditions being drawn passively to their conclusion, where the particularity of singular subjects, of political agents, of acts of play are shaped to slot into a story - that of Marxism-Leninism - which has already been told. If Müller's work had fitted, there would have been no use in telling his story again. But as this chapter will show, Müller's plays could not be put to work in the GDR. The distance between Müller's portrayal of late 1940's Germany and that of the official histories of the GDR provides the space for this chapter, if not the whole thesis. Already in this early work, written in stages between 1956 and 1961, the immanence of the historical and philosophical doxa is being resisted, allowing the effects and demands of community and politics to shine through the texts. Contrary to some criticism of the play<sup>2</sup> the particularity of the events and characters of *Die Umsiedlerin* preclude any substantial identification with other officially sanctioned art of the time.

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<sup>1</sup> Heitzer, H., *DDR - Geschichtlicher Überblick*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> See Girshausen, Theo. *Realismus und Utopie: die Frühen Stücke Heiner Müllers* and Fehervary, Helen: *Enlightenment and Entanglement in Brecht and Heiner Müller* New German Critique 8, 1976, pp. 80-109.

### *The Subject of (the) Play*

Had Müller's work fitted into the Socialist Realist canon, it would claim to reflect the course of history, the dialectic which allowed culture and art to become just one more factor in the economic plan. "Künstler und Schriftsteller müssen zu Propagandisten in den Betrieben, in der Stadt und auf dem Lande werden."<sup>3</sup> Art would reflect reality, and above all become an art for the people. The plot on stage would come to a close in order to allow any contradictions in the course of the play to be resolved, either to motivate the audience to act in the same way outside the theatre or to allow them to reflect upon the progress which has been made since the events portrayed in the play took place. As *Die Umsiedlerin* is set in the late 1940's in eastern Germany, the content of it is historical. The audience was given, when the play was shown for the first time in 1961, an opportunity to witness a series of historical conditions which lay in the past. The land reform had long since been completed, the process of collectivisation recently so. However, to judge by the reaction that the performance of the play provoked, the problems which it addressed had not been as easily overcome as was generally thought. The fact that *Die Umsiedlerin* was conceived as a comedy only complicated the situation. What, or whom, exactly were the audience laughing at?

The freedom from the strictures of GDR's cultural politics, not only in the subject matter of the play but in its treatment, affords *Die Umsiedlerin* an autonomy which lies at the very roots of the problems which surrounded the play. The story of

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<sup>3</sup> Schubbe, Elimar (ed.) *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur- und Kulturpolitik der SED*. p. 92. Keller also quotes a passage (p. 50) explaining how art should "in erster Linie den Arbeitsenthusiasmus entfalten", but the reference is incorrect.

exclusion which runs through the play is, I will suggest, equal to the suppression of laughter and expression which the censorship and punishment of both Müller and the director (Tragelehn) represent. The fact that Müller's theatre is art, that it displays its autonomy from criteria of use, led to its exclusion from the theatre, just as in *Die Umsiedlerin* one character's uselessness results in his departure from the GDR. The task of this chapter is thus to examine the transgression of uselessness, firstly in the sense that uselessness is a violation of a Communist morality, but also that Müller's work can be seen as representing that heterogeneity which Georges Bataille saw as subversive to modern societies of production and accumulation. This heterogeneity, finally, will be seen to be constitutive of community itself.

The events of the play are presented in a series of scenes, fifteen in all, loosely connected but focussed upon the processes of the land reform of the late 1940's which led up to the drive to collectivisation some years later. Through the course of the play we meet Flint, the local party official who struggles to convince the peasant farmers of the efficacy of communist theory put into practice while he simultaneously falls far short of a new morality by his inability to be as equally principled in his personal life. He is frustrated by the local bureaucracy, especially by the *Bürgermeister* Beutler who is concerned only to line his pockets and retain his position of power and privilege. Flint comes across similar obstacles in the residue of feudal social structures, in the power and access to capital of the *kulak*, the land-owning peasant, who is still able to wield his influence and exploit his wealth to make the most of the new economic order. Finally, he is frustrated by the refusal of one particular character, Fondrak, to take up a smallholding and work for a living. Fondrak prefers to drink and live to excess, remaining as elemental as the nature surrounding him, while instead expending his

energy in fathering a child by Niet, the refugee of the title, and flatly refusing to take any responsibility for his actions. Other characters move in and out of the play, presenting comic sketches in short scenes, all of which allow an impression of the social environment to accumulate rather than a coherent narrative. Despite the good intentions of rural proletariat, the "struggle for progress" is seen to be hindered by reactionary forces from the German past and the wider burden of a particular heritage that acts against the interest of the disempowered and disadvantaged in Germany. At the end of the first scene, in a grotesque tableau far more typical of Müller's later work than the rest of this play, Flint is left alone on the stage and is joined by those figures from Germany's past who symbolise most powerfully the failure of the progressive forces in Germany:

*Auftreten Hitler mit Eva-Braun-Brüsten, angebissenem Teppich und Benzinkanister, und Friedrich II von Preußen, der ihn verfolgt, zwischen den Beinen seinen Krückstock. Hitler springt auf den Rücken, Friedrich II springt Hitler auf den Rücken. Wiederholte Versuche Flints, sie abzuschütteln. Bei jedem Versuch fällt etwas anderes oder alles andre mit: das Fahrrad, die Fahne, das Schild, die Bücher.<sup>4</sup>*

Although the characters of the play are pulled into the foreground, so that their conflict with their particular environment is emphasised, a number of recurrent motifs become clear in the process of the play. While the struggle for a meaningful land reform becomes the milieu of the action on stage, the confrontation of the old social order with the new, of city with the land, of the old and new means of production, of the new arrivals and the already established, and finally of newly emancipated women and men all shape the content of the play. This meeting of antiquated, almost feudal practice and

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<sup>4</sup> *Die Bauern* in *Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande*, p. 25, but referred to hereafter (as does Müller) as *Die Umsiedlerin*. All references are to the Rotbuch edition which has the slightly altered (and re-titled) version from 1964. This is the only version still available of the play, as its fate, discussed at the end of this chapter, makes clear.

new imposed theory, which brings about the confrontations listed above, is much more dramatic than a similar encounter in the city. "Life on the land" throws the competing classes, ideas and habits into much sharper relief, and it was this comparative backwardness of rural social development which the land reform attempted to alleviate, just as it had done, in a pattern of events too similar to ignore, in the Soviet Union just after the revolution.

*The problem of the land*

Indeed, the parallel of land reform in the GDR and the Soviet Union was pre-shadowed by an even more decisive link of social and economic development earlier in the century. Müller subscribes to that view of history (shared by Walter Benjamin and Leon Trotsky amongst others) which sees failure of a proletarian uprising in Germany in 1923 as leading to the catastrophe of "Socialism in One Country" in the Soviet Union. This policy of Stalin was itself a most radical shift from Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy which regarded the success of the revolution in an economically under-developed country such as the Russian empire as utterly dependent upon a subsequent revolution in the Western capitalist economies. This in turn led to the appeasement of the rural middle classes, the postponement of land reform and a re-introduction of market economics. The rapid collectivisation that followed only served to discourage the dominant rural classes from production, leading to widespread inefficiencies and famine.

Retarding industrialisation and striking a blow at the general mass of the peasants, this policy of banking on the well-to-do farmer revealed unequivocally inside of two years, 1924-1926, its political consequences. It brought about an extraordinary increase of self-consciousness in the petty bourgeoisie of both city and village, a capture by them of many of the lower Soviets, an increase of the

power and self-consciousness of the bureaucracy., a growing pressure on the workers, and the complete suppression of party and Soviet democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The support of the kulak, who would have been the only peasants capable of hiring other peasants for their labour, is seen by Trotsky as the main cause of the increasing autonomy of the bureaucracy. It ought to be added, however, that this argument, as seductive as it is, serves principally his aim in defending the Bolshevik revolution itself from any accusations of installing a state apparatus whose character was always heavily bureaucratic. For Trotsky Leninist notions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, a state apparatus whose very purpose was to prevent the growth of a bureaucracy, had been perverted by the reliance on bourgeois economics and the entrenchment of class structures of dominance in the peasant village. "Irresoluteness before the individual peasant enterprises"<sup>6</sup> - one of the most difficult problems facing the "progressive" forces in *Die Umsiedlerin* is thus seen as the ground of Stalinist bureaucracy and dictatorship. The Party was "no longer the vanguard of the proletariat, but the political organisation of the bureaucracy."<sup>7</sup> Lenin himself seemed to show somewhat more resignation in his attitude to the peasant problem:

Der Bauer ist, wie er ist, und wird sich in nächster Zukunft nicht ändern. Bauern sind keine Sozialisten. Und Pläne machen, als ob sie Sozialisten wären, hieße auf Sand bauen. Die Verwandlung der bäuerlichen Psychologie und Gewohnheiten ist ein Ding, das Generationen braucht. Die Anwendung von Gewalt macht es auch nicht besser.<sup>8</sup>

Müller's play not only retraces, therefore, the problems that faced the Soviet Union in its attempt to reform "life on the land" but also ties in closely the fate of the German proletariat and peasantry to that of the Soviet Union. One could read the events

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<sup>5</sup> Trotsky, L., *The Revolution Betrayed*, p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>8</sup> quoted in Keller, Andreas. *Drama und Dramaturgie Heiner Müllers zwischen 1956 und 1988*, p. 144.

of the play as a metaphor for the crucial formative years of socialist economic experiment and note how the basic problems of land, labour, class and organisation apply across the whole range of command economies. But the failures and setbacks that one sees portrayed in the play must also be remembered as setting the framework for bureaucratisation, "Socialism in One Country" and thereafter the imposition of the Soviet system on eastern Germany after the war. Thus in Müller's historical chain of events, the failure of a German revolution leads on a circuitous path to the conquest through an "imperial" socialism at the end of the Second World War. The revolution fails twice over, in both cases the German working classes have proved incapable of overturning existing social structures by themselves. The consequence of this failure is the employment of a theory upon a set of circumstances and conditions which offer up resistance to such organisation and allow something to be left over, to be in excess, for which the theory can have no response other than to recuperate it, or expel it completely. This movement of excess and expulsion becomes not only the subject matter of *Die Umsiedlerin* but also tells the story of the production of the play itself.

#### *Setting the scene*

In the very first scene of the play Müller sets out the difficulties facing the proposed land reform. The kulaks still wield power contrary to the expressed aims of the party, the poorer peasants still see themselves as subordinate to them and it becomes clear that the only way to bring about the desired end will be to enact the authority and force of the state. As the curtain rises the audience are faced with a tableau of agitation: a banner proclaiming the campaign slogan "Junkerland in Bauernhand", as well as red

flags and the stones that will be used to mark out the borders of the smallholdings expropriated from the land-owning classes. Music is being played on an accordion to preface the ominous first words of the *Bürgermeister* and chief bureaucrat:

BEUTLER Mach die Musik aus. In  
Durchführung der Verordnung, die Enteignung  
Von Junker- und Großgrundbesitz betreffend  
Der mit dem heutigen Datum abgeführt wird  
In Bauernhand  
BAUER MIT TRANSPARENT Red schneller, Bürgermeister<sup>9</sup>

Immediately, that which is non-rational, heterogeneous to the profane programme of the Party, that which is excessive, aesthetic and joyful is silenced. Taking its place is polemic, state repetition of dogma, a dry, instrumentalised language which concerns itself solely with enacting the law. The peasant-farmer with the banner, who will be directly affected by the realisation of the policy, betrays not only his impatience at the long-winded proceedings while his field is waiting to be tilled, but also frustration with the rhetoric of bureaucracy. Beutler's speech has not only censored the enjoyment of the moment through music but delays by its verbose style the work on the land that must be accomplished. There is thus a difference already being drawn by Müller between the work of the bureaucrat and that of the peasant. The former, as is witnessed by the tone and pace of his speech, is characterised by delay and displacement. The peasant's work, however, claims a degree of immediacy in its negation of the environment which sets it apart from the shuffling of the pen-pusher, but also to a degree from the work of the industrial proletariat. Throughout the play the audience is confronted by "life on the land" as possessing some elemental quality about it which sets it apart from work where the process of completion of the product is deferred to others (for example in the

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<sup>9</sup> *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 19.

factory) or where the end result of labour is displaced onto serving an idea (the Party or state) or some future goal (communism or unalienated man). The peasant, as characterised in *Die Umsiedlerin*, has a different relationship to technology (they are not so "alienated" from the end product of their work through the intervention of technology as is the factory worker) and modernity (the farmer who works for himself does not sell his labour but is more akin to the artisan). This qualitative difference between the peasant and other workers becomes the point of resistance in the play to the imposition of modern technological theory on to the land, an impediment which accounts partly for Lenin's admission quoted earlier. This is not to say that agricultural production can never be socialised or reformed, indeed, collectivisation is seen by the end of the play as just such a necessary reform, but Müller seeks simply to display what is left over and expunged by an ideology of progress at any cost.

The nature of the bureaucracy confronting the agricultural workers and of the characters who inhabit these positions of power within it is made yet clearer in Beutler's reply to the impatient farmer:

Eins nach dem andern. Vor dem Leib die Predigt.  
*Zum Bauern mit der Fahne.*  
Bück dich.  
*Den Bauern als Schreibtisch benutzend. [...]*  
BAUER MIT TRANSPARENT Der steckt in meiner Haut.  
Und der erste Tag, daß ihm sein Fell paßt, ist heute.<sup>10</sup>

Beutler's words and actions, both heavily laced with symbolism, make the political environment in which the land reform is taking place perfectly clear. His rhetorical logic as well as his political reasoning are pregnant with the structure of instrumentalisation, that is, the employment of a way of thought which engineers objects as means toward a

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

particular end. The critique of this mode of reasoning becomes absolutely central to Müller's earlier plays, but it would be a mistake to suggest that he seeks simply to question all means-end rationality. Crucial to the disposition of instrumental reason is the degree to which the goal that has been set is one prescribed for all members of society and the extent of coercion that is involved in attainment of that goal. In the first scene of *Die Umsiedlerin* the laudable and economically vital goal of land reform can already be seen to be infected with the power relations of totalitarianism - where the members of the society are treated as one homogenous body and employed, put to work, as such a body for the accomplishment of that goal. The process of redistribution has to be carried out at the pace dictated by the bureaucrat in a series of stages laboriously prescribed beforehand. Beutler also makes clear that any satisfaction or fulfilment can only be attained by means of the bureaucracy, at its bidding and after its fashion. The ambiguous nature of "Vor dem Leib die Predigt" hints not only at the clerical character of the Party, its almost theocratic status, but also the delay of *libidinal* enjoyment and the sole possibility of it as being structured by the dictates and rhetoric of the Party. In a similar vein, one of the activists is forced to bend double and act as administrative serf, a foretaste of the exploitation of the peasant for bureaucratic ends - "*den Bauern als Schreibtisch benutzend*" - which will return time and time again throughout the course of the play.

The peasant farmer with the banner (Kaffka) relates the tricks and bribes that Beutler used to be elected to his position of power, but in a long speech that aims to set the tone for the audience's reaction to the typical peasant who has been landless up until this point, he emphasises his personal history of abuse and servitude to those forces who have been the ruin of Germany.

Meine Haut ist international. Prügel in Deutschland, in Frankreich Läuse und in Rußland Frost. Durch zwei Kriege hab ich sie getragen, sie wurde nicht dünner dabei, aber dicker."<sup>11</sup>

Not only has this ex-soldier been transported around the killing fields of German military adventurism, but suffered for his resistance ("Prügel in Deutschland") to the reactionary forces. He also announces his solidarity and shared identity with all who have suffered at the hand of power, with other representatives of the industrial and agricultural working classes. Beutler's words get under this internationalist skin, they are an affront to the ordinary workers across Europe, but in particular to those working under the yoke of a bureaucratic elite.

Some lines later Kafka breaks into blank verse, a poetic capacity which stands in contrast to the rhetoric of the *Bürgermeister* in its grounding in the material conditions of the present. He rejects the deferral of reward to the afterlife, thereby implicitly criticising the ecclesiastical character of the Party's representatives personified by Beutler in his speech immediately before, but also any nostalgia for the immediacy of the non-political, symbolised by the safety of the mother's womb. In a speech that prefaces Müller's resolutely material, *diesseitig* worldview which comes more and more clearly to expression in his works, Kafka begins by relating how he regarded his position in the world until he was enfranchised by the liberation of Germany after the war. From waiting for the world to come, or wishing he had been born into another class, this peasant then goes on to assert the lot of the human subject as subject to laws greater than him/herself, to a process which is as elemental as the environment upon which the peasant works:

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

Ich sags wies ist: bis dato wär ich gern  
Aus meiner Haut gefahrn in eine bessre.  
In jeder Bibelstunde hab ich dem  
*Er zeigt mit dem Daumen nach oben.*  
Im Ohr gelegen um ein feinres Startloch  
Oder daß meine Mutter mich zurücknähm.<sup>12</sup>

An image that is overdetermined in Müller's works, the retreat to the mother's womb retains in *Die Umsiedlerin* connotations of fecundity as well as signifying the irreversible opening of a life that is only brought to its closure by death. They are indeed inextricably intertwined, both pointing to a particular economy of human society, irreducibly materialist, which the ideology of unmitigated progress and homogenisation ignores. Progress is then at the cost of the expulsion of what is the condition for representation and theory - the material, the elemental itself. As Schulz lucidly points out in her discussion of *Die Umsiedlerin*,<sup>13</sup> the influence on Müller of the Baroque is evident even as early as this play, although her description of him as a typical Baroque melancholic must be taken issue with. It is rather Müller's rejection of the contemplative stance of the melancholic which produces the thoroughgoing political nature of his texts.<sup>14</sup>

Kafka, for his part, emphasises his *particular* subject position, after declaring once more the destiny of that subject's body in decay. However, he not only describes the process, but affirms it ("gut ists, daß so ist"). This attitude, however, which offers an opening for a politics that takes into account the particular as such and sees that particularity as being grounded in a thoroughly material environment, is suffocated by the concerns and temporality of the bureaucracy.

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>13</sup> Schulz, pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> See discussion on Benjamin, the Baroque *Trauerspiel* and Müller in Chapter Three.

Aber es ist schon so: aus seiner Schale  
Hat keiner einen andern Ausgang als  
Nach unten, wo der Wurm den Menschen schält  
Und mit der Nabelschnur wird dir von Anfang  
Der Rückmarsch in die Mutter abgeschnitten.  
Und heute sag ich, gut ists, daß es so ist  
Und meine Mutter war der richtige Eingang.  
BEUTLER Kürz deine Sprüche, Kaffka. Du hältst die Bodenreform auf.<sup>15</sup>

Here, it is Beutler who wants to get on with things, displaying that delay and deferral, or poetry and verse cannot be seen as indicative of the peasant or bureaucrat themselves. Beutler speaks elsewhere in some of the most accomplished verse of the play. Deferral or poetry have instead a meaning for the critic only in the context of the whole utterance which, Müller seems to suggest, must include the relation of the speaker to power and authority. For example, later in the same scene Beutler orders the music to start again in order to avoid discussion of the difficulties that are facing the village, in this case, the lack of horses. Similarly, whereas verse form spoken by the peasant might signify the effervescence of the present, in a figure such as Beutler, it betrays only privilege.<sup>16</sup>

Beutler's attempt to dominate through discourse meets resistance in Kaffka's proletarian credentials. Contrary to Beutler, who has worked his way up the greasy political pole from working previously as milkhand, Kaffka's role, and with it the hope for any meaningful progressive change, remains in the field. Full of optimism he proclaims:

Nämlich mir ist eine neue Zeit angebrochen *zieht eine große Taschenuhr* vor einer Minute. [...] *Er wirft das Transparent weg und schleppt einen Grenzstein auf sein Feld.*<sup>17</sup>

Putting aside political agitation for the process that will bring about real change to the material conditions of the working classes, namely labour, Kaffka seems to embody the

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<sup>15</sup> *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 20.

force that can offer effective opposition to the bureaucracy. However, the policy of land reform, which had been pronounced as the socialisation of the land, as the equitable distribution of the means of agricultural production, is based upon a number of peasant smallholders. Kafka drags the stones marking out the plot for himself and family, but the audience who saw this in 1961 were only too aware that the plan of support for smallholders had turned, just as in the Soviet Union in the 1920's, into succour for the kulaks, as they were able to demand labour from other farmers in return for use of the scant agricultural technology. Kafka's pride and diligence have therefore a somewhat more tragic touch to them, Beutler's question "Bist du jetzt fertig?,"<sup>18</sup> a cruel, ironic twist.

This refusal to shy away from the problems that the GDR faced throughout its history is given immediate emphasis in this first scene. We meet for the first time the Party official, Flint, whose job it is to oversee the successful transfer of land to the peasant farmers. He distinguishes himself from Beutler by his incorruptible honesty, a quality much needed for his political agitation, but which brings him misfortune in his private life. His honesty to his feelings (if one could put it so charitably) leads to his marital infidelity. He lacks, in any case, the guile and deceit of Beutler. His single-minded pursuit of a better future for all is shown, however, to have unpleasant repercussions. He has to order the peasants to take responsibility for themselves and their political futures, convinced that he is acting for their own good. This can lead in some instances to a ruthlessness that belies the claims of liberation and replays once more the dictatorship of the bureaucracy over the proletariat. While Beutler counters

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<sup>16</sup> Vitally, Müller counts himself as poet and playwright amongst these privileged.

<sup>17</sup> *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

questions to the shortage of horses with the defence that "Germany lost the war", betraying at the same time his residue nationalism, Flint argues:

Ihr habt den Krieg gewonnen. Merkt ihrs noch nicht?  
Ein Jahr, dann fährst du deinen eignen Traktor  
Du auch, und habt vergessen, was ein Pferd ist.<sup>19</sup>

While the line between political education and dictat is fluid, Flint's propaganda for a particular view of history rings hollow when the German and European proletariat were, almost by definition, the great losers of the events leading up to and including the Second World War. The simplistic reaction demanded of the peasants to the catastrophe of the previous fifteen years can hardly do justice to the complexity and suffering involved in the development of their material conditions.

The unflinching severity of Flint and the inflexibility of his view of the world is given voice immediately after. When one farmer protests that the five hectares offered to him will not suffice to feed himself and his descendants, Flint reacts with proletarian steel:

So nähm sie einen andern.  
Zu Beutler                      Streich ihn aus.  
BAUER MIT FAHNE Der Strich geht in den Magen.<sup>20</sup>

The same peasant, used to feudal customs and conditions takes off his cap, addresses Flint and Beutler as "Herren", speaks to them in the most obsequious manner he can muster and promises to show his gratitude for that to which he is in any case entitled.

FLINT *brüllt*:  
Behalt die Mütze auf und laß den Herrn weg.  
BAUER MIT FAHNE *setzt die Mütze auf*:  
Jawohl.  
FLINT Und wenn du wissen willst, wer hier

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

Dein Herr ist, kauf dir einen Spiegel.  
BAUER MIT FAHNE Jawohl.<sup>21</sup>

The farmer's fawning reaction explains far more about the authority structures still present, while the absurdity of *ordering* a halt to servitude seems to be wasted on Flint. When the farmer asks to stay, if it is permissible, Flint replies: "Gut, ich erlaubs dir, aber mit Bewährung"<sup>22</sup>.

Flint's continuation of dictatorial practices by other means might seem justified, however, when faced with the economic realities that are revealed immediately after. The kulak Rammler appears on stage, after having been spared expropriation by having three hectares too few (landowners with more than 100 hectares, as well as those convicted of Nazi war-crimes, were expropriated without compensation), and reveals his interest immediately. He reacts to Flint's threats of proletarian violence with the confidence and scorn of one who can work the system to his own advantage, due solely to his possession of capital:

Weiß ich, was ein Kulak ist? Ich bin Deutscher [...], ich bin CDU, ich halt die andre Backe auch noch hin aus Parteigeist. Dann kann ich sie beide herzeigen im Demokratischen Block.<sup>23</sup>

The necessity perceived by the Communist Party in the GDR, based itself on the experience of the Soviet Communist Party under the leadership of Stalin, of forming a movement across the political spectrum, led only to the protection of the kulak class from the demands of the peasants. In a political tactic analogous to the ill-fated "people's fronts" of the 1930's, the East German bureaucracy allowed those who already had access to power and capital to remain protected from further expropriation and indeed allowed them to build up constituencies in the bureaucracy itself. The essence of

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

their privilege is laid bare in this first scene. Rammler's power lies in the resources of capital that he possesses, enabling him to buy the labour of other peasants or lend machinery for the fruits of labour.

Ich borg dir einen Gaul  
Flüchtling. Du gibst mir eine halbe Ernte.  
So gern ich dir helf, umsonst kann ichs nicht machen.  
Mir hat der Krieg auch mitgespielt.<sup>24</sup>

His unashamed egoism is given further vent in an exchange with Kaffka, shortly after the latter's ruminations on life, death and reproduction. Using the same image, Rammler displays how different is his philosophy, confirming only Kaffka's assertion "Wir kommen aus verschiedenen Müttern". Once again, similar statements are given harshly conflictual emphases on the basis of the particularity of the subject's social position.

RAMMLER                      Was willst du, Kaffka. Zum  
Ausbeuter ist der Mensch geboren, du auch.  
Das wäscht dir kein Regen ab, das ist Natur  
Der Herrgott hat dich so geschaffen, mach was.  
Vor der Entbindung hast du deine Mutter  
Schon ausgenommen, Parasit und Blutsäufer  
Am Nabelschlauch [...].<sup>25</sup>

Rammler's apologies for exploitation are thus framed within a code of servility, not only to a perceived immutable social order but also to a god which is the origin and guarantor of that order. Communism, he adds, is a good idea but is no more than "was für die Zeitung". What is at least laid bare in this first scene is the material condition for profit, that which the holder of capital appropriates from the value of the worker's labour. In this case, the value of the horse he offers bears no relation to that value of the harvest which he will gain. It seems clear that any basis for socialised conditions of labour on

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 23-4.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

the land can not be grounded upon the private enterprise of the kulak. Indeed, Rammler fears the next step of land reform: "Wenn die Katze aus dem Sack springt, heißt sie / Kolchose."<sup>26</sup>

The results of such unequal access to capital and the state's acquiescence in the structures of domination which follow from this are put before us in the next scene. Another kulak, Treiber, comes to claim from Ketzer, a new peasant farmer, what he is owed for the horse that the latter has bought, in part-exchange for a cow whose purchase by Treiber has led to Ketzer not being able to fill the milk quota allotted to him by the state. In a double bind epitomising the impotence of the peasant, Ketzer cannot keep the cow without a horse to provide the feed for the cow: "Ohne Gaul konnt ich die Kuh nicht halten - [...] womit sollt ich ihn kaufen als mit der Kuh?"<sup>27</sup> Treiber, with the support of Beutler - as representative of the law and state - demands his repayment. Ketzer reminds Beutler of his roots which he seems conveniently to have forgotten:

Du warst nicht immer Bürgermeister. Weißt du  
Die Zeit noch? Melker warn wir, Kumpels, keiner  
Mehr als der andre, einer für den andern.  
[...] Und jetzt ists nicht gewesen und mich melkst du.<sup>28</sup>

He refuses to believe the oft repeated promise of tractors for the village, seeing himself swindled by the state as he was under feudal conditions: "Tausend Jahre hat uns der Junker geritten. Kaum ist er abgessen, sitzt der Kulak auf, dem Kulak der Staat, unsrer, beide unsereinem."<sup>29</sup> Beutler meanwhile, in a display of sanctimony which the audience has already come to expect from him, speaks of his duty to act in accordance

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

with the law, even if it acts in the interest of those who were officially declared class enemies.

Als Bürgermeister muß ich allen gleich  
Gerecht sein. Meine traurige Pflicht ist, daß ich  
Dem gegen dich zu seinem Recht verhelf jetzt.<sup>30</sup>

Ketzer, rather than hand over his horse, slaughters it with his knife, leaving Treiber to exit the stage with an unconcerned air, complaining not of the death of the animal but of the peasant's lack of "Verstand/ Für die Wirtschaft". It is indeed a senseless act, wasteful, bereft of any logic of conventional economy. This impression is strengthened in the speech immediately after where he bemoans his servility to his cattle and to the land:

Die Hauptsache am Bauern ist das Vieh  
Er ist kein Mensch ohne, er kann sich kopfstelln  
Sein Feld sein Grab, mit seinen Knochen düngt ers  
Und vor der Ernte erntet sein Feld ihn  
Er feiert Kirmes zwischen den sechs Brettern.  
Ein Vieh macht keinen Bauern ohne Knecht [...].<sup>31</sup>

Like his father and his father before him the only way out is suicide; a sign merely of his complete impotence in the face of the environment and the economy which works upon it. One could understand Ketzer's suicide and sacrifice of his horse as the final act of defiance, a desperate bid for power over the land and the work it demands. The imminent arrival of the tractor, which finally does come to the village, might be seen as fulfilment of the faith in technology which would have made Ketzer's death unnecessary. However, Ketzer's desperation is the result not of a transcendental value attributed to the Land, but to the effect of a particular disposition of economy which attempts to organise and reproduce the land and environment. It is the material labour of

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

those working the land, with or without technology, which provides possibilities of adequate social forms. Impotence over and against the land might, therefore, seem to be due to exploitative social structures where the fruits of labour are not returned to the peasant. Technology and land are not mere tools, but sites of struggle. That the human subject and his labour are treated as objects secondary to what serves as capital is then emphasised at the end of the scene.

ERSTER Trecker kommen, Ketzer. *Tritt in die Kate*. Der ist schon kalt.  
ZWEITER *holt das Messer*: Schad um den Gaul.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, at the end of the first scene the origin of material wealth, be it collective or that which reproduces the privilege of capital, is emphasised once more. Flint prevents a farmer from removing books from the library of the *Schloß* nearby. The whole town, the peasant informs us, "wischt sich den Arsch mit der Schloßbücherei". Flint insists, however, on the books' being returned, and on their relevance, indeed dependence, on the labour of the peasants. Culture relies in the last instance on the toil of those on the land:

SchillerundGöthe, wer hat ihm den  
Bauch gefüllt? Homer, wer hat ihn angezogen?  
Kein Buchstab ohne dich und kein Gedanke.  
Dein krummer Buckel, deine krumme Hand.<sup>33</sup>

The books will be used for a "Kulturhaus" but this is not a possibility at present. The luxury of culture can only be afforded *tomorrow*, once more delayed, once again deferred. While the emphasis on the revolution of the means of production is not surprising, the culture of excess is deemed unimportant in comparison to the demands of production. Culture remains in excess to instrumentalised production in two senses:

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<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

firstly, "a material excess is necessary in order that culture should grow, refine and complicate itself",<sup>34</sup> but secondly it remains beyond the comprehension of utility. There is no *use* for culture as such in material reproduction of the environment. It is rather a luxury that can only be afforded given sufficient development of productive forces and exploitation of technology. What will be discussed later in this chapter is whether an economy *always* produces the excess upon which "culture" feeds and whether its deferral or expulsion actively represses the particularity of each human subject which was expressed so powerfully by Kafka in this first scene.

*The Bureaucracy - Macht macht weiche Hände*

The events leading to Ketzler's death show Beutler, the highest ranking bureaucrat in the village, in his true light. While proclaiming the necessity of socialism ("Die Revolution kennt keinen Aufenthalt"<sup>35</sup>), when out of the public eye he reveals himself as opportunist and crook. His revolutionary zeal remains merely a role to be played, a means to line his pockets. When, at the end of the day in his home, he is informed of the arrival of the tractor he says only: "Mein Dienst ist um. Der Bürgermeister kann mich."<sup>36</sup> He then has his wife pull off his boots, banishes the refugee (the eponymous *Umsiedlerin*) from the kitchen, and orders his wife to go too with the arrival of Rammler who has news of their attempts at corruption. The old *Landrat*, who took bribes willingly from the likes of Rammler and Beutler, has been deposed and replaced by a more conscientious socialist who merely laughs at Rammler's complaints and shows him the door. Just such a

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<sup>34</sup> Trotsky, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>35</sup> *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

fellow-traveller as they were formerly used to dealing with then appears at the door, on the run from the authorities.

Im Amt bis gestern, von unten geschmiert, von oben traktiert, hoch im Kurs bei der Bevölkerung, mein Bauch der Beweis, mit der Regierung auch auf Du, der Schrecken der Vorzimmer im Kreismaßstab, politischer Flüchtling heute.<sup>37</sup>

Beutler appears not to want to come to the assistance of his old comrade in crime until it is revealed that he has stolen the *Gemeindekasse*. Rammler pockets most of the money claiming "Politik verdirbt den Acker". Beutler, who has until now only looked on, seemingly content to allow the bribery but not dirty his own hands, then exercises his power, replying to Rammler:

Und den Charakter. Daß ich euch nicht anzeig.  
*Er hält dem Flüchtling eine, Rammler die andre Hand hin. Beide zahlen.*<sup>38</sup>

He takes the runaway's last pfennig and watch, leaving only his false teeth and a bicycle without tyres to flee on. When the news of Ketzer's death arrives, however, and Beutler is faced with the responsibility of his death, his ruthlessness reaches new heights.

Der Tote macht mir einen Fleck aufs Vorhemd  
Ich brauch ein Fleckenwasser, und kann sein  
Wenn ich dich liquidieren laß, hab ich eins.  
s ist dialektisch: eins und eins macht null.<sup>39</sup>

He seeks advice in the statute book, which before he had sought only to use as fly swat, to rescue himself from his predicament. It is Rammler the kulak, however, who is able to show him the way to retain his power and protect his privilege. Just as Antaeus lost his power by being lifted from the ground ("Dann kam Herr Kules, nahm ihn bei den Gurgel/ Und hielt ihn in der Luft, bis die ihm ausging."), so must Beutler remain in contact with the masses. Rammler hopes thereby to keep control of the bureaucracy,

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<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39



serves partly to underline the critique of state and Party power in *Die Umsiedlerin* as a whole while never quite managing to escape their clutches.

Beutler sets out his stall in a long, eloquent speech at the end of the same scene. He realises that if he were to make a false move now he would land once more in the milk-shed, whose hard graft and degradation he has left far behind. He has to keep continually one step ahead of social and economic developments:

Der Fortschritt sitzt mir auf den Fersen. Ein  
Stolpern jetzt und im Stallgang lieg ich wieder  
Abtritt für Rindvieh und Kulak. Die Hand  
Ist weich geworden, Macht macht weiche Hände.<sup>42</sup>

He resolves to become as "[r]ot wie die Sünde in der Heiligen Schrift", so as not to end up in the same position as the ex-colleague whom he has just robbed. Even his previous occupation would be preferable:

Und besser sitzt sichs unterm Euter noch  
Als überm Blechnapf, sagen die Experten  
Ein Kurort ist der Stall gegen den Schacht.<sup>43</sup>

The threat of hard labour in Bautzen is incentive enough to go over once more the commandments of the opportunist, in other words, of someone who sees advantage in the present moment for his own personal future. In this regard he differs from the Party official (such as Flint) who with integrity and honesty seeks to defer fulfilment of the present for a future moment in which the whole of the society will attain its reward. Whether this movement of delay is misguided will become the subject of this chapter, but it suffices to say for the moment that Müller seeks to draw the distinction between the bureaucrat, agitator and rebel (such as Fondrak) precisely at this junction of

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

temporality and subjectivity. Beutler seeks opportunity in power, even if each step up the ladder involves, by turns, obsequiousness and betrayal:

Nach jedem Wind aus Osten häng  
Den Überzieher. Auf dem Dienstweg krieche  
In jeden Hintern, der dir vorgesetzt wird.  
Steig aus, eh er auf Grundeis geht. Und wenn du  
Noch einen Fußtritt landen kannst, land ihn.  
Bedenk: du brauchst ein Sprungbrett in den nächsten.“

With every change of direction, the bureaucrat can accustom himself to the new conditions (such as, for instance, the "de-Stalinisation" while the play was being written). Thus Beutler finishes on a note of unparalleled cynicism which, however, succeeds in laying bare the motivations of the self-serving state apparatus: "Als neuer Adam steigst du aus der Taufe/ Und füllst die Backen an der alten Raufe".

The problem as to whether to regard Beutler as representative of a corrupt state or simply as a rotten apple in the barrel runs through the play as a whole. Müller clearly leaves it as undecided as possible, although Beutler's arrest at the end of the play seems to resolve the matter, at least on a superficial level. It remains open whether blatant corruption is the real obstacle to the successful administration of a socialist society or if there is not a tendency to the oppressive in the notion of the administrative itself. Beutler certainly regards himself as the personification of state power, and uses this to defend himself against accusations of misbehaviour. If *l'état, c'est lui*, then any censure of him is equally treasonable. The logic of democratic centralism is carried to its absurd, but logical conclusion, each utterance is symbolic of a further symbolic stance, a process which leads simply to the situation where the state becomes civil society, and where any moment of autonomy, be it an act of free speech or work of art, becomes in

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

turn by definition asocial behaviour. There is no space for political debate either within civil society or within the state or Party itself (in contrast to Lenin's notion of democratic centralism). There is thus no greater contradiction to the idea of the state withering away than the logic of this speech of Beutler's and no greater testimony, not only to how the bureaucracy has been hijacked by the egoism of the opportunist, but also to the self-serving nature of the bureaucracy itself. It becomes finally an end in itself.

Also du hast geäußert, unser Staat schickt  
Was in den Knast gehört, zum Bürgermeister.  
[...] Ihr habts gehört. Also du bist ein Staatsfeind.  
Und weil der Frieden eins ist mit unserm Staat  
Bist du ein Friedensfeind. Und weil die Kinder  
Den Frieden brauchen vor der Muttermilch  
Bist du ein Kinderschlächter.<sup>45</sup>

Beutler mistakes Flint's violent reaction to his speech as support for himself. It is indeed one of Flint's chief frustrations that the party and state that he serves and believes in can countenance such a character as Beutler. He is consequently riven and paralysed by this and other contradictions, but perhaps because of these never succumbs to the blatant abuse of power which infects Beutler. Whether his accidental offences betray simply a weak socialist character or a problem which structures the Party hierarchy as such is a central theme of the play.

*The Party - Macht macht Sorgen*

Flint is the good Communist. Loyal to the Party, admiring of the Soviet Union, his dedication to the furtherance of the goals of the revolution has allowed him to neglect

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 54.



again, Flint thus becomes embroiled in the contradictions of agitation and leadership, replacing one object of deference for another, namely, himself. The stage directions state simply "*Henne gehorcht*". The crux of Flint's problem becomes his inability to see how his life reflects those very same power structures which he is trying to abolish, be it in his personal life and relationship with women, or in his political work. The central contradiction lies in his idea of a future society, the goal of Communism, and the everyday struggle and obstacles of organisation. This manifests itself as the unforeseen dissension and bifurcation of Party and revolution and when they conflict, it is always the same one which must give way. In a later scene Flint is confronted by a priest who, like him, has a flock to tend to in three different villages. When asked if he could lend his bicycle, Flint at first protests "[E]s ist ein atheistisches Fahrrad", but is reminded of his Party's tolerance of the established churches. Flint grudgingly surrenders his only means of transport, muttering glumly, "Ich verrate die Revolution aus Parteidiziplin. Das Herz ist nicht dabei."<sup>49</sup>

This frustration turns to incomprehension when he sees the obstacles to the revolution and his work towards it as being created by his own class. That his comrades are not able to see that the Party and state are acting in their interest is baffling for Flint, but he veers between encouraging them to take their future into their own hands and a desire to let the state accomplish what he demands of the proletariat - even if that involves totalitarian methods. On hearing the news of Ketzler's suicide he curses the peasant's weakness and impatience:

Hat er nicht warten können? [...] Der beste Staat  
Ist machtlos auf die Länge, wenn das Volk

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<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 81.

Sich hinter seinem Rücken aufhängt und  
Die Hände hochnimmt vor der Reaktion [...].<sup>50</sup>

He complains to a Party secretary, however, about the lack of support in his village and the same fragility in the face of class enemies:

Revolution ist eine Kleinigkeit mit Vollmacht. Wenn du ein Gesetz hast beispielsweise: Mit Zuchthaus wird bestraft, wer die Mütze abnimmt vor einem Kulaken. Oder kannst den Bürgermeister an die Wand stellen einfach, der nicht funktioniert.<sup>51</sup>

His doubts in his flock lead him to act in what he sees as their interest, even if they are to be lied to. The programme of land reform was only ever meant as a prelude to widespread collectivisation but, once again, the decision to bow to the power of the land-owning peasants and the distrust in those without such capital means that the real goal of agricultural policy has to be hidden. In order to reassure the kulaks Flint declares, "Kolchos ist Feindparole", propaganda from the West to de-stabilise rural social relations, but adds in an aside, "Bis auf weiteres."<sup>52</sup> Flint's tactics are to be compared with those of the *Landrat* who succeeds in solving the contradictions faced by the village by engineering a situation where the workers discover for themselves what is to their advantage. Flint, by contrast, is seen to rely too much on agitation and ideology, instead of allowing the peasants to see how a change in the social conditions of production on the land is to their benefit. He seems to fall into the trap of attempting to change his environment by simply the strength of ideas, and if that fails by the enforcement of one ideology by the agencies of the state. His alienation from the material conditions of production is signified by his no longer working on the land. The battle for change, however, needs to be fought in these fields and by increasing the

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

capacity of socialised production against the hidebound structures of the kulak farms. Flint, by contrast, is always on the move, shifting between villages and meetings, in comparison to a figure such as Niet, the refugee, whose role in the play is to stay where she is.

FLINT Ich lass mein Feld Feld sein, vom Pflug weg fahr ich  
Weils mir um mehr ist als um meinen Krautacker  
Mit einem Sack voll Sorgen zur Partei [...].<sup>53</sup>

Flint's neglect of his field is compounded by his absence from home. As Party official he plays a particularly important and exemplary role in the establishment of a new socialised morality. He has, however, problems in being as rigorous in his private life as his comrades in their public political struggle. Beutler announces him at the village meeting as "Kommunist von Kopf bis Fuß. Die Mitte sperrt sich."<sup>54</sup> He has left his first partner for a much younger woman, who is more able to satisfy his immediate needs, for which he is lightly chastised by the party hierarchy. Their admonishment however gestures towards one of the central problems of the play: the conflict that arises when the goal of Communism, which promises fulfilment of desire and an end to everyday worries, necessarily involves the deferral of satisfaction of desire in the present. If Communism is in the interest of the agricultural working classes, why, in the name of that same Communism are they obliged to delay that same interest? To put it another way: why does the present have to be deferred for the sake of the future when what the future offers is the privilege of the present? Flint's transgression of this morality of deferral takes place in sexual dalliance, the epitome, perhaps of the ecstasy

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<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*, p. 87.

of the present, which brings the reputation of the Party and its programme into disrepute.

Die Massen sehn dir nicht bloß auf den Bauch und auf die Finger, dein Bett steht auf der Straße, du bist die herrschende Klasse, Flint, steig ab.<sup>55</sup>

His position as representative of the ruling class does put him in a position of power but also one of responsibility whose load is almost too heavy to bear. As member of the vanguard who is doing more than any other to bring about society's fulfilment, it is precisely he who must abstain from the fruits of such development. Flint must struggle

Fürs bessere Leben, das vielleicht zu spät kommt  
Was mich betrifft, und immer morgen, morgen  
Und eh du deinen Fisch hast, hat der Wurm dich.<sup>56</sup>

Flint likens himself to Moses, the bearer of the law, whose role it was to lead his people to the new land, to prevent the sacrifice of the promised land on the altar of self-indulgence in the present. The contradiction already alluded to thus becomes that between the New and the Now. Flint sees his occasional lapse into the latter as result of the pressure that he has been placed under to produce the results of tomorrow today. His excuse for his infidelity is based on his need for a woman who is "liberated" enough to understand the issues he is involved in, but who with her youth is able to supply distraction from that work. He berates his wife (Flinte 1) for not learning enough to understand the reasons for the work that he does and yet it is she who has provided him with enough time and opportunity to do precisely that himself. Once again, Flint criticises the weakness of those who work on the material conditions of the reproduction of the environment, while not recognising that it is exactly this elemental work which

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<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

grounds the revolution of ideas in which he is engaged and from which he has progressively distanced himself.

Wer hat dir die Socken gestopft gegen Kapp und das Hemd gewaschen, Essen in den Roten Busch geschleppt vier Wochen, wie die SA dich gejagt haben, und die Zunge zerbissen im Sturmlokal und kein Wort?<sup>57</sup>

Flint's invocation to his partner to learn and understand what he sees as the wider social context of her actions and his behaviour remains at the level of his agitational work. The explanation for his infidelity is justified by the future even if it involves indulging in the joys of the present. However, in order for Flinte to bask in the comfort of "knowledge" and the excuses it provides Flint, she would have to neglect the labour that makes the luxury of knowledge possible. This is impossible for her *as woman*, or rather as a woman in this particular society:

Kinder austragen, in die Welt schreien, aufziehn  
Bis mir die Brust vorm Bauch hing, auch für nichts. Ein altes Weib, [...] abgeschoben für ein frisches  
Fleisch jetzt, mit dem du deinen Spaß hast. Ich  
Hab auch bezahlt, und mehr als ich herauskrieg.<sup>58</sup>

Woman cannot allow herself, when put in the position portrayed in *Die Umsiedlerin*, to indulge in the present, *nor* to enter that pattern of sublimation and delay which is the basis of Flint's political work. Her responsibility is the provision of the material conditions for the possibility of the future and as such does not allow the same freedom as utilising an idea of the future to shape those material conditions:

FLINT Ich laß dir deine Freiheit, laß mir meine.  
FLINTE Sagte der Bräutigam nach dem zehnten Kind.<sup>59</sup>

Woman, at least with regard to those qualities which seem to be afforded her in this play, is associated with the land. Her fecundity and identity as the primary means of

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<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

reproduction of the environment goes some way to explain the juxtaposition in the title *Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande*. Niet's fleeting presence in the action of the play belies her importance as symbol in the relation of *man* and labour where there always remains an excess which provides the very conditions of the relationship in the first place. The inability to account for this structuring remainder, be it in the politics of organisation or in the expulsion of the heterogeneous, haunts the play as a whole. Woman and the land could be seen as that material condition which remains exterior to this particular ideology and yet provides a point of resistance to that ideology's drive to create a single, undifferentiated future.

Flint's hypocrisy in this regard is made clear towards the end of the play when he seems to affirm the idea of festivity, not simply as a pause from the development of socialist society but as an integral part of that development.

denn jede Freude ist  
Ein Vorgeschmack vom Kommunismus und  
Der Kommunismus ist, was Spaß macht, sonst  
Wozu den langen Weg mit Blut und Schweiß.<sup>60</sup>

However, when his new partner, Flinte 2, expresses her desire to participate in this foretaste, she is ordered home on the basis of Flint's political responsibility:

FLINT Ich leb nicht zum Vergnügen. Komm. *Packt sie.*  
FLINTE 2 In die Versammlung kann ich schon nicht, weil ich arbeiten muß für  
zwei, wenn du die Dörfer abfährst für alle. Und mich noch dumm schimpfen  
lassen weil ich unpolitisch bin. Jetzt hab ich Zeit.  
*Flint ohrfeigt Flinte 2. Flinte 1 ohrfeigt Flint. Tauziehen um Flinte 2.*<sup>61</sup>

The resistance of women to their instrumentalisation involves their autonomy and assertion of their difference. Flinte 1 advises her "replacement" to cuckold Flint so that

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<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

he can finally learn the meaning of equal opportunities. However, that heterogeneity which the portrayal of women hints at in the play is seen finally to undergo repression, deferral and expulsion. The most striking representative of its transgressive power is not a woman, however, but the most self-centred and seemingly incorrigible character in the play, Fondrak.

*Fondrak - auf den Boden scheiß ich.*

Fondrak is not a character to elicit sympathy. He may provoke fear, loathing or laughter but his behaviour seems almost entirely anti-social and destructive. On his first appearance he sets the tone of his attitude towards his responsibilities. He has fathered a child with Niet, the *Umsiedlerin* but demonstrates not the slightest paternal instinct. He bemoans rather her loss of figure and his attention remains firmly fixed upon his next moment of consumption.

Die Brust ist auch nicht, was sie war, wirds auch  
Nicht wieder hier, wo die Bonzen uns das Fleisch  
Wegschnappen, und jetzt wächst dir noch ein Fresser.  
Schaumgummi, wenn der Busen nachläßt, gibts beim Amerikaner. [...] Hol  
Bier.<sup>62</sup>

His priority is always clear; he aims only to satisfy his own desires, primarily in intoxication and ecstasy. The consequences of this behaviour do not concern him. He characterises his situation as "[e]in Kind zu viel, ein Bier zu wenig."<sup>63</sup> He is not however so addled with alcohol that he cannot find the way to his next beer and is able to combine an uncanny assessment of the village dynamics with a welcome irreverence to those in positions of power or wealth. He blackmails the landlord into giving him a

beer simply by mentioning his black market activities, crowing to Flint after his reward, "Wissen ist Macht."

Flint thereafter spends a great deal of time trying to persuade Fondrak to accept the offer of a smallholding where he and Niet can settle down, work and build a secure future. Fondrak shows, however, not the slightest interest, even though it would give him the means to buy more beer. Flint's promises are merely the deferral of that revelry which Beutler silenced so brutally with the first words of the play: "Musik von morgen. Mein Durst ist von heute. Bier."<sup>64</sup> He demands instead instant gratification and a social system whose primary quality will be the promotion of immediacy; the fungibility of all objects of desire; their co-existence with the desiring subjects in time and space; in other words the privilege of the present over the future, of consumption over deferral: "Kannst du den Kommunismus gleich machen? Wie wärs mit einer Lage für den Anfang?"<sup>65</sup> Fondrak likens his creed of consumption and pointless expenditure to a moral code and challenges Siegfried, an enthusiastic communist, to construct a better one. The only morality which this environment can offer is one of restriction and self-denial, a code which the most willing proletarians (Siegfried and Flint, for example) cannot obey when faced with the temptations of the flesh.

Fondrak regards this ethics of confinement, or incarceration *in the future*, by the demands of work itself, which in this social environment is directed toward a future satisfaction by someone else, as "ein Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit",<sup>66</sup> using a passing crippled farmer as example. When the only reward at the end of a life of labour

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

is the grave and where "der Wurm hat den Oberbefehl."<sup>67</sup> The ordinary labourer works him/herself literally to death ("das Sterben ist dem Menschen angeborn"<sup>68</sup>) and thus the only response for s/he who seeks to escape such servitude and affirm his/her liberty is to withdraw from the project of work and from *project itself*: "Der Mensch ist zum Leben geborn, ich will mich in Freiheit besaufen, auf den Boden schieß ich."<sup>69</sup>

The ambiguity of this line is striking, however. While Fondrak rejects in the most forceful and crude way Flint's offer of agricultural labour, and seemingly the land as condition of material production, such an action also has a beneficial and fertile effect. Later he advises Niet, with regard to her offer of a smallholding: "Schieß drauf, das düngt"<sup>70</sup> - it is perhaps the scatological, elemental aspect of the figure of Fondrak which is most shocking, but in retrospect, that which will be most missed with his departure. He claims to be living the utopia which others are striving for in the future, but now, in the present. While Flint makes clear the cost of such behaviour for the other members of the village ("Die halbe Menschheit hat sich abgeschunden im Kollektiv für deine individuelle Hand."<sup>71</sup>), it is Fondrak who offers traces of that liberty, exultation and joy which communism claims to have amongst its personal effects. Fondrak maintains he is simply living out the egalitarian creed: each according to their need, from each according to their ability. Flint tries to put him right, demonstrating once more his ethic of deferral:

FLINT Jeder nach seiner Leistung, das hast du vergessen, Die Bedürfnisse kriegen wir später.

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<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

FONDRAK Ich bin meiner Zeit voraus, ich hab sie schon. [...] Was war zuerst: der Durst oder das Bier? Ich sage: das Bier, die Welt muß verbraucht werden.<sup>72</sup>

Fondrak brings the structuring contradiction of such a political programme into the open. The future promised defines itself as future, it can never be present, for to be so would be to endanger that future. This itself is an effect of gathering all subjects' futures under one sign - that of a communist utopia. As the play makes clear through the mouth of various characters, the only future they are sure of is their death and decay. While Kaffka and Flint employ this realisation to work for a better future, although the latter allows his idea of the goal to interrupt the material labour in which Kaffka is engaged, Beutler and Fondrak regard the inevitable decay unto death as the reason to seize the present moment. The huge difference between these two seeming egoists is that while the former speculates on the opportunity of the present, that is, what it will bring him at the cost of others, Fondrak expends in the present and exhausts this expenditure. The defining difference between these characters is rather the degree to which they accumulate rather than *expend* the resources which they have garnered. Such accumulation is utterly foreign to Fondrak, while Kaffka seems interested only in accumulation to satisfy basic material needs which will be the ground of social progress. Flint, however, represents that belief in technical progress - coming about through the accumulation of the means of production - which will allow full expenditure in a Utopia dated beyond the deaths of those living. Beutler, despite the mockery of such belief witnessed in his actions, amasses wealth and power for personal, private expenditure, while professing a restrictive communist morality.

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<sup>72</sup> *ibid*

Fondrak is right to be suspicious of the repression of such conspicuous consumption, not least because such suffocation brings with it a restricted understanding of how economies and structures organise and reproduce themselves. He remembers the consequences of such extreme *Spießbürgertum*:

Ein Verbesserungsvorschlag:  
Bier aus der Wand. [...] Den Massen fehlt der Weitblick  
Hitler hats ausgenutzt. Ich wußte gleich  
Den blutigen Ausgang, weil der Mann kein Bier trank  
Und wer kein Bier trinkt, säuft bekanntlich Blut.<sup>73</sup>

Neither the village nor the GDR can find a place for such a figure as Fondrak. He simply cannot be held, tied down to a system of patient work and anticipation. Flint tells him frankly that he must work or die. Fondrak's refusal to do work is less a recommendation of sloth as a demonstration of what is lost by the employment of an ideology of progress and *Aufhebung* born in Hegel and structuring the whole of Marx's thought, of a continual discovery of self-identity unfolding itself through stages of a dialectic culminating in an origin in the future. Such a process of social transformation can easily flip over into dictatorship, even if the "revolution" is being carried out in the name of freedom:

Dann wirst du zugeschnitten, was nicht in den Topf paßt, ab, und wenns der Kopf war. Zum Beispiel wenn du gern ein Bier zu viel trinkst oder zwanzig, oder du willst eine Fabrik aufmachen, eine Brauerei zum Beispiel. Gleich kommen sie mit IchbinBergmannweristmehr oder Bauauf Bauauf. Wenn du verhungern willst, fällt die Fürsorge über dich her. Diktatur.<sup>74</sup>

Flint replies, only confirming Fondrak's analysis: "Dir müßte man das Maul versiegeln, Fondrak."<sup>75</sup> Fondrak is silenced, he leaves the GDR for the West, vowing not to return until socialism has developed enough to deliver what it has promised.

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<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

Ich bin  
Für Arbeitsteilung. Ich besorg den Absatz.  
Tut euer Teil, ich hab mein Teil getan.  
Vorm Kommunismus seht ihr mich nicht wieder.  
Ab.<sup>76</sup>

His departure signals a decisive founding moment for this society. Fondrak goes to the West, aware that the economy of surplus value, overproduction and appropriation awaits him ("Gib [Geld] her. Wenn Inflation kommt, steh ich trocken/ Wenn ich ihn flüssig mach, ist er mir sicher"<sup>77</sup>), and that the breach between the two economic systems is about to be widened to dangerous levels. In a speech which was written in 1959 and yet proved to be eerily prophetic, Müller has Fondrak foresee the imminent future of Europe:

Kann sein, der Rasen zwischen uns wird Staatsgrenze plötzlich, man hat schon Pferde kalben sehn aus Politik, du stehst in Rußland ohne einen Schritt, ich in Amerika, und Kinder machen auf dem Grenzstrich ist Export und verboten, Einfuhr wird auch bestraft. Wenn ich bloß nach deiner Brust greif, wird schon geschossen.<sup>78</sup>

Such a division, the defining moment of the second half of the century, is then expressed by the ability of the two sides to obliterate each other and themselves many times over. The promise of apocalypse, which served as umbrella to the Cold War, is once again foreseen by Fondrak, "Vielleicht sehn wir uns auf dem Mond wieder durch den/ Luftdruck von der Wunderwaffe im nächsten Krieg."<sup>79</sup> It thus bears out his earlier justification for seizing the present: "Kann sein, mich trifft der Schlag eh ich hier aufsteh. Oder ein Stück von einem Stern, der vor dreitausend Jahren geplatzt ist, dich auch."<sup>80</sup> The threat of apocalypse is an effect of the same expulsion of the heterogeneous

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<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 71

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 101.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72.

and suppression of play, and thus links the two sides of the Iron Curtain more closely than they would have imagined or liked.

Fondrak remains a cipher; he displays in his excess what the GDR lacks, namely excess itself. This might be said of any structure as such, but such over-expenditure was particularly dangerous for the ruling elites of the GDR bureaucracy. It undermined the solid self-representation of non-contradiction which the GDR state was seeking to establish, or rather of non-antagonistic contradictions which could be sublimated into a peaceful synthesis. Thus any indiscipline or play within the rigid structure could not be countenanced, as any heterogeneous element threatened the *raison d'être* of the structure which was to allow a homogenous, universal goal of Communist society to develop. By definition, the centre of this structure, the Party and state, limited the play or autonomy generated within civil society, repressing or expelling such play or that which was seen as transgression of the self-imposed limits of socialist society. It might be objected that to regard the state or GDR as structure itself limits the play within the concept of structure<sup>81</sup> and that this argument falls prey to the same movement of universalisation. However, the GDR saw *itself* as such a structure, that is, as something immune to the play and fluidity of time, in that it represented itself as an idea coming back to itself. It was not change that was on the agenda as much as self-realisation, a structure becoming progressively more real, more visible.

The GDR defined itself, therefore, by what it excluded. The transgression of self-representation gave the structure substance, a transgression that was already inscribed into the structure by its drawing of boundaries and limits to itself. By drawing

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<sup>81</sup> Cf. Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* in Writing and Difference. pp. 278-294.

a frontier, or limit of what constituted acceptable behaviour or economic action, the beyond of that acceptability was already established, indeed was the condition for what was proper to, and what constituted propriety in, the GDR. This was, of course, a logic that was not particular to the GDR and other command economies, but is at play in all societies, which by definition must include and exclude in order to define and represent themselves. What was particularly indicative of the totalitarian state - a structure where the state regards itself as universal and is able to act as such - was the energy that was expended on minimising transgression as far as possible. If such control is successful the result is simply a strengthening of the apparent immutability of the limits, as well as a decreasing interest in questioning those limits which define the structure. The fact that the GDR was, as argued above, already inhabited and conditioned by transgression allows such play to surface now and then, primarily in those practices (such as art, certain religious events and festival, for example) which resisted being put to work, being instrumentalised, by the state. Their importance, however, and their continual return, demonstrates only that these practices of transgression, of expenditure without return, were the condition for the self-representation of the GDR state. It is not surprising that they do not appear in the considerations of classical economics which focus primarily and restrictedly on the productive apparatus, but they do correspond to ideas of *general economy* (which have informed this first section) which seek to understand human, social and indeed all activity within the global economy as a whole (from the growth of plants to the deaths of animals) in terms of the constitutive necessity of an excess of resources, given primarily by the absolute expenditure of the sun. In so doing, it seeks to answer the problem of why unproductive expenditure and transgression is so vital to our society, indeed is the condition of it, a problem which the

restricted economy of production can only gloss over by defining it as primitive, useless and immoral.

### *General Economy*

Georges Bataille's work could be characterised by an attempt to think away from God, that is, away from a transcendent, eternal space beyond the limited realm of human activity. This limited space has been regarded as incomplete when contrasted to the unlimited, indeed it is defined by the absence of transcendence, an existence limited to the earthly sphere. Bataille, in response to this historically powerful view, seeks to provide an irresolutely materialist response, which sees human existence as limited but not incomplete because of that. These limits can be transgressed, the limited space deconstructed and then constructed again. The desire, however, to go beyond the bounds of our limited existence is so strong that it cannot be escaped, being in fact constitutive of our very nature. We seek to be at one, perhaps at rest again, with everything that is not ourselves, we seek to be everything, to be unlimited. This desire has been harnessed in various ways by the world's religions, for example, producing the illusion of never having to die, or being reborn into oneness with the whole or absolute. Bataille seeks to exploit this desire in a material way, to transgress the limits of human existence, finally defined by the irrecuperable limit of death, only in order to return to within those limits. For Bataille, there can be no permanent move into the beyond but only a momentary transgression which can only come about if there is a return to within the limits of social existence. Complete transgression is literally unthinkable, completely unrepresentable, for it is either the realm of the psychotic, whose existence, if absolutely psychotic, is

purely in the grasp of the present moment or it is ceasing to exist, not *being* anymore. Complete transgression, or "pure sovereignty" simply *is not*, it is not a *thing*.

This constitutive desire which Bataille describes is at the basis of the understanding of general economy. There is always an excess of energy to be expended, so that the human subject will never be satisfied. However, this rule applies to all activity in the environment:

I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g. an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.<sup>82</sup>

A general view of economy starts with this fact. Any contradiction with contemporary modern economies remains only apparent, the expenditure in loss takes place in any case, merely taking on a more masked and yet more catastrophic form. Expenditure and loss without profit drive all economy, the key to their understanding resides in the surplus that always comes to pass and will always be spent. As soon as the organism comes up against an obstacle or limit to the growth which had previously accounted for the excess of energy received, a loss must take place, not *in order for* another event to happen - this loss has no use as such - but it is an inevitable effect of that first rule of general economy quoted above. Growth, too, is an effect:

[T]here is generally no growth but only a luxurious squandering of energy in every form! The history of life on earth is mainly the effect of a wild exuberance; the dominant event is the development of luxury, the production of increasingly burdensome forms of life.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Bataille, The Accursed Share (AS I), p. 21.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

In the chilling extension to this logic, Bataille regards the expenditure of energy which all organisms and organisations indulge in as witnessed in modern society not by acts of festival (which have come to be regarded as primitive) but by war. That this need not necessarily be the case, that Bataille's ideas of general economy accomplishes a "Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking -and of ethics" leads him to his critique of modern society, both capitalist and Socialist discussed below. This reversal finds no better expression than in the rejection of the point of departure for classical, restricted economy:

From the *particular* point of view, the problems are posed *in the first instance* by a deficiency of resources. They are posed *in the first instance* by an excess of resources if one starts from the *general* point of view.<sup>84</sup>

The masking of excess has been most successfully carried out by the modern economy which overturned feudal relations in order to install the new order of accumulation which characterises the modern era. The medieval economy in Europe<sup>85</sup> was defined by the interdependence of the clergy and nobility whose needs were satisfied by the production of the labouring classes. The former provide a form of protection, the latter, providing the moral law of the church was adhered to, offered a place beyond the short brutish life being enjoyed. Society was conceived along the lines of the human body, of component parts separate and distinct, that is, heterogeneous to each other. The economic world of business and transaction displayed no autonomy, trade was governed by the notion of a *just* price. The excess of wealth was expended in a non-productive manner in the form of festivals, the extravagance of the aristocracy and the grand devotional buildings of the church.

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Bataille, *ibid.*, pp. 116-124.

What differentiates the medieval economy from the capitalist economy is that to a very large extent the former, static economy made a non-productive consumption of the excess wealth, while the latter accumulates and determines a dynamic growth of the production apparatus.<sup>86</sup>

This development of accumulation of the means of production came about through the upheaval of the Reformation. While Luther is often credited with sowing the seeds of capitalism, Bataille follows Weber and Tawney<sup>87</sup> in regarding the radical shift away from medieval organisation as being accomplished by Calvin. While Luther provoked only a "naive half-peasant revolt" the influence of Calvin could be seen to correspond to the initial growth areas of mercantile capitalism (Holland, America and Great Britain). The importance of Luther, however, was to formulate the idea of the meaninglessness of wealth as regards heavenly salvation. Any work engaged in here below had no other meaning than what its ends were on earth. Any accomplishment was in any case essentially futile, salvation could only be attained by grace and faith alone. Thus the only significance left to work became its productive value, but this was kept strictly in check by Luther's continued abhorrence of usury and an earned wealth that might have smacked of greed and extravagance.

Calvin rejected such scruples, seeing no difference in the earned income of the merchant and banker and the unearned accumulation enjoyed by the landowner. Furthermore, such industry served the glory of God, good works and hard labour could not attain salvation but were rather a demonstration that the successful merchant had been saved, and that a righteous life was to be found in salvation, rather than the other way around. Any luxurious expenditure was thus seen as pointless (as it could not bring about salvation) or rather, such outpourings were condemned because of their lack of

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*, p. 116.

utility. Value came to reside in utility itself, as such the value of an action or an object was always deferred from the present moment to some point in the future; work became compulsive repetition, the forever unsuccessful attempt to overcome the finitude of earthly existence which the opening of bourgeois subjectivity had emphasised. The protestant had only a certain amount of time to *achieve* something. Hand in hand with such developments arose the individualisation of property, the surrender to value residing in things or a universal equivalent, now money, and most importantly the marginalisation of glorious expenditure. While Bataille insists on its continued status, the Reformation saw expenditure become that part of life that was taboo, an accursed share. In its place, capitalism accumulates the means of production; wealth is not spent but invested in the development and continual revolution of the means of production:

It is not the final purpose of any individual in particular, but collectively that of the society that an epoch has chosen. It gives precedence in the use of the available resources to the expansion of enterprises and the increase of capital equipment; in other words, it prefers *an increase of wealth* to its immediate use.<sup>88</sup>

Production becomes an activity valid in itself, it attains the status of value generation. A man is worth what he produces, where that value is determined not by what immediate use the results and effects of his production have, but rather by what they can be exchanged for:

Money serves to measure all work and makes man a function of measurable products. [...] [E]ach man is worth what he produces: in other words, he stops being an existence *for itself*: he is no more than a function, arranged within measurable limits, of collective production (which makes him an existence *for something other than itself*).<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Bataille's reading was based on Weber's *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* and Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*

<sup>88</sup> Bataille, *ASI*, p. 119.

<sup>89</sup> Bataille, *The Psychological Structure of Fascism in Visions of Excess*, p. 138.

The two lines of the epochal divide were thus drawn. The sovereign classes of the *anciens régimes* defined themselves by the useless consumption of wealth against the labouring classes of the bourgeois world who characterised themselves by the degree to which they were servile to the goals of production. They produced wealth, but not in order to consume. Even the most extravagant factory owner appropriated the produced wealth of his employees not to consume it profitlessly but invest for further gain. This investment was purely for himself however, it plays no role in cementing society as did the extravagance of the aristocracy. In this sense, the expenditure of the medieval sovereign and his/her descendants was not for him/herself but was an expression of the economy of society - the notion of individual wealth to be disposed of as individual was at this point not so virulent. The technological upheaval of the modern age did not solve the problem of expenditure for the capitalist, it simply allowed the amount of surplus energy produced to increase, thus amplifying also the measure of loss that was indulged in. To emphasise once more, the onset of a society of accumulation and technology did not obviate the need to expend. Bataille insists that if the economy is understood *generally*, profitless loss will remain the conditioning force, one must simply look for it away from the conspicuous extravagance of aristocracy and instead in the industriousness of the modern labourer, surplus value and a different form of war.

Bataille focuses upon the replacement by labour of an intimacy of the present moment which the sovereign figure would have enjoyed. The principle determinant of the economy changes from such concentration on the present moment to the motor of the subsequent result. Clearly such a change allows also for change itself, it allows for programmes and projects of liberation, but Bataille insists that the modern

consciousness, in its dependence on labour and deferral, is essentially servile. The sovereign consciousness remains "beyond utility".

[W]e may call sovereign the enjoyment of possibilities that utility doesn't justify (utility being that whose end is productive utility). Life beyond utility is the domain of sovereignty. [...] We may say, in other words, that it is *servile* to consider duration first, to employ the *present time* for the sake of the *future*, which is what we do when we work. [...] The worker does not personally have in view the sovereign pleasure of the future [...]. What is sovereign in fact is to enjoy the present time without having anything else in view but this present time.<sup>90</sup>

In contrast to servile labour for the future, sovereign action in the present cannot become part of a project of work, it cannot be *put to work*, or commodified. It is not, unlike labour, negation of the environment, it does not get involved in a dialectic having synthesis as its goal, it can only remain different, particular, unique, useless. Sovereign action

can no longer *collaborate* with the continuous linking-up of meaning, concept, time and truth in discourse; because it literally can no longer *labor* and let itself be interrogated as the "work of the negative".<sup>91</sup>

Labour, on the contrary, must negate. It cannot help be swept up in the consideration of the future that is the continual negation and re-negation of dialectics. Labour makes *things*, it names them, conceptualises them, in order to use them for the future. An object becomes through labour an instrument, merely a means to an end.

The fundamental difference in modernity lies in the shift in the characterisation of labour. With industrialisation and the increase in the power of capital, labour must sell *itself* as a thing (as a commodity) as the worker can no longer produce goods efficiently enough to compete with mass production. The labourer thus has only his

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<sup>90</sup> Bataille, *The Accursed Share Volumes II and III*, (AS II & III), pp. 198-9.

<sup>91</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, in *Writing and Difference*, pp. 259-60.

labour to sell and is himself reduced to the status of a thing.<sup>92</sup> What is most human - the reproduction of the environment - becomes commodified to an unheard of extent; almost everything can be exchanged for a universal equivalent, and primarily the activities of the labourer are diminished to the exchange value of what he produces. The human being who has only his labour to sell is, in degrees, less a subject than s/he who expropriates the objects of his labour:

The share of this product that is not necessary to the subsistence of the *object* that the man who produces is for the time being, is the share of the *subject* that the sovereign is. The sovereign restores to the primacy of the present the surplus share of production acquired to the extent that men submitted to the primacy of the future.<sup>93</sup>

The intimacy of the human with his/her environment can never be expressed through the thing for in and with it dwell always a consideration and devotion to the future rather than the present moment. The only way of achieving this intimacy once more, of attaining some experience of one's particular subjectivity, one's singularity, is through practices where the deep structure of general economy is acknowledged once more:

Intimacy is not expressed by a *thing* except on one condition: that this *thing* be essentially the opposite of a *thing*, the opposite of a product, of a commodity - a consumption and sacrifice. Since intimate feeling is a consumption, it is consumption that expresses it, not a *thing*, which is its negation.<sup>94</sup>

The modern world, Bataille maintains, has been shaped by the attempt to solve the problems raised by the dominance of the thing. Modernism, if thought of as generally as a reaction against modernity, has sought to allow an underlying reality beneath the world of things to speak out. Marxism, in spite of its claims to be the antidote to capitalism, proclaims its modernity, not only by its emphasis on the development of the

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<sup>92</sup> cf. Bataille, AS I p. 129.

<sup>93</sup> Bataille, AS II & III, pp. 240-1.

<sup>94</sup> Bataille, AS I, p. 132.

means of production as the means to the goal of communism, but also by its insistence on this being achieved through the *thing*.

The fundamental proposition of Marxism is to free the world of *things* (of the economy) entirely from every element that is extraneous to *things* (to the economy): It was by going to the limit of the possibilities implied in *things* [...] by carrying to its ultimate consequences the movement that reduces man to the condition of a *thing*, that Marx was determined to reduce *things* to the condition of man, and man to the free disposition of himself.<sup>95</sup>

This emphasis on production of commodities, in order to free the world of the fetishism of commodities, places Marxism firmly within the modern doxa. Production, and the deferral of enjoyment which accompanies it, comes to define society for Bataille as *homogenous*. Production lies at the base of social homogeneity insofar as it conditions every act to be useful. Useless acts are not productive, they do not allow anything else to be produced. An object is produced, on the other hand, in order to be useful for another product and its production cannot be a valid activity in itself. The value of the activity of production is measured by a calculable equivalent - money - which "measures all work and makes man a function of measurable products."<sup>96</sup> Seen as a whole, ideologically, production comes to be seen as useful, simply because it produces: production, in ideology, becomes an end in itself. The whole society becomes geared as one to the idea of the goal of production.

The middle ages, by contrast, displayed its degree of *heterogeneity* in its relative indifference to production for its own sake. Goods were produced to be consumed within a framework of social heterogeneity, with clearly defined roles of lordship and servitude. The labourer worked for the immediate consumption of his superiors. Clergy,

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>96</sup> Bataille, *The Psychological Structure of Fascism*. *op. cit.*, p. 138.

military aristocracy and labouring classes did not merge into each other and it was indeed this uncompromising distinction which could be said to define the society.

In the society of industry which followed on from this epoch, however, the owner of the means of production is distinguished from the producer. The former appropriates the product and becomes thereby a function of the product itself. He "founds" a social homogeneity which forces the producer to work, but excludes him/her from profit. The proletariat thus only truly fit into the homogenous framework of production when they are producing and earning their wage. Their activities outside of production, although they may be reduced to a bare minimum, display a degree of heterogeneity to the dictates of utility. This would explain bourgeois distaste of working-class culture, the pointlessness of spending a week's wages on Friday night, the refusal to "invest" in oneself. It is the degree to which the producer has incorporated the psychological homogeneity of the productive process into his life outside work which determines the heterogeneity which could be a signifier of the power of the producing classes. The power in such alterity from the norms of utility goes some way to explaining why transgression comes to be expelled from homogenous society. The solidity of the post-war Western world might thus be explained by the progressive inclusion of the producing classes and their ever-increasing distance from the possibilities of transgressive behaviour.

Heterogeneous activity can be defined by that which does not serve the function of utility in homogenous society. Thus Bataille includes not only socially useless activity (where the society in question is driven by the need to produce) but also:

everything rejected by *homogenous* society as waste or as superior transcendent value. Included are the waste products of the human body and certain analogous matter (trash, vermin etc.); the parts of the body; persons, words, or acts having a suggestive erotic value; the various unconscious processes such as dreams or

neuroses; the numerous elements or social forms that *homogenous* society is powerless to assimilate: mobs, the warrior, aristocratic and impoverished classes, different types of violent individuals or at least those who refuse the rule (madmen, leaders, poets, etc.).<sup>97</sup>

Indulging in such acts outside of the space and time that has been allotted them constitutes some form of transgression of the homogenous norms of utilitarian society. Such transgression moves beyond the *limits* imposed on such behaviour (for example where and in what form sexual acts should take place) but its power resides only in its ability to return to within the limits, to become non-transgressive once more. Complete transgression, utter heterogeneity can, as in the case of the madman - simply be labelled, negated and used by society to strengthen its limits by expelling transgression that threatens its stability. The joyous surpassing of limits, which occurs exemplarily in erotic behaviour and the festival, is lacking in the productive apparatus of capitalism and modern society generally, as it serves no purpose, and indeed threatens the vary nature of purpose and rational teleology. Sexual activity which does not serve a purpose, in other words, which does not reproduce or itself produce a commodity (such as in pornography), stands out as a challenge to the principle of work and utility. It is an operation which is valid in itself and in its own time. Perhaps more than any other activity, erotic behaviour luxuriates in the present. In contrast, the festival has been turned into a theme park, the carnival has become commodified.

Whereas in pre-modern society such transgressive behaviour was a form of cohesion, typified by the chaos of a festival, it has since become subversive. When society becomes one body it cannot allow any part of it to become infected with otherness, or that part must be expelled and made completely other. The subversive

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<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*, p. 142.

power in transgressive behaviour resides, once more, in its ability to remain part of the body politic, to avoid banishment, in its capacity to return within the limits of that body. On the other hand it also resists assimilation into any speculative unity of the body; the processes and structures of homogeneity are not *immanent* to it.

Transgression and heterogeneous activity live with the threat of their expulsion from or recuperation into the body of society. In fact, their heterogeneity does not allow them to be thought within that society unless they are accorded a meaning which the discourse of society can grasp. If heterogeneous activity is by definition resistant to utility and to considerations of the future and is at the same time an eruption of the present as an end in itself, then it cannot be understood in discourse which unfolds over time.

[K]nowledge is never given to us except by *unfolding in time*. It is not given in sudden illumination of the mind but in a *discourse*, which is necessarily employed in duration. Knowledge, and the most profound knowledge, never appears to us in full except, finally, as the result of a calculated effort, an operation useful to some end.<sup>98</sup>

The present can only be known and communicated in discourse through representation, imbued with the anticipation, teleology and the future, and infected with memory, history and theory. The meaning of the sovereign moment in the present can only be given in the loss of that moment, a *submission* to future concerns: "As a manifestation of meaning, discourse is thus the loss of sovereignty itself. Servility is therefore only the desire for meaning."<sup>99</sup> In his essay on Bataille's work on Hegel, Derrida goes onto characterise the former's attempt to escape the path of constant negation and increasing self-knowledge as the subversion of the dialectic itself. The speculative dialectic, which

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<sup>98</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, p. 202.

<sup>99</sup> Derrida, J., *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p. 262.

encloses itself in the circle of self-realisation, governs and determines what lies before and behind it in a *closure* of anticipation and memory. What is negated by the dialectic, then *aufgehoben* into the next stage is used for the coming-to-itself of consciousness in the Hegelian scheme. The speculation involved in the dialectic is engaged in for the profit of *Geist*, for the ever-increasing accumulation in knowledge. It is thus that Derrida can write: "Self-consciousness is servile."<sup>100</sup>

Bataille insists, however, that one of the chief characteristics of heterogeneous or sacred activity is that it is *communication*. How can non-servility thus be communicated if discourse immediately betrays the ecstasy of the moment? Bataille maintains in response that an expenditure without reserve, indulging in glorious loss, communicates what is at stake in life, without expressing it in representation. Heterogeneous activity and expenditure without profit occur in sacred activities where the basic law of general economy is revealed. Indeed, they can only occur in sacred and heterogeneous activities for to do otherwise would be to turn them into profane activities expressed in discourse. In this sense it is meaningless to talk about heterogeneity, as by definition any analysis of it transforms it into an object of knowledge rather than the particular subjectivity which it expresses. However, we can still witness its effects, we can even try to inscribe traces of it into writing, but it remains other and utterly different.

The communication of non-servility to project and utility is expressed in an exemplary fashion by those who put themselves in question when faced with death. When confronted with the risk of death, the self is put at stake, it reaches its limit, beyond which is only nothingness. Reaching this limit in sacred activity (be it in the ecstasy of the erotic where control, self-governance and the boundaries of subjectivity

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<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 276.

are breached or sacrifice where the death of the other is substituted for the onlooker) communicates that limit- death - which defines human existence. But the experience of the limit can only come about in heterogeneous activity, that is, in the instant, in a present that always eludes us, and which can never be re-presented. The *sovereignty* that such behaviour witnesses is not performed by a self-consciousness, but is a pure subjectivity:

[S]overeignty *does not govern itself*. And does not govern in general: it governs neither others nor things, nor discourses in order to produce meaning. [...] Once sovereignty has to attempt to make someone or something subordinate to itself, we know that it would be retaken by dialectics, would be subordinate to the slave, to the thing and to work.<sup>101</sup>

Sovereignty only takes place in operations of loss; in this expenditure without reserve

sovereignty is essentially the refusal to accept the limits that the fear of death would have us respect in order to ensure, in a general way, the laboriously peaceful life of individuals. [...] It also calls for the risk of death. Sovereignty always demands the liquidation through strength of character, of all the failings that are connected with death, and the control of one's deep tremors.<sup>102</sup>

Only traces of sovereignty are to be found within individuals, but where it reveals itself it announces itself as a result of the refusal to commit oneself to work as the only useful activity one can indulge in before one dies. The representation of death that occurs in the world of project becomes finally the end of life, its fulfilment and what gives life meaning. (Indeed, the idea of any complete project might itself be regarded as the attempt to accomplish fullness and live to tell the tale.) In the moment of sovereignty, by contrast, in that ecstasy of the present, a representation of death (which by definition would mean making it an object) is impossible; instead one flirts, playfully, with the experience of death, laughing at its inevitability.

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 264-5.

<sup>102</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, pp. 221-2.

The primacy of the present that is replayed in the event of sovereignty subverts therefore the temporality of work. While the labourer works for a future consumption by another, the sovereign "restores to the primacy of the present the surplus share of production, acquired to the extent that men submitted to the primacy of the future."<sup>103</sup> While the lord or capitalist expropriates that share of subjectivity that the labourer has lost by having to succumb to the future (in other words by becoming an object for the expropriator), the human who seeks to assert his/her sovereignty at work does so by not working. The sovereign individual does only useless things, s/he indulges in a senseless loss. The sovereignty that such loss entails, because it is *loss*, cannot be said to be:

[T]here is no sovereignty *itself*. Sovereignty dissolves the values of meaning, truth and a *grasp-of-the-thing-itself*. This is why the discourse that it opens above all is not true, truthful or "sincere". Sovereignty is the impossible, therefore it *is not*, it *is* - Bataille writes this word in italics - "this loss".<sup>104</sup>

It is consequently not a *thing* that can be exchanged, commodified, or put to work. It cannot be used as a means toward an end as it is not an object that can be negated and preserved in a dialectic. Rather, "sovereignty is never truly objective, [...] it refers rather to deep subjectivity."<sup>105</sup> It refuses employment and utility altogether, it declines to use others as means for its own ends: it refuses *power*. Accordingly, the only way for the worker to act sovereignly is to refuse to work, to extract him/herself from the dialectic of deferral and self-consciousness in the future by initiating this refusal in the present.

Such action is not only to be found in industrial strife. The privilege of the sovereign moment is powerfully expressed in all useless activity, not least in a writing of loss, a writing that sacrifices its meaning. Poetic speech is powerless, but sovereign in that it is not significative:

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 241.

The poetic or the ecstatic is that *in every* discourse which can open itself up to the absolute loss of its sense, to the (non-base) of the sacred, of non-meaning, of un-knowledge or of play [...]. What is poetic in sovereignty is announced in "the moment when poetry renounces *theme* and meaning."<sup>106</sup>

The expenditure of sense without profit in poetry can communicate not only a degree of sovereign subjectivity in the experience of reading a poem, or hearing poetic language, but it can call forth also a response that similarly sacrifices meaning and utility in a sovereign manner. The great problem for criticism resides in the destruction of this sovereign moment when it is turned into an object. For the sovereign moment consists in mocking such utility, indeed, laughter, or perhaps a *certain sort* of laughter is its language. If no meaning or use can be attached to it, if it cannot be made an object of knowledge or negated in discourse, then it does truly "exceed dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity."<sup>107</sup> Certain laughter, therefore, is sovereign to death, in that it laughs it out, but cannot be included in any system or programme which aims at self-realisation of an idea (be it *Geist* or communist society) because it is no *thing*; it is not an object that can be known and then employed. If comedy produces a certain form of laughter, a laughter of the moment, of forgetting the project and dialectic, it becomes as heterogeneous as ecstasy or the sacred. A certain laughter *transgresses*, but only if its object is no *thing*, if the joke cannot be explained. Laughter shows a sovereign moment only if it communicates sovereignty away from the dialectics of discourse thereby remaining on the margin, transgressing the limit of the

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<sup>104</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>105</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, p. 237.

<sup>106</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p. 261.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.

organisation of utility that cannot laugh at itself, for to do so would be to expend and lose without reserve.

*Comedy in the Kolchosa*

The attempt to write about comedy or to re-inscribe laughter immediately faces the problem that the object of its study has disappeared. When the joke is explained, it ceases to be funny, it does not make us laugh any more. In other words, the very event that provokes us to study does not and cannot present itself as an object of study. Laughter, as Derrida points out in his essay on Bataille, is *no-thing*. It exemplifies the impossibility of representing the body adequately, or rather, the expenditure which the body indulges in cannot be represented without there remaining an excess which transcends the attempt to recapture it. The problem of discussing expenditure in academic discourse illustrates the general impossibility of the entry of the profane world of science and knowledge into the sacred arena which is characterised by loss. As soon as that entrance is made, the defining property of the sacred - loss - is lost. This would in turn, however, point toward that academic discourse which would prove most suited to the description of the sacred. This discourse would hope to show itself aware of what is lost in its accumulation of knowledge, in other words, that it is subject to the same laws of general economy as that no-thing which it attempts to objectify.

*Die Umsiedlerin* advertises itself as a comedy. It could be regarded as a chronicle of events past, a collection of amusing scenes focussing on the early years of the GDR. It might be performed as a fable where the events come to a conclusion, where the epoch portrayed is closed. In concrete terms, this would mean the

representation of the problems of modernisation and collectivisation of GDR agriculture as having been superceded and built upon by the present epoch, that is, by that era which the presence of the audience in the theatre represents. At the first performance of the play the GDR would have been in need of some reassurance as to the justice of its project as the Berlin Wall had just been erected. This immediate post-wall era would thus seem to provide a fertile ground for seeing the *Gründerzeit* as problems successfully overcome, as lying so far in the past that one can now *laugh* about them.

This would seem to correspond to those theories of comedy which, perhaps revealingly, though thin on the ground, sought to explain the workings of comedy and laughter in Marxist-Leninist terms. The very attempt to do so, and its extraordinary results, reveals as much about the nature of Marxist-Leninist as any other artistic theory. In its endeavour to explain laughter, to make it an object, it is re-inscribed in that teleology of totalitarianism which encapsulates the GDR most succinctly. Comic theory becomes an extreme example of such instrumentalisation because it attempts to restrict that which is most inimical to the work of the state - losing oneself in the laughter of the present.

Marxist-Leninist theory on comedy is based,<sup>108</sup> in the most general sense, on the comic, disjunctive effect of historical anachronism. The fact that earlier societies were not so advanced as now, and that they displayed contradictions which have been resolved by historical progress, is funny. As Keller accurately sums up

[D]ie anachronistischen Rückstände historisch überholter gesellschaftlicher Formationen gelten als bevorzugte Gegenstände der Komödie. Das Gesellschaftlich-Komische ergibt sich aus dem Widerspruch zwischen erstarrten politischen und sozialen Strukturen, die ihren Geltungsanspruch verloren haben

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<sup>108</sup> This summary is indebted to Andreas Keller's (op. cit.) discussion and bibliography of comic theory, pp. 154-171.

und deren endgültige Verabschiedung längst überfällig geworden ist, und den historisch notwendig sich vollziehenden Veränderungen, die sich letztlich gegen alle Widerstände durchsetzen werden.<sup>109</sup>

This idea in turn comes originally from a passage in Marx which was evidently seized upon by Marxist-Leninist theorists who were desperately looking for some, for *any* reference to comedy in the canon which might allow them to formulate a suitably Marxist theory of comedy. In the end, despite their eagerness, these theorists had to settle for passages from Marx's *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, where the term is used in passing in the introduction. One shudders to think what they might have come up with had Marx not chosen to use in this context a metaphor of comedy and tragedy to describe both the last days of the *ancien regime* as well as the *Vormärz* years in Germany (those leading up to the revolution in 1848). Marx suggests that while the demise of the former was experienced by its adherents (that is, those living through and at the time of the events in question) as tragedy, "[a]us der Sicht der fortgeschrittenen Staaten, in denen die alte Ordnung schon durch eine neue ersetzt worden ist, erweist sich der Fortbestand des *ancien regimes* als lächerlich."<sup>110</sup> Thus in Germany after 1848 the *Vormärz* regime was seen simply as a historical anachronism, a laughable hotpotch of counts and dukes, of antiquated rituals and ceremonies which history had left behind.

It was thus

mehr Komödiant einer Weltordnung, deren wirkliche Helden gestorben sind. Die Geschichte ist gründlich und macht viele Phasen durch, wenn sie eine alte Gestalt zu Grabe trägt. Die letzte Phase einer weltgeschichtlichen Gestalt ist ihre Komödie.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Keller, *op. cit.*, p. 154-55.

<sup>110</sup> Marx, Karl, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (extract) in Marx, Engels, Lenin, *Über Kultur, Ästhetik und Literatur: Ausgewählte Texte*, p. 375.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

With nothing else to go on, the necessity of formulating a theory of comedy for *real existierender Sozialismus* (in order that it be performed at all) had to resort not to aesthetics or psychology but philosophy of history. Comedy thus became based on perceived historical development and progress and laughter came from the security of knowing that history will continue to develop to its logical conclusion. In other words, just as bourgeois society was destined to overcome its feudal predecessor, so would socialism live to see capitalism buried as well as any of its own outstanding contradictions resolved. As such, this theory of comedy represented on the one hand as stark a form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as can be imagined, married with the self-satisfied smile of the person who imagines him or herself the victor. The laughing member of the audience was, however, by definition not alone. In order to find anything funny, s/he was obliged to identify and align him or herself with the rest of the society because it was only as the next stage in social and economic history that anything was funny at all.

Nur die Übereinkunft der Zuschauer, gemeinsam für die Sache des Fortschritts einzustehen, nur die parteiliche Grundstellung gegenüber anachronistischen Tendenzen in der Gegenwart ermöglicht ein gemeinschaftliches Überlegenheitslachen.<sup>112</sup>

Laughter, in this schema, is that of the mocking majority, ridiculing those who are not seen as part of the body politic; it is in its bare essentials little more than an ugly combination of mob rule and *Siegerjustiz*, an attempt to comfort oneself by assuring that one remains part of the crowd that is in power at that moment. Keller quotes Georgina Baum, author of *Humor und Satire in der bürgerlichen Ästhetik: Zur Kritik Ihres apologetischen Charakters*, whose book was written only a short time before the first

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<sup>112</sup> Keller, Andreas. *Drama und Dramaturgie Heiner Müllers*, p. 155.

night of *Die Umsiedlerin*. She states with chilling simplicity: "Der Lachende [kann] im Sozialismus nur Repräsentant der sozialistischen Gesellschaft sein."<sup>113</sup> Laughter therefore ceases to be a singular bodily expression of a psychological reaction, and becomes only an admission or not of whether one subscribes to the dominant philosophy of history. This of course begs the question as to how this theory seeks to deal with bodily humour itself, be it slapstick, mime or fart jokes on the one hand; or on the other that form of wit where laughter comes from the skewed re-presentation of linguistic utterances.<sup>114</sup> This problem and how it relates to *Die Umsiedlerin* will be discussed below, as socialist realist comic theory has no answer to it. Instead it emphasises far more the historical solidarity whose existence comedy, along with every other social and private act in the totalitarian state, is meant to ensure. Comedy merely serves two purposes:

[E]inerseits werden die rückschrittlichen und hemmenden Faktoren des Geschichtsprozesses entlarvt und durch Verlachen denunziert; auf der anderen Seite wird das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl der lachenden Zuschauer gestärkt.<sup>115</sup>

There were correspondingly, according to Keller, two forms of comedy which resulted from this standpoint. The first, satire, had as its principal object those situations which had been safely left behind or those figures who were representatives of anachronistic social scenarios. What was laughed at, therefore, was the past or those trying to reintroduce that past into the present. Laughter itself becomes a means of distancing oneself from that past and more poignantly, of brushing over the violence and victims of

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<sup>113</sup> Baum, quoted in Keller, *ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> To give one example: "What did the slug say to the snail? 'Copy of 'The Big Issue' sir?'" While the context of the joke clearly emanates from the serious problem of homelessness in the U.K., the humour, equally clearly, does not. Instead, the idea of a slug being "homeless", i.e. without a shell, is what makes one laugh (or not, as the case may be). As such, this humour is also based on figures and events being transported away from their usual context (in other words a form of anachronism), and this *displacement*

the transformation of anachronistic past to relevant present because those victims were deemed necessary for the goal of society in the future.

The second form of comedy is described as *Humor*, a more gentle, seemingly more generous and yet patronising smile at those figures in any portrayed scene of contemporary society who represent "non-antagonistic" contradictions waiting to be ironed out by the course of history. This form of humour claims, according to Keller, to have regarded itself as an act of charity, involving a degree of "wesentliche Identification". Laughter is thus

genährt von dem im Publikum verbreiteten Wissen einer bereits erfolgten geschichtlichen Überwindung eines jahrhundertealten Antagonismus, dem keine weiteren gesellschaftlichen Antagonismus nachfolgen werden.<sup>116</sup>

Essential to this rather more relaxed position is a measure of political liberalisation which might allow more sanguine reflection on the "contradictions" in the society of the time. This is suggested by some commentators on GDR history as having set in after the erection of the Berlin Wall, when the last opportunity of escape from the country was sealed. Müller himself recalls the hope which permeated the circles of GDR intelligentsia, including figures who were later to become prominent dissidents, that however barbaric the Wall might be, it might at the same time promise the blooming of a thousand flowers of thought.

[W]ir waren ungeheuer froh über die Mauer. Manfred Krug hat sofort einen Film gemacht, damals zur Mauer, wie ein Arbeiter einer Betriebskampfgruppe ein blondes Mädchen vor der Prostitution in West-Berlin rettet, indem er es noch rechtzeitig auf diese Seite der Mauer bringt. Ein ganz rührendes Werk. Wolf Biermann hat ein Stück geschrieben mit einer ganz ähnlichen Geschichte. Wir fanden alle, daß das das einzig Richtige ist und das einzig Mögliche. Und das war auch die einzige Möglichkeit, die ökonomische Ausblutung der DDR zu

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is humorous, not what is displaced itself. Almost all of Monty Python or Gary Larson's work fits this pattern exactly.

<sup>115</sup> Keller, *Drama und Dramaturgie Heiner Müllers*, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 156.

verhindern. Und wir dachten: Jetzt ist die Mauer da, jetzt kann man in der DDR über alles offen reden. Zur gleichen Zeit sagte der Sekretär von Ulbricht zu Stephan Hermlin, und das hat er mir später erzählt: Jetzt haben wir die Mauer, und daran werden wir jeden zerquetschen, der gegen uns ist.<sup>117</sup>

Certainly while a very moderate thaw is sometimes seen as setting in in the years after August 1961, although this in comparison was still less than the cumnudgeonly liberalisation which followed Ulbricht's death and Honecker's confirmation in power, the experience of Müller and his director Tragelehn succeeding the performance of *Die Umsiedlerin* seem to tell a different story.<sup>118</sup>

To recall Benjamin's division of the work of art into *Sach-* and *Wahrheitsgehalt* (discussed in Chapter One), and how their relationship determines the reception of the work in years to come, it could be suggested that two forms of humour are to be found in *Die Umsiedlerin*. The first corresponds to the officially sanctioned comedy of the time, where the object of amusement or satire is an easily criticised and detested figure or misguided practice, both of which have no place in the GDR's contemporary self-representation. It is an easy laugh, an obvious target of ridicule which confirms rather than challenges the dominant political ideology, and equally falls short of addressing the position of the subject and its material body within that ideology and the society it serves and reflects.

The second form of humour present in *Die Umsiedlerin* is far more dangerous, as witnessed by the fate of the play after its opening night. Exemplified by the figure of Fondrak, these jokes are coarse, dirty, insulting and transgressive. Often taking the form of bodily humour on the stage, their aim is not to remain content with a self-satisfied review of the dialectic of history. They are, it will be argued, an eruption of the present

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<sup>117</sup> Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer* 3, pp. 114-5.

into a narrative: firstly into that story-narrative that makes up the play as a whole, but secondly and more significantly they fissure that narrative of history which sees itself as already written. The fact that this humour and attitude are banished in the play (Fondrak's desertion of the GDR) and that they also lead to the censorship of the play within the GDR after its performance must, I will argue, be seen as being the inevitable consequence of their congruence in Müller's work. Finally, if part of the material content of the play is its humour, then the first sort represents that which is lost over time, which weakens the play and which simply is not so funny anymore. This is not merely because jokes about Soviet tractors fail to achieve much resonance in late Nineties Britain, but also because the form of their humour attempts to foreground the present epoch by laughing at the past. That lightning flash of recognition of which laughter is the effect<sup>119</sup> is only with difficulty reproduced when any truth content which might shine through is dependent upon a material content which does its level best to prevent remembrance (as argued above). Preoccupation with the justification of the present thus prevents the *jouissance* of that present coming through.

The easy laugh of historical superiority<sup>120</sup> is most amply represented by the figure of Beutler, the milker turned bureaucrat whose opportunism finally leads to him receiving his just desserts at the end of the play. While on the one hand a portrayal of

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<sup>118</sup> See discussion below.

<sup>119</sup> That the lightning flash of the dialectical image can be seen as analogous to the moment of laughter in Bataille (and Derrida) has, as far as I am aware, not been properly investigated. One could go further and suggest that laughter over a dated joke is dependent upon the then and now (anachronism again) appearing momentarily and simultaneously. As hard to define as truth content is, (indeed one would have to tell a joke, for example, to allow it to be shown) it would seem that those jokes, just like literature, where the truth content cannot be released into a dialectical image with the now (the precondition for the truth content in the first place) will not survive *as jokes*. By satisfying themselves with the inevitability and permanence of their present, they become lost to future generations.

<sup>120</sup> It is, of course, all too easy to laugh at the humour of the GDR for representing an idea that has had its day (state socialism, or the idea of the historical telos itself). This would, however, be to repeat exactly

such a rotten apple in heart of the local state apparatus might be seen as provocative and dangerous – in that one would have to know the denouement of the play in order to be able to sit back, enjoy his downfall and laugh at the representative of long sublated social contradictions – the presentation of the figure of Beutler as caricature (he is very much a one-dimensional figure in comparison to Flint, Niet, or even Fondrak) must have allowed the audience to laugh at him from the very beginning. It is because he is not accorded any role in narrative, be that in the story of the play as a whole (other than his switching back and forth between political positions) or in the sense of being allowed any history or development of character, that he comes to take on the appearance of a symbol. It is then vital that what he is a symbol of is made immediately clear (through his alliances with kulaks and other reactionary elements left over from pre-GDR Germany), the *temporality* of his very flat symbolic character allows him to appear as anachronism.

Scene 3 provides a number of examples of the laughter which Beutler is expected to provoke. He comes home from a hard day's Machiavellianism, tells Siegfried (the FDJ activist), who brings the news of the arrival of the tractors, "Mein Dienst ist um. Der Bürgermeister kann mich."<sup>121</sup> He orders his wife to pull off his boots and she out of spite immediately refuses Niet leave to use the stove. A typically symbolic scene follows:

BEUTLER Das Gesetzblatt

*Beutler macht aus dem Gesetzblatt eine Fliegenklatsche und jagt Fliegen.*

*Auftritt Rammler [a kulak].*

Ein Fliegenjahr. Verschwind, Frau. Politik.

RAMMLER Dein Speck.

BEUTLER

Warst Du beim Landrat?

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that historical self-satisfaction I am criticising in the GDR. As already argued above, such a view also prevents remembrance of the GDR, that is, in Benjaminian terms, an adequate historicisation itself.

<sup>121</sup> Müller, *Die Umstiedlerin*, op. cit., p. 30.

RAMMLER Ja.  
 BEUTLER Und bringst  
 Den Speck zurück? er hat ihn nicht genommen?  
 Wars ihm zu wenig?  
 RAMMLER Er sieht nicht so aus  
 Als ob er einen Speck von dir geschenkt nimmt.  
 BEUTLER Der Fleischwolf, der den ganzen Landkreis ausnimmt  
 Mit sieben Kindern, jedes Jahr ein Wurf?  
 RAMMLER Ich red vom neuen Landrat. Deiner sitzt.  
 BEUTLER Du hast ihm doch den Speck nicht offeriert  
 Etwa? Hat er gefragt, warum du kommst?  
 Was hast du ihm gesagt warum?  
 RAMMLER Ich will mich  
 Beschweren, hab ich gesagt. Der Bürgermeister  
 Ist mir zu links, hab ich gesagt, und daß du  
 Die Bündnispolitik mit Füßen trittst hier.  
 Ich hab ihm was erzählt von Repressalien  
 Altbauernschinden und Neubauernvorziehn.  
 BEUTLER So? Das war gut. Und er?  
 RAMMLER Er hat gelacht.  
 BEUTLER Und dann?  
 RAMMLER Dann hab ich mich beschwert, weil er  
 Gelacht hat.<sup>122</sup>

The 1961 audience is expected to be amused by a number of events and references in this passage. Beutler's disrespect for the law is expressed obviously and clumsily and the sort of character that he is is immediately emphasised – that sort around whom flies would swarm. The audience thus immediately can regard his transgressive behaviour as adhering to a character about whom they can feel secure. The treatment of his wife, which should equally have no place in the GDR (as is given considerable expression later in the play) and the desecration of the law can provoke the shocked cackle beloved of bourgeois audiences elsewhere, but which demonstrates that audience's security at being able to laugh at the breaking of such taboos. Only in the knowledge that behaviour such as Beutler's is generally not accepted and will be shown to be anti-social is that behaviour amusing. The laughter is thus based on the acceptance of a certain

implied doxa which might at other times have a quite different effect. One could imagine, for example, how such a scene could have been played, or what quite different effects it might have produced toward the end of the GDR's life.

Rammler's unsuccessful attempt to bribe the new *Landrat* represents a more obvious version of the humour which relies on the anachronistic character displaying itself as such. Already, the state and Party has been successful in replacing corrupt members of the bureaucracy, the contradiction of antiquated practices (bribery and favouritism) has been resolved by the rational reorganisation of the state apparatus. Indeed, the *Landrat* emphasises the inevitability of historical development by laughing *himself*. As will be seen when that same figure appears later in the play in order to resolve the contradictions which have arisen in the story, his laughter seems to represent an added dimension which is missing in some of the other comedy in the play and most certainly in the events surrounding the *actual* event of laughter during the play's first night. He does not react to Rammler's bribery attempt and reactionary politics other than to laugh. While this clearly also represents a firm belief in the strength of his own political position, the lack of any further action (such as arrest or castigation) betrays confidence that goes beyond simple belief in the progress of history. This will be seen on his entrance into the play later, and provides the subversive moment to a theatrical device which normally represents *par excellence* the ideology of absolutism – the *deus ex machina*.

Much of the humour in the play is analogous to the scene quoted at length above. Throughout the play characters (including Beutler and Rammler) are presented as coming to terms with the new social and economic environment by trying to gain as

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<sup>122</sup> *ibid.*

much personal advantage out of it as possible. They simply do not understand that such behaviour – such as trying to bribe an incorruptible Party official – is pointless and indeed counter-productive. An economy run along lines of the common good for all, or at least working toward that goal in common, works primarily through a devaluation of egoistic behaviour and as such those who still think they can get ahead by putting their own interests first instead of those of the collective will merely see themselves marginalised and defeated.

The farmers in the play are the best examples of this residual selfishness. While one might expect this from the landowners – the kulaks – it is perhaps more surprising to witness the stubbornness of the ordinary peasant farmer in refusing to understand that his interests lie in pooling his productive wealth with others. In the last scene of the play Simoneit, "Umsiedler/ Bauer durch Bodenreform"<sup>123</sup> declares that because the newly arrived tractors are *Volkseigentum* he has only part ownership. The concept of common ownership he finds difficult to understand:

wenn ich  
Simoneit, Bauer und Volksgenosse, Mit-  
Besitzer also am Volkseigentum  
Jetzt meinen Anteil will von meinen Treckern  
Das Rad oder die Schraube, die mir zusteht  
Was krieg ich? Ein Gelächter. Wenn ich aber  
Mir heimlich meine Scheibe abschneid, was wird?  
Ernst wirds. Drum ist mein Vorschlag der: wir lösen  
Die Trecker aus, und jeder hat die Chance  
Fleisch oder Fisch, wer kriegt, hat, und kein Streit mehr.<sup>124</sup>

It is this suggestion that proves to be the impulse to the satisfactory denouement of the play, as the absurdity of sharing agricultural machinery when the land itself is not shared becomes apparent. The eventual solution is simply collectivisation but at this

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<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

point the farmers have to grasp that all have access to the tractors and that a *collective* decision on their use has to be made, rather than having it made for them by the bureaucracy. The farmers learn this (through the intervention of the *Landrat*), are brought around to the contemporary way of thinking and thus leave their residual comic potential behind them. Not so the kulaks. Figures such as Treiber and Rammler will never fit willingly into the new order and either leave or have to be forced into the collective (where they will continue to exploit it). Müller sees this not merely as a simple historical anachronism, but rather as a result of the particular relationship between the land, those who labour and those who have access to capital. In a number of scenes in the play, for example Scene 1 (Rammler and Kaffka) and Scene 6 (Rammler, Treiber and Fondrak), kulaks attempt to buy labour with their surplus capital, presuming not entirely incorrectly that the peasant farmer will have nothing to trade for access to that capital apart from their labour itself. While the remaining exploitative relationship between labour and capital is seen to have appalling results at the beginning of the play (Ketzler's suicide), by Scene 6 the audience is well-informed enough about the progress in productive relations depicted in the play for Müller to be able to present a highly comic scene.<sup>125</sup> Rammler and Treiber, desperate for labour to work their holdings, now that the tables have been turned, attempt to bribe Fondrak with beer and engage in a tug-of-war to bring that most unproductive of figures to their field.

Since, therefore, most of the officially sanctioned humour in *Die Umsiedlerin* is intimately tied up with the development and progress of productive forces towards a collective and rational conclusion, the relation of those productive forces with its object

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<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 60-1.

– the land – ought equally, it would seem, to become an object of humour as well as be swept up into the synthesis of the new harmonious relationship of collective means of production and collectivised land. While the latter development should, according to the logic of Marxist-Leninist comic theory, mean that life on the land becomes less amusing as time goes on (that is, as the antagonistic relations on the land become sublated) in Müller's work the resistance of the land to such *Aufhebung* both in the present of the play as well as its putative future suggest quite another problem: that there will always be something to laugh (or cry) about and that the continued existence of this humour does not signify simply the yet-to-be synthesised relations of production on the land, but rather that laughter cannot be accounted for simply by the inevitability of historical progress. Müller sows the seeds in this early work of his critique of such an unproblematic view of history, suggesting that there will always be contradictions to be overcome (and thus thankfully always laughter in the *Kolchosa*), but also hints that such a fundamental characteristic of human existence as laughter subverts the very idea of progress towards a historical telos in the first place. Any theory of social and economic development that failed to take this into account (a theory of restricted economy) will simply find itself and its works subverted by that which it seeks to exclude or overcome (its others), namely in *Die Umsiedlerin* laughter, land and women. Therefore, in the final analysis, a body of theory and philosophy such as that of Marxism-Leninism "can do or say nothing about this laughter, for it should have 'considered laughter first.'"<sup>126</sup>

One character who has to wrestle with this problem within the play is the FDJ activist Siegfried. Like his forefather-namesake, he seems impregnable in the blue of his

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<sup>126</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p. 256. Derrida quotes Bataille from *Conférences sur le non-savoir*, Tel Quel 10.

uniform, (as opposed to the red of the dragon' blood) but has one chink in his moral armour. However, rather than having his weak spot between the shoulder blades, in the case of Müller's Siegfried his weakness is to be found, like Flint, between his legs. In Scene 8 Siegfried tries to impress upon his love, Schmulka, in the evening meadow the passion of economic development where in the end work will cease and "Zeit ist umsonst."<sup>127</sup> Schmulka, however, not unlike Fondrak, sees the possibility of the end of want as the fulfilment of desire and she as woman dreams of herself as object of male desire:

Abends geh ich zum Tanz im neuen Westkleid  
Wenn ich durchs Dorf geh, hängen alle Weiber  
Im Fenster, alt und junge, schwarz vor Neid  
Weil alle Männer mir nachlaufen, aber  
Ich geh mit keinem, der kein Auto hat.<sup>128</sup>

In response to Siegfried's protestations that she is not allowed to sleep with everybody who has a car, she replies, "Im Kommunismus darf man", to which Siegfried can only reply that if everything else will be unnecessary under communism, then morality will still go on. This of course contradicts precisely that which he had tried to teach Schmulka at the beginning of the scene: "Im Kommunismus, wenn die Arbeit aufhört/ Zeit ist umsonst, Maschinen machen alles[.]"<sup>129</sup> It is of course just that which Siegfried would like to do with Schmulka which machines are least capable of doing, and the contradiction in his behaviour and argument is compounded by his adherence to a morality which asks him to wait for the fulfilment of his desire: "Erst müssen wir den

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<sup>127</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 66.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*, p. 66.

Kommunismus aufbauen."<sup>130</sup> is his response to Schmulka's demand for a declaration of his love, repeating later that, in contrast to life after communism, "[n]och ist Zeit".<sup>131</sup>

Schmulka, on the other hand, lives only for the moment: "Jetzt oder nie [...]Ich leb nur einmal, leicht wird keinmal draus."<sup>132</sup> The contrast between the two characters (and there it seems to be no accident that the relationship is exemplified as that between man and woman)<sup>133</sup> brings once more to mind the economy which seeks to marginalise the eruption of the present and laughter, portraying it instead as the archetype of that which can be sublated. For Siegfried morality consists of delay and displacement of satisfaction into the future, just as laughter within the same theory is robbed of its expression in the present and displaced merely as the means of comparison of the fulfilled future with the incomplete present. Similarly, just as laughter in Marxist-Leninist theory is based on an analogous delay – that of anachronism – the timelessness of communism about which Siegfried speaks so passionately, the idea of which governs action in the present no matter how far away that goal might be, must necessarily make laughter itself redundant. It is this notion of transcendence in the idea of communism which Müller seems to want to resist, putting in its place that finitude which governs human existence as a whole (and which structures all of Bataille's work).

Siegfried himself is forced to recognise this at the end of the scene. Frustrated by Schmulka's departure and despite her waywardness, he cannot simply dismiss her, much as his head would like to. His body resists and he succumbs to the temptations of the

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<sup>130</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>133</sup> See also Flint's relationship with his partners discussed above, but also the differently charged relationship of men to Niet, discussed below.

flesh. He wonders also how such facts, such as that of the body itself, can be included in his supposedly all-encompassing theory:

Als Mitglied hab ich ein Bewußtsein, aber  
Der Mensch ist ein Ensemble, und als Mensch  
Der ein Ensemble ist, hab ich ein Mitglied  
Das kein Bewußtsein hat. Es ist spontan  
Springt von der Linie ab, versteift sich auf  
Den eignen Vorteil, stellt sich gegen die Leitung  
Stößt die Beschlüsse um. Ein Widerspruch.  
Wo ist die Lösung?  
*Sucht in der Literatur.* [...] *Im Kommunismus wird man weiter sehn  
Schmulka!  
Rennt ab, ohne die Literatur.*<sup>134</sup>

The refusal by theory (for example, that of Marxism-Leninism) to consider the body and laughter as excess first of all represents most strongly the claims of this theory to transcendence. As such, it is hardly not surprising that it must dismiss that excess which undermines such transcendence as "Widerspruch", betrayal or exception that can be sublated, expelled or ignored.

This is, of course, exactly that fate which befalls Fondrak in the course of plot, as well as that which met the play as a whole after its first performance. Fondrak represents that body and laughter, itself representing the finitude that determines human existence, which the GDR must take into account first of all. Müller thereby suggests, as early as 1961, that there will always be laughter; there will thus always be excess; there will always be time. In contrast to those who would place Müller's early work as generally affirmative of the regime, it would seem that simply by writing the form of comedy that *Die Umsiedlerin* is, Müller distanced himself, consciously or not, from the dominant ideology of the rational progress of productive forces which lead inevitably to

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<sup>134</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 68.

a historical telos. While Müller remained in the GDR, enjoying his privileges but also in the hope that the state could be reformed, from our viewpoint now we can see just how inimical his politics and philosophy were to that of the socialist state.

Keller quotes Joachim Ritter's comments on the play which seem to suggest that Müller himself seeks to include the laughable into the deathly seriousness of the GDR everyday, that is, that the present is laughed at not simply because it will disappear in deference to the transcendental future, but because the finite body demands it now:

in dem Spiel wird die Zugehörigkeit all dessen zur Lebensordnung erwiesen, was für den Ernst als das Nichtige und Entgegenstehende außen vor bleiben muß. Das Lächerliche wäre in diesem Sinn am Entgegenstehenden das Moment, durch das diese seine Zugehörigkeit zur Lebensordnung sichtbar und positiv ergriffen werden kann.<sup>135</sup>

Müller thus in Richter's eyes goes further by suggesting that what is truly ridiculous and laughable is firstly the very fact that laughter is excluded and secondly that the laughable itself consists of its manifesting itself *as what has been excluded* as belonging to the everyday. The attempted exclusion itself would not only be ridiculous in retrospect, but funny at the moment of production of the play. The best example of such humour which transgresses the exclusion of excess by affirming its place in the everyday *Lebensordnung* is of course Fondrak.

The figure of Fondrak is funny primarily because he breaks taboos. He hauls the excessive into the heart of the community and affirms its constitutive importance. His elemental behaviour is presented not only in its own terms, but through it he often manages to get the better of those anachronistic figures (such as the kulaks) who hope to exploit him for their own ends. Through this very fact, therefore, it would seem that

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<sup>135</sup> Ritter, Joachim, *Über das Lachen*, in *Subjektivität: Sechs Aufsätze*, quoted in Keller, *Drama und Dramaturgie Heiner Müllers*, op. cit., p. 169.

Müller portrays him as belonging to the community now because he is the means by which the anachronistic is displayed as such. On the other hand, it becomes clear by the end of the play that the ideology of production and collectivism cannot support such a figure and the transgression *per se* of this ideology is either inadmissible or impossible. Fondrak thus leaves for the West, in effect externalised as the *Entgegenstehende* for good. The humour which is to be found, as Ritter suggests, in the momentary inclusion of the transgressive ends with the expulsion of Fondrak, for as totally excluded he can not bring about transgression. Accordingly any humour in the play after Fondrak's departure is based solely on the revelation of future productive powers which make the selfish or uninformed behaviour of some of the players laughable.

A number of examples of Fondrak's elemental humour were given earlier in the chapter. Two more are notable for the direct involvement of the audience in the moment of laughter, emphasising once more the difference in Fondrak's effect to that of the humour of historical anachronism. In the case of Fondrak, the audience is directly spoken to or gestured at, or is shown something rather than having an ideology reactivated to repeat what is essentially exactly the same point.

In Scene 11 Fondrak cheats a priest out of his motorbike (in direct contrast to Flint who has had his push-bike confiscated by the same priest immediately beforehand), repairs it and sells it on to a debt administrator (also earlier seen at the suicide of Ketzler) who wants to flee to the West. Fondrak can thus seemingly be productive when he so wishes, but we are left in no doubt as to what use he will put his winnings. In answer to the query as to how to stop the bike, Fondrak replies,

Such dir einen Baum aus oder eine Mauer. Was du willst. Es kann auch ein  
Heuschaber sein für den Anfang. Auf dem Mond wirst du damit nicht landen.  
*Erfasser ab.*  
Wasser in Wein verwandeln, das kann jeder

Doch die Verwandlung einer christlichen  
Vierhundertfünfziger BMW in Bier  
Verehrtes Publikum, sehn Sie nur hier.<sup>136</sup>

A few moments later in Scene 13 Fondrak is once more the object of a bribery attempt from Rammler and Treiber who want to make him Bürgermeister. He receives a cigar, and is then asked whether he can write. He signs a piece of paper – which is then directly communicated to the audience – "Schei-ße", thereby not only giving a suitable response to the machinations of the kulaks, but indirectly signing his most memorable attributes – expulsion, expenditure, excess. He then immediately manages to turn the tables on the landowners and is showered with more cigars to keep him quiet.

As argued above, the humour which emanates from the figure of Fondrak is of two kinds – while he partakes in the ridicule of those who represent reaction, he also encourages in the audience an immediate response to what is happening on the stage *now*, without reference to an idea which will find fulfilment in the future. It thus represents an active forgetting of the future or of the present as means to that future, and instead provokes the interruption of the present into the historical process. Certain episodes of Fondrak's humour express themselves therefore as the *sovereignty* of the present when it has no reference to anything but itself and thus immediately disappears. The humour Fondrak might provoke in the audience is that of a sovereign laughter which has no object which it negates and sublates; it rather just momentarily is. Bataille writes of the sovereign moment with regard to the productive process, but the analogy to laughter within the GDR is plain to see.

The sovereign restores to the primacy of the present the surplus share of production, acquired to the extent that men submitted to the primacy of the future. The sovereign, epitomizing the *subject*, is the one by whom and for

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<sup>136</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 82.

whom the *moment*, the miraculous *moment* is the ocean into which the streams of labor disappear.<sup>137</sup>

Sovereign laughter thus cannot be said to present itself at all to any discourse; it interrupts that discourse frustrating any attempt to capture it by knowledge or – what is particularly relevant to the officially sanctioned form of humour to be found in *Die Umsiedlerin* – any form of dialectics.

Laughter alone exceeds dialectics and the dialectician: it bursts out only on the basis of an absolute renunciation of meaning, an absolute risking of death, what Hegel calls abstract negativity. A negativity that never takes place, that never *presents* itself, because in doing so it would start to work again.<sup>138</sup>

To put laughter to work, or at least to attempt to do so, would be to deny what laughter is. It is merely a movement or moment of expenditure and of loss:

The general economy, in the first place, makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that *is* sovereignty.<sup>139</sup>

Derrida confirms this idea of the sovereign moment without meaning to be witnessed in laughter (and amongst other things in tears and the festival<sup>140</sup>) by describing it as the "affirmation in the play outside meaning. Not a reserve or withdrawal [...], but a kind of potlatch of signs that burns, consumes, and wastes words in the gay affirmation of death[.]"<sup>141</sup> Sovereign laughter is therefore not self-control – the discipline of a body for the benefit of a discourse expressed as morality or philosophy of history – but instead the laughing surrender to the risk of breakdown of bodily integrity and therefore by extension to the *essential* disintegration of the body which ends in death. What is more,

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<sup>137</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, p. 241. Spelling is American.

<sup>138</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p. 256.

<sup>139</sup> Bataille quoted in Derrida, *ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>140</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, p. 242: "Subjectivity is never the object of discursive knowledge, except obliquely, but it is *communicated* from *subject* to *subject* through a sensible, emotional contact: it is communicated in this way in laughter, in tears, in the commotion of the festival...."

the sovereign laughter which might occur in the production of Müller's work takes place in a shared arena, or more pointedly a communal ritual, that of theatre. The sovereign laughter of and at finitude communicates community itself, not merely because one laughs with others at the same time, but because laughter itself communicates the finitude of the *other*. Furthermore *Die Umsiedlerin* discloses, partly through laughter, partly through other means, the constitutive nature of particular alterities to homogenous thought (excess itself, land and women) and how this thought is thereby pulled apart.

As argued above, the comedy discussed in Marxist-Leninist theory has a quite different role. It seeks to negate the anachronism presented to the audience, in order to sublimate it into the social and productive synthesis that is communism. While this form of humour seeks to persist for as long as contradictions appear in socialist society, the sort of sovereign laughter which is nothing more than a hilarious affirmation of the finitude of human existence cannot negate anything: "Laughter is not the negative because its *burst* does not *maintain* itself, is neither linked up to itself nor summarized in a discourse: laughs at the *Aufhebung*."<sup>142</sup> Laughter resists *Aufhebung* because it is a momentary expression of subjectivity, and not an object which can be negated and used:

In laughter there is not one object that independently determines the same effects in the different laughs. The objective working of the mechanism can perhaps be grasped, but what is missing from it is the subjectivity of the laughter, which is not expressible discursively, but in which the laughs sense an unforeseen, astonishing transparency from one to the other[.]<sup>143</sup>

This makes the any attempt to use it through the activity of *Aufhebung* utterly ridiculous and absurd:

What is laughable is the *submission* to the self-evidence of meaning, to the force of this imperative: that there must be meaning, that nothing must be definitely

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<sup>141</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., p.274.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, note 11., p. 335.

<sup>143</sup> Bataille. *AS II & III*, p. 242.

lost in death, or further, that death should receive the signification of "abstract negativity", that a work must always be possible which, *because it defers enjoyment, confers meaning*, seriousness, and truth upon the "putting at stake." This submission is the essence and element of philosophy, of Hegelian ontologies.<sup>144</sup>

This brings us once again to the discussion on the problems of academic writing on laughter. That laughter and Fondrak's humour in particular is put to work in order to play a role in the argument of this chapter is undeniable. The laughter which Fondrak provokes, however, escapes even this employment by demonstrating the consequent *ridiculous* nature of any such argument. In other words, humour, the absurd and laughter return and subvert *any* attempt to put them to work. The only response can be a periodic surpassing or transgression of the limits in order to return within the confines of those limits (here of academic discourse) in order to facilitate their repeated transgression.

On the one hand therefore, one can only laugh and transgress in order to *return* to within the limits of discourse, be they of the university or the theatre, but on the other the manner of that return has to be carefully scrutinised. Derrida himself warns against the association of the "potlatch of signs" and the accumulation of the energy which is expended, while at the same time insisting that any social or communitarian benefit which might be communicated by laughter or other sovereign activity can only have any meaning, be organised or accounted for within the confines which laughter erupts through:

The consumption of the excess of energy by a determined class is not the destructive consuming of meaning, but the significative reappropriation of a surplus value within the space of restricted economy. From this point of view, sovereignty is absolutely revolutionary. But it is also revolutionary as concerns a revolution which would only reorganize the world of work and would redistribute values within the space of meaning, that is to say, still within

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<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 256-7. My emphasis.

restricted economy. This last movement [...] is rigorously necessary, but as a phase within the strategy of general economy.<sup>145</sup>

Sovereignty is revolutionary therefore not only in the context of a capitalist economy which organises itself on the appropriation of excess value, but also, as we have seen in the case of *Die Umsiedlerin*, where meaning is appropriated by a bureaucratic class in order to justify a particular development of productive forces. Since a certain laughter is aimed at the necessary *unproductiveness* in the human condition, the sovereignty encapsulated momentarily in such laughter equally has no place in the "productive" society that was real existing socialism.

#### ***Sovereignty in the Soviets***

The lack of a successful proletarian uprising within Germany was a matter of constant regret for Müller, but simultaneously a source of constant explanation. In a number of interviews he sees the failure of the German left as the beginning of a process that came back indirectly, via the Soviet Union, to haunt Germany again.

Und dann 1918 die Enthauptung der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, der Tod Rosa Luxemburgs und Karl Liebknechts. Damit war der Anschluß der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung an Moskau – die Abhängigkeit von Lenin – programmiert. Und die DDR war nur noch eine Grenzbefestigung von Stalin, nichts weiter, diese Volksdemokratien waren lauter Grenzbefestigungen.<sup>146</sup>

The socialist society in the DDR was thus not brought about by the risk of revolution, but by the imposition of an imperial, military power. Bataille goes further to suggest that there has *never* been a successful revolution by the proletariat against an established bourgeois order. The great revolutions of the world have all been against a collapsing

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<sup>145</sup> Derrida, *From Restricted to General Economy*, op. cit., note 33, p. 337.

<sup>146</sup> Müller, *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, p. 91.

feudal regime in an undeveloped, agricultural economy. These revolts were aimed in the first instance at the sovereignty of the aristocratic or clerical classes, that is, at the measure of their senseless consumption that was expended without reserve. Each revolution, for Bataille, prepared the way for the industrial economy of accumulation and as such the events in Russian in 1917 or in China in 1949 do not differ markedly from those upheavals which brought about the onset of the industrial revolution in Western Europe.

We are passing from the primacy of sovereign works, tied to agricultural predominance and the feudal order, to the primacy of accumulation. The basic determination, in the superstructure of a society, involves the use of the excess resources for the production of the means of production.<sup>147</sup>

The difference between the accumulative production of the means of production in socialist and capitalist countries lies in the importance in the latter of the profitability of a particular sector, firm or enterprise determining its development. In other words, the communal ownership of the means of production is supposed to insure that the primary aim of the economy is to maintain growth in the means of production – Stalin gives the example of the continued support to "loss-making" heavy industry to the detriment of the manufacture of consumer goods. Any release of the latter's potential would harm the Soviet *national* economy, "because the *national* economy cannot be continuously expanded without giving primacy to the production of the means of production."<sup>148</sup> The individual ownership of the means of production by the capitalist inhibits growth because s/he is driven by the desire to generate the biggest possible profit, only part of which will be re-invested in the means of production. The rest is creamed off by the capitalist him/herself for personal expenditure, which although not on the same level of

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<sup>147</sup> Bataille, AS II & III. p. 291.

exuberance as that of the feudal aristocracy, still allows the possibility of luxury as opposed to the simple subsistence of the worker.

The difference between the necessary work performed by the labourer to produce a level of subsistence and the actual value s/he produces is, under capitalism, the surplus value which is extracted by the capitalist. Bataille notes that Soviet economic theory refuses to draw the distinction between surplus and necessary labour because the former goes to provide the means of supporting "necessary" products and services, such as health, education and the military as well as being used to expand the means of production. With this establishment of universal necessity within the economic arena, a realm of freedom is lost:

On the part of the bourgeois, accumulation was the result of a choice; the bourgeois were, and they remain, *free* to invest their resources in productive enterprises; they were *free* to indulge rather in extravagant spending. The workers, if they accumulate, emphasize the *necessity* that accumulation satisfies; by this very fact, they dismiss – at least temporarily – the possibility of giving the present moment precedence over the future.<sup>149</sup>

It goes without saying that the necessary surplus produced by the workers in the command economy did not go directly into the provision of the necessary services. It was instead expropriated by the state or state-owned enterprises and reinvested in those services or industries which the state regarded as most important, whereby the military were particularly privileged.

The direction of the surplus of necessary labour into particular sectors of the economy (be it health, education, military or into the growth of the means of production) might be thought of as the end goal of production itself. Socialist production would thus serve as its end the satisfaction of needs of the population for a

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<sup>148</sup> Stalin, Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR, quoted in Bataille, *ibid.*, p. 293.

good health service or education system. Bataille insists, however, that these can equally be seen as the means to reproduce the means of production, be it through a well-educated and skilled workforce, a workforce free from ill-health, injury or military threats from outside. Bataille goes on to find in the same essay by Stalin quoted earlier exactly what was seen by Soviet economists (at least those loyal to Stalin) as the real end of production. Criticising other Soviet economists (who presumably soon after experienced at first hand a rather harder form of labour) who sought to describe the end of production as production itself, Stalin insists that the aim and goal of production is man and the satisfaction of his needs.

If the satisfaction of the needs of man is the end of production, then this does not mean the present needs of the population but those of the *idea* of man as complete and whole in the future. The goal of communism thus comes to dictate the development of the means of production not so much through a crude implementation of an idea of Utopia, but rather through an ideology of the self-fulfilment over history of the idea of man and his needs. Production seems therefore to serve his ends rather than the other way around, and yet the idea of man, which reveals itself in communism as the goal of production, is in fact that of *man as producer*.

Stalin arguing against Yaroschenko [Soviet economist], who paradoxically limits value to productivity, does not cite desire, but "man and his needs," which may be different from productivity, but not very different. For this man, cited by Stalin, is above all a producer and the satisfaction of his needs, far from harming production, serves to increase it.<sup>150</sup>

Thus while the *unproductive* expenditure described by Bataille as constitutive of human existence is a possibility in Marxist-Leninist philosophy, it can only be admitted if it

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<sup>149</sup> Bataille, *AS II & III*, p 296.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p. 314.

corresponds to those values that have been declared to be immanent in man as primarily a *productive* animal. Bataille reacts with severity to this conclusion, accusing communism of putting the needs of productive life in the place of "the desire that man *passionately, capriciously* is."<sup>151</sup> Man becomes therefore the sovereign end of labour, but only at the cost of sacrificing that sovereignty which the periodic transgression of the limits of existence brings about. The worker sacrifices his/her sovereignty not so much so another can enjoy the fruits of his/her labour (as in feudal times, or to a lesser extent in capitalism), but rather for the idea of fulfilled man "whose requirements are measured against the need to ensure and increase production."<sup>152</sup> Renouncing one's sovereignty for an idea of oneself that will only be determined in the future therefore acts theoretically as a powerful boost to an economy of accumulation.

For man to be fulfilled, and for the progress toward this goal to be an expression of the idea coming to itself, a gradual erasure of differentiation within society must take place. As all members of society are representatives of "man", all have the same needs which will be satisfied by the accumulation of the means of production. The expression of the idea of man continues the desire to distance oneself from the animality of nature. Bataille argues that this movement was precisely the same one which set up the beginning of exploitation by human beings of each other, that is, by regarding one person or class as less worthy of respect, as more "animal" and thus as more distanced from the characteristics of what defined the human. In socialist society, however, the idea of man is employed in order to eliminate class distinction. This contradiction is laid bare by Bataille thus:

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, p. 315.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, p. 322.

If the universal man of communism has a value so great that it is criminal to exploit him, he gets it from the ancient "curse of man by man." The man of "classless society" owes the value in the name of which he destroyed the classes to the very impulse that divided humanity into classes.<sup>153</sup>

In this sense, the desire that man "passionately and capriciously" is, and which becomes manifested in moments of sovereign action still exists in a displaced form in a society which has as its aim the eradication of all sovereign heterogeneity. By wanting to eliminate the differences in access to capital, the practice of Marxism-Leninism sought also to eliminate the sovereign expression of the human subject's relation to their own finitude. Sovereignty is expressed, we might remind ourselves, in the momentary transgression of the limits of human existence, primarily in social rituals which in turn express the shared finitude of human existence. This finitude can only be shared if it is *particular*, if the subject has its own particular finitude to contend with, even if that can only be registered and understood through the finitude of others. By attempting to sublimate sovereignty by displacing the fruits of labour onto an idealised notion of "productive man", communism sought to rob the human subject of what defined it most strongly: a relationship to its death through the deaths of others, either through the notion of sacrifice for the future goal of unalienated, fully productive man *or* by repressing acts of sovereignty which sought to express that same relationship to the other and community. No-one can perhaps blame Marx or Lenin for seeking a remedy to the iniquitous social conditions of feudal society or early industrial capitalism, but the defining *repressive* moment of their work emanated from the desire to eliminate that heterogeneity which had been expressed in the economic relationship of sovereign and servant.

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<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p. 337.

Clearly, socialist societies had not attained complete undifferentiation between classes and subjects. The very need for a state, the fact that it had not withered away and indeed employed an army of bureaucrats to administer it, was demonstrative proof of the still transformative nature of socialist society. The idea of communism and man had not yet been fulfilled, and thus in the name of these ideas, social differentiation was still necessary. The difference between this state of affairs and that of the capitalist world was that such differentiation and privilege was enacted in the name of what was regarded as an objective idea – that of the fulfilment of productive man. Thus, as Bataille argues, sovereignty is renounced with the aim of producing undifferentiated equality, and "the objectivity of power takes its place."<sup>154</sup>

The necessary social heterogeneity and differentiation through which sovereignty had come to be expressed are sacrificed; put in their place is a form of social differentiation which manifests itself as an objective homogeneity. The power which is wielded in socialist society is not an expression of the particular economic relationship between lord and servant or capitalist and labourer, but instead the necessary, objective expression of the production of the means of production for the ends of "man". Those who were in positions of power would have been, ideally, oblivious to the consequence of their personal standing and any material advantages that they might have gained from their position were

the signs of a culminating effectiveness on the part of the power holders, but this effectiveness [was] collective: for each one it [was] a matter of participating as best as he [could] in the general effectiveness and, situated within an immense activity, of coming as close as possible to those who control it.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>155</sup> *ibid.*, p. 350-1

It should not be forgotten, however, that one of the reasons the production of the means of production took such precedence was because of the failure of revolutions in industrialised Western Europe. Socialism in One Country found particular urgent reasons to concentrate on the accumulation of the means of production and this, together with the development of the *objectivity* of power relations within the country led to the establishment of adherence to such a policy as a test of loyalty. If heterogeneous subjectivity came to be expressed, and Bataille suggests that the nature of the finitude of the human subject demanded such expression, then the differences which bourgeois freedoms hold most dear could only be repressed.

Furthermore, Bataille suggests that the objective power that the state was obliged to wield was, because of the failure of friendly Communist parties (including most importantly Germany) to establish themselves in other countries, expressed *militarily*. Production and accumulation whose end was supposed to be man, found itself instead manifested in military power and it was this constellation which was then imposed on the GDR, by definition from the outside. Müller, in a short article written for *Neues Deutschland* one month after the fall of the Wall, expresses it thus:

Die feudalsozialistische Variante der Aneignung des Mehrwerts, Ausbeutung mit anderen Mitteln, ist die Konsequenz aus der Stalinschen Fiktion des Sozialismus in einem Land, deren Realisierung zur Kolonisierung der eignen Bevölkerungen in den osteuropäischen Ländern geführt hat. Das Volk als Staatseigentum, eine Leibeigenschaft neuen Typs.<sup>156</sup>

In the final analysis, the repression of sovereignty and heterogeneity in favour of the objectivity of power and homogeneity might be seen to originate from the notion of how productive behaviour, which is the defining characteristic of man, comes to negate

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<sup>156</sup> Müller, *Plädoyer für den Widerspruch*, *Neues Deutschland*, 14.12.1989, also collected in *Gesammelte Irrtümer III*, pp. 34-5.

that which is other and sublate it in the name of utility. In other words, what is other can always be negated and acquired, proscribing the possibility again of sovereign behaviour which by definition is a transgression of the limits of existence in order to reveal the other *as other*, be it death, the other person or the unassimilable in nature. Just such alterities come to the fore in *Die Umsiedlerin*, putting into question not only the relation of the subject to accumulation and production, but of that subject to the transgression of its limits (such as in laughter at Fondrak), to its sexual other and to the land.

#### ***Life on the Land***

In *Die Umsiedlerin* the land is portrayed as elemental, as a source of productivity and thus as object. It has to be worked, or in terms of materialist dialectics, it must be "negated" in order for its productivity to become apparent. However, this does not take place in a neutral environment, but one, at least where Marxism-Leninism is concerned, where labour and its products are put to use in order further to produce the means of production. The fecundity of land is regarded principally as the result of the negating act of labour, that is, the land becomes subject to human organisation in such a manner as to bring it into the process of accumulation which serves the end of production – that of "man". The very idea of negation in Marxism-Leninism, therefore, is dependent upon the goal towards which every negation gestures. The land has to be *overcome*, be it through improved technology or more progressive forms of social organisation in order for it to become more *useful*. As such, the productivity and fecundity of the land might be regarded as two different things. The ideology along whose lines agricultural work is

organised in *Die Umsiedlerin* is less interested in the bare fact of whether the land can be tilled or not, but rather the end to which it can be put. Land is fecund (actually or potentially to greater and lesser degrees) but any judgement on its productivity brings a great many factors into play, principally in this context, how best the ends of man might be served.

Throughout Müller's play, however, the land is shown to offer up resistance. Those who live on it never manage to bring it fully under control for their own purposes. The land remains stubbornly heterogeneous to the planned economy of the GDR, to its project and even to the technology employed on their behalf. The problem comes therefore to be seen as the inadequacy of the notion of negation when faced with something as fundamental as the land which refuses to forgo its alterity, but which simultaneously proves itself to be constitutive of the human subject. Müller seeks to gesture towards this by demonstrating that the land is not simply a passive object waiting for human intervention, but it and the animals, which farmers similarly hope to exploit, *consume* also. In Scene 2, the ruined Ketzer, who has just murdered his horse rather than let it be confiscated by the kulak and his debt collector, bemoans his fate as peasant farmer.

Die Hauptsache am Bauern ist das Vieh  
Er ist kein Mensch ohne, er kann sich kopfstelln  
Sein Feld sein Grab, mit seinen Knochen düngt ers  
Und vor der Ernte erntet sein Feld ihn  
Er feiert Kirmes zwischen den sechs Brettern.  
Ein Vieh macht keinen Bauern ohne Knecht  
Die Kuh melkt ihn, der Gaul legt ihm den Zaum an  
Der Staat macht ihn zur Sau und stopft ihn pfundweis  
Dem Volk ins Maul[.]<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 29.

Instead of being lord over the land he surveys, the peasant farmer becomes its serf, serving it even in death by fertilising it through the decay of the body. The land is simply more than, and in excess of, the peasant farmer; he may eke out an existence on it with his labour but it will always be a struggle. The only farmers who might find it easier are those with capital to spare and who can thus afford either the labour of others or a higher standard of technology and thus do not work *on* the land at all. The peasant farmer, as will become clear as the play goes on, has only one option: to join with others like him and work collectively on the land, for otherwise he will remain its victim.

Through the course of the play, therefore, the audience is invited to regard the struggle with the land and for the tools to work it as another site of struggle between the classes. Ketzler's death came about because he was not in a position of power over the kulak with working capital to spare and it is thus suggested that if the right forms of social organisation are found, then such exploitation of one farmer by another, and thus the exploitation of the farmer by the land he works, will come to an end. At the beginning of the play, however, the old social relations on the land still persist. When one kulak attempts to demonstrate his solidarity with the peasants, the response is harsh enough to indicate that change is coming:

KAFFKA Wir kommen aus verschiedenen Müttern, Rammler  
Und wenn mein Hund dich anbißt, sind wir quitt.  
Mein erstes Bett war deine Ackerfurche  
Hoferbe vor dem ersten Schuß warst du.  
Mein Acker ist zu schad für deine Stiefel.  
Geh mir vom Feld, Kulak.<sup>158</sup>

On the other hand, the farmer on the land is also faced with the orders and regulations handed down from bureaucrats and intellectuals from the cities who have little or no

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<sup>158</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

idea as to the day-to-day existence of the farmers themselves. One such city-dweller is seen in Scene 5 to be cursing the dirt, dogs and general lack of co-operation from those he presumes to be helping.

Dreckbauern. Eine Schußwaffe werde ich beantragen zur Selbstverteidigung.  
Oder ich schule um und geh in die Kultur. *Zieht eine Wurst aus der Tasche, ißt.*  
Der Bauer kultiviert den Boden, wir kultivieren den Bauern. Das ist die  
Kulturrevolution. Ich pflüge Hirne, wie der Dichter sagt.<sup>159</sup>

These antagonistic relations between competing classes on the land or between city and land or finally intellectual and proletariat (agricultural or industrial) could be seen, however as merely temporary. Just as some of the humour of the play rests upon the inevitability of historical progress, so does a partial, restricted consideration of the relation between the classes presented in the play seem to promise the possibility of their reconciliation. Such harmony is, of course, only attainable through a development and accumulation of the means of production.

A fuller reading of *Die Umsiedlerin* would seem to throw up far more problems, however, for in the play the primary points of friction are to be found between what is heterogeneous or other to labour and thus the process of accumulation. If that which is other cannot be negated within the system and carried forward to the next stage of history, then it has to be suppressed or expelled. While one example of such suppression would be that of the residual capitalists on the land, the attempt is made in the GDR depicted in the play, as has been argued a number of times in this chapter, to forbid any behaviour which results in useless expenditure and overcome any resistance which might be offered up by the processes of production. *Die Umsiedlerin* demonstrates, however, that the land can never be fully negated and that unproductive behaviour will

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

always return. The very attempt to repress their otherness results instead in an impoverishment of the community, but far worse, the objectification of relations of power to the detriment of those who are supposed to gain from the new social forms.

Despite the forced collectivisation of land which the last scene portrays, the audience is not allowed to be left to ponder the successful completion of socialist agricultural policy. It is made perfectly clear by Flint that although social progress and technology might be thought to have turned the tables in the relationship of humans and nature, the work on the land will always leave something more, it will always produce an excess which "negation" cannot account for. As is also seen in the final scene, the "solution" of technology, if tied to an ideology of production and accumulation simply succeeds in stamping out that which is different or heterogeneous to the inevitable course of history – in this case the farmer who resists collectivisation. The land itself will instead continue to outlive the farmer, provoking the melancholic last line of the play, itself echoing speeches by farmers throughout the piece as a whole.

Das Feld ging übern Bauern und der Pflug  
Seit sich die Erde umdreht in der Welt.  
Jetzt geht der Bauer über Pflug und Feld.  
Die Erde deckt uns alle bald genug.<sup>160</sup>

Complete negation and sublation of the land simply never happens for Müller. If only because we will all end up as part of the land, swallowed up and sublated by it, rather than the other way around, it is facile to attempt to conceive it as part of the self-realisation of the idea of man. Throughout the play, the audience is faced with a quite different proposition; that precisely that which cannot be negated or put to use has a constitutive role, a different sort of fecundity, in the subjectivity of the human being.

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

The important quality of the land, therefore, is precisely that it does offer up resistance, or to be more exact, that it escapes any attempt to categorise it or include it in a programme which would negate precisely that which we find so heterogeneous to our *limited* existence. The fecundity of the land lies in its consumption and exuberant expenditure which set it apart from the human existence lived within limits. In such fecundity it thus displays its alterity to human organisation, an alterity which is only experienced by human subjects in moments of bodily or communal expenditure. That the land *is* not us, that it is other to us, constitutes our very subjectivity, and yet the land becomes instead in industrial society simply yet another means to reproduce the means of production. It is thus no accident, for Bataille, that the agricultural pre-industrial world was that where "sovereign works" were dominant (in other words, where the feudal lord enjoyed the fruits of others' labour through sumptuous expenditure) for at this point work on the land was not tied up with an ideology of accumulation.<sup>161</sup>

In Müller's play, or at least to those reading or watching it now, it becomes gradually clear that the attempt to overcome the land and bring it under the control of "man" and for his ends justifies a political and economic regime which steadily erodes the freedom and capacity of the society's members to think and act differently. This itself stems from attempting to exclude moments of sovereign expenditure from the body of society, and it would seem from the evidence of *Die Umsiedlerin* that this then prevents the society from experiencing the land *as* other. The land will thus always be seen as something to be overcome, where complete subordination to the full development of the means of production is the goal of economic activity.

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<sup>161</sup> That agricultural festivals mostly concern themselves with the celebration of the exuberance of the earth is further confirmation of this point.

There is, however, a danger inherent in any attempt to think of the constitutive role of any alterity in the subjectivity or forms of self-understanding of the human subject. If, for Bataille, this alterity can only be experienced in moments of transgression, then the return within the limits of restricted economy must not preface any attempt to think that one has done enough simply by labelling the land as other – this would be simply to accord the land a property like any other object which can be named and "negated", and thus it would not be other anymore. Instead, it is only in the periodic moments of transgression that the general economy of human existence (in this case human intercourse with the land) can be experienced and, what is more, experienced as other. Trying to think about the constitutive alterity of the land within the terms of restricted economy leads us only into aporia, and it is there where responsible thought must remain. Other approaches to this problem, which indulge in the "piety of the other", run the risk of hypostasising what they laud as other, for example by mourning the separation of "man" from nature and encouraging a return of man to his roots in nature. However, living on the land and foregoing particular technology cannot by itself promise social reconciliation, as *Die Umsiedlerin* shows, and importantly Müller himself falls prey to the tendency to reify what is other in his portrayal of women in the play, as will be discussed below. Instead, the relations between the human subjects and their environment in the play, the struggle between the classes and the land which forms the centre of the action, need to be seen not as a class struggle which will achieve reconciliation at some point in the future, but a class struggle which takes place in the relations of power between those who reap the benefits of production and those whose power lies in their very alterity to an ideology of production and accumulation which serves the ends of "man". In other words, the power

of the underprivileged producing classes lies in their *not* producing, in their moments of unproductive expenditure – not only because it brings accumulation to a halt, but because it could bring about a general rather than a restricted understanding of the economy of human society. In Marxism-Leninism, of course, it is the producing power of the agricultural and industrial proletariat which will bring about their liberation, after this power has been realised through withdrawal of labour from the capitalist economy.

### *Women*

If class struggle is thus to be seen as primarily a battle over the aim of production between those who reap the benefits of production and those who power lies in the transgression of the ideology of production, then certain figures, as the representatives of certain classes in *Die Umsiedlerin* exemplify such transgression. Fondrak manifests the characteristics of the *Lumpenproletariat* who illuminate the contradictions of the notion of utility, while the female characters in the play, notably Niet, Schmulka, and Flinte 1 and 2 serve to undermine the apparent self-evident nature of male dominance in the post war GDR. Towards the end of the play, Müller clearly attempts to right this bias: Niet turns down the patronising, if well-meaning, offer of marriage from a peasant farmer and gets a field of her own (albeit the one which was originally assigned to Fondrak, and which will of course be dissolved into the collective a few years later). Flinte 1, for so long the victim of Flint's dalliances, instead of enacting revenge, apparently chooses the more rational route of educating her successor, Flinte 2, on how to keep her man interested.

FLINTE 1 zu Flinte 2, die [*Flint*] nachlaufen will: Hier bleibst du. Willst du dich wegschmeißen? Vielleicht blätterst du ihm noch die Seite um, wenn er die

Gleichberechtigung auswendig lernt. Setz ihm Hörner auf, dann weiß er, was er an dir hat.<sup>162</sup>

The play seems to demonstrate that women are on the way to achieving equality of opportunity when even Flint, for so long committed, well-meaning and utterly misogynist, accepts that his behaviour is unacceptable.

FLINTE 1 Was sich eine Frau vom Mann gefallen läßt, ist auch Staatsverrat hier.  
Hab ich recht, Bürgermeister?  
FLINT [...] Sie hat Recht, was?<sup>163</sup>

This equality of opportunity is restricted, if still hugely important. Women are not only given the right to work, but are actively encouraged to become productive members of society in a sense other than simply remaining child-minders. On the other hand, that activity too is regarded as productive work, as not only the strength of Flinte's arguments show in Scene 9, but also in the last scene by the reaction of the activists to the kulak Treiber who continues to resist collectivisation.

Mein Leben lang hab ich mich abgeschunden  
Vier Liter Schweiß pro Tag auf jeden Hektar.  
In meinem Stall steht kein Stück Vieh, das nicht  
Von mir wär. Über meine Zähne ist  
Kein Happen Fleisch gekommen, den ich nicht  
Mir von den Rippen erst hab schneiden müssen.  
ARBEITER Und deiner Frau.<sup>164</sup>

The reference to the biblical myth of the creation of woman is clear, but here quite the opposite is being asserted. The idea that the man provides and is responsible for the woman, be it mythically or materially, is denied; from the very beginning woman laboured as much as man in providing the conditions for man to labour and produce outside the home. Under GDR socialism, therefore, women have their historical legacy recognised – that they provided the conditions for production – but they are also freed to

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<sup>162</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 100

become paid labourers themselves. The question that would remain would be whether the "man" to whose needs the development of the means of production is directed really does designate humankind, or just one privileged part of the population.

While the women in the agricultural community, by the end of *Die Umsiedlerin*, have attained equal employment opportunities, their sexual difference is characterised principally throughout the play by their ability to bear children. Fondrak in his typically ironic and yet observant manner sees himself as especially moral because he is promiscuous:

Ich hab die Moral: der Kommunismus braucht mehr Leute, daß er schnell geht, und aus einer Frau, wens hochkommt, kommt im Jahr ein Kind, Zwillinge sind schon ein Glücksfall. Überall, steht in der Zeitung, steigern sie die Produktion jetzt. Da muß sich die Moral auch nach der Decke strecken.<sup>163</sup>

The manner in which this property is recuperated in order to insist on the equality of the sexes is to regard child-bearing as the reproduction of the means of production (that is, a new labour force). Women thus automatically become associated with a form of reproduction which differs from labour as the negation of the environment, and is more akin to the fecundity of the land. It goes without saying that this need not be the case. The act of fecundity involves both sexes, but women in the GDR of *Die Umsiedlerin* as well as elsewhere become regarded as symbols of fertility because childbirth and rearing their offspring has not been paid labour. In this sense that fact that some cultures might regard women as fecund is not merely because their bodies "give" the child; it is more pertinent that the socio-economic organisation of child-rearing subsequent to the birth is organised so that it is set apart from the reproduction of the environment that takes place outside the home. The recognition that what has historically been women's labour in the

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<sup>163</sup> *ibid.*

home has been devalued and that it is equally important in the process of production is a first step taken by the community portrayed in *Die Umsiedlerin*, but repercussions of the characterisation of women in the play show up the difficulties in maintaining such equity when the goal of production is seen simply as the satisfaction of human needs. The play demonstrates also, however, that despite Müller's attempts to the contrary, his portrayal of women does very little to free them from male-imposed standards and characterisation and that such a portrayal seems to contradict his petition for more heterogeneity in GDR society.

Women are thus assigned a place of sexual difference whose primary attribute is that of fecundity, which itself can be sublated into the idea of producing the means of production. Müller is concerned to accord women an equal place in the productive process, but he also attempts in *Die Umsiedlerin*, as has been argued throughout this chapter, to point toward that heterogeneity which is constitutive of the liberated community. As such he points to the equality of women as being based on their alterity to men - their sexual difference - which as argued above still leaves them firmly characterised as productive beings. However, that which is heterogeneous as regards this restricted economy of production (and which he seems to regard as vital to any healthy community) finds no active place in the lives of the women in the play. They represent instead that which *provokes* transgression or which is the *object* of transgression from the male point of view, such as forgetting one's responsibilities as male party member (Flint and Siegfried), or forgetting the project of accumulation all together (Fondrak in his relationship with Niet). The other moments of unproductive expenditure which

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<sup>164</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

Fondrak partakes in are committed almost exclusively in male environments such as the pub or in the meeting of predominantly male farmers. Only when they are not the object of sexual attention from their male counterparts – that is, when the men are not being distracted from their work – are the women free to engage themselves with knowledge and theory which the men take for granted. Flinte 1 starts visiting the library only when her husband is philandering. A farmer comments on her borrowing Lenin, "Seit sie allein schläft, legt sie sich auf Bücher."<sup>166</sup>

As they do not take part actively in transgressive behaviour, some of the women in the play begin to take on the pall of the victim, a position from which they are freed only when they become productive members of the community, directing their labours towards the goal of communal utility. Niet, the *Umsiedlerin* is perhaps the best example of this. She reacts passively to Fondrak's excuses for his behaviour, although the audience is not given the opportunity to consider whether she took just an active a role in the fateful act of intercourse which made her pregnant as Fondrak himself. Her fate now is merely expressed in terms of male expenditure in the sovereign moment and its inconsistency with the ideology of accumulation which elsewhere permeates day-to-day life, a quandary in which Flint and Siegfried also find themselves later in the play:

Fondrak, mir paßt kein Kleid mehr, wie lang soll ich  
Spießbruten laufen? Unterm Schlehstrauch nachts  
War ich dir gut genug fürs Leben, schön auch  
Mit Kirschenmund und Brust wie eine Gräfin.<sup>167</sup>

As the play progresses, however, she becomes increasingly independent and is given her reward in the shape of the field which she can work on her own. Turning down the offer

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<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, p. 41.

of marriage she makes a strong plea for autonomy and an end to the objectification of women as man's sexual object.

Grad von den Knien aufgestanden und  
Hervorgekrochen unter einem Mann  
Der nicht der beste war, der schlimmste auch nicht  
Soll ich mich auf den Rücken legen wieder  
In Eile unter einen andern Mann  
Wärs auch der beste, und Sie sinds vielleicht  
Als wär kein andrer Platz, für den die Frau paßt.<sup>168</sup>

The position of liberation is, once more, not that of sovereignty. Although the figure who encapsulated best the alterity of such sovereignty, Fondrak, is gone, the first duty of those who had been portrayed as significant others to the dominant order - women - move from having that alterity determined for them (as objects of transgression) to being part of the undifferentiated producing community.

What the portrayal of women in *Die Umsiedlerin* would seem to lack, therefore, is otherness itself. Although this is due partly to Müller's wish to emphasise their equality before both the law and needs of the means of production, women are either seen as objects, and thus simply a reflection of the subject which can be negated, or as part of the homogenous undifferentiated community where even sexual difference is sublated into the ideology of accumulation. As the former, they can be identified with the land as fecund, as the latter they come simply to be identified with men. Nowhere in the play is their alterity given voice *as* alterity, a position which would see them as unanswerable to the dominant discourse as Fondrak seems to be in his moments of transgression. The sovereign enjoyment of the present moment, though often enacted through women, is a male privilege. Fondrak's departure allows Müller to problematise the GDR's inability to account for the structuring and constitutive role of that behaviour

which transgresses homogeneity and utility, but women are *only* ever portrayed as a means to an end, as something to be *used* either for male transgression, or for the self-fulfilment of productive society.

The moments of transgression of utility, upon which there has been so much emphasis in this chapter, must therefore be brought into perspective. In this early piece Müller succeeds only in reintroducing an ideology of accumulation by another means because the alterity which he seeks to hold up in sexual difference and sovereign behaviour relies on their *not* treating the other *as* other. In Chapter Three it will be discussed how Müller came to recognise this problem and instead of providing a solution, experiments with a theatrical discourse to produced transgressive moments which leave the aporia of alterity intact. This is done by bringing attention to the history of theatrical discourse itself. Indeed, although only in embryonic form in *Die Umsiedlerin*, the obvious use of a theatrical device in the penultimate scene of the play prevents the piece as a whole of slipping into hubris. It was also ironically the inclusion of this device, the *deus ex machina*, which might have been thought to save the play from the censure of the state and party. The reality was somewhat different. Although I have described the play, even its most transgressive moments, as partly recuperating itself within the ideology of accumulation, the authorities in 1961 saw otherwise. The Party instead initiated a flurry of inquisitions and retribution which makes Müller's momentary relapse look in comparison to be small beer indeed.

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<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p. 102.

### *The Expulsion of (the) Play*

The history of the *Die Umsiedlerin* itself, of its composition, performance and subsequent suppression, reflects the concerns of the play itself, if only by accident. Müller did not set out to be controversial, as his comments in his autobiography *Krieg Ohne Schlacht* show. The play represents by Müller's own admission, however, an exercise in expenditure without any thought of direct utility. His main concern was not to produce a political play as such, but to produce a play politically, as the process of production of the play in 1961 shows.<sup>169</sup> Müller was able, after Walter Ulbricht's criticism of overly didactic theatre in the late 1950's, to write with more freedom and was finally in a position to write without reference to other concerns.<sup>170</sup>

Das Problem mit einer repressiven Kulturpolitik ist ja [...], daß keiner dazu kommt, sich "auszukotzen". Und das ist ja die Voraussetzung für ein dramatisches Œuvre, daß man wenigstens einmal die Gelegenheit hat, den ganzen "Glanz und Schmutz" seiner Seele von sich zu geben.<sup>171</sup>

Müller wrote scenes as the play was rehearsed with students of the *Hochschule für Ökonomie* in a process which lasted some two years. Müller remembers the spirit in which the play was being produced: "Wir waren ganz heiter, fanden das so richtig sozialistisch, was wir da machten, die Studenten auch[.]"<sup>172</sup>

In retrospect, however, it seems incredible that the production of the play slipped through the net of censorship that had been cast over the artistic community as a whole, but Müller puts this fact down to chance and bad organisation on the part of the

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<sup>169</sup> Müller quotes Godard a number of times in interviews as well as in *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 183: "Es geht nicht darum, politische Filme zu machen, sondern politisch Filme zu machen."

<sup>170</sup> Müller had, just as importantly, received a grant from the Ministerium für Kultur, which had given him the *financial* independence to write. See also Chapter One, note 41. It is also amusing to note that Müller found himself only able to within the strictures of such patronage if he *transgressed* them: "Termine habe ich nie gehalten. Die einzige Möglichkeit, mich zu Terminen zu verhalten, war für mich immer, daß ich sie überschritt." *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 161.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, p. 160.

authorities as much as the slight relaxation in cultural politics inspired by Ulbricht. However, while this apparent thaw temporarily gave Müller the freedom to explore and experiment with form away from the dominant naturalistic theatre of the time, it was in the end the form of the play, and how that form became the political content for the play's critics which sealed the fate of *Die Umsiedlerin*. Nevertheless, periodic visits by party officials in the time running up to the performance always ended in their approving further rehearsal, not least because *Die Umsiedlerin* was to be presented as the opening night of the International Student Theatre Week at the beginning of September 1961.<sup>173</sup>

It is, however, another irony that a play such as *Die Umsiedlerin* which seems to take a critical view of the Soviet influence on the GDR, at least as regards the collectivisation of agriculture, passed the censorship of the domestic authorities because of the mistaken belief that their Soviet counterparts approved of the production. One of the players, a Russian author, Boris Djacenko,

war gerade beim Zahnarzt gewesen, hatte eine dicke Backe und dadurch noch mehr russischen Akzent als sonst, der sprach nun emphatisch mit russischem Akzent für diese Aufführung. Daraufhin waren die Genossen eingeschüchtert und dachten, wenn die Russen dafür sind, müssen wir vorsichtig sein.<sup>174</sup>

After the Berlin wall was erected, one month before the performance, the play suddenly took on the form of a provocation, not least Fondrak's prophetic speech to Niet quoted earlier in the chapter.<sup>175</sup> It was then decided to permit one performance of the play, but only as "Versuchsaufführung [...], über die es verschiedene Meinungen gibt."<sup>176</sup> The

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<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Müller's comments on the Party officials, *ibid.*, p. 166: "Sie verstanden nichts, merkten aber da ging etwas vor, das sie selbst nicht mehr beurteilen konnten, etwas Gefährliches."

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>175</sup> See above note 79.

<sup>176</sup> Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 167.

FDJ, possibly especially piqued at the presentation of some of their number in the play, even attempted to organise concerted cat-calls during the performance, but their plan failed because, Müller claims, the audience were laughing so much.<sup>177</sup>

The laughter stopped immediately afterward, however. The student actors were hauled out of their beds that same night and made to recite their lines until they had understood the "counter-revolutionary" elements in the play and it is these and Müller's acts of self-criticism, as well as the condemnation from members of the artistic community and bureaucracy which reveal most clearly how transgressive *Die Umsiedlerin* was understood to be.

The criticisms of the play fall broadly into two categories: firstly, that the world depicted on the stage bore no relationship to the GDR, that it did not reflect the reality of the successfully evolving workers' and peasants' state; and secondly, that the manner of depiction, the theatrical form of the play, did not allow the audience to come away with a concrete understanding of the issues at stake. These two forms of criticism are, of course, closely linked – the first follows immediately from the understanding of theatre implied in the second, demonstrating the failure of any style other than realism to win acceptance in the cultural bureaucracy of the GDR.

One student claims to have realised that the characters in the play are simply not typical for the GDR, thus disqualifying *Die Umsiedlerin* from any canon of socialist art:

Dieses Stück ist gekennzeichnet durch ein Zusammentragen von negativen Figuren und Geschehnissen, die es wohl hin und wieder beim Aufbau unserer Republik gegeben hat, die aber nicht typisch für unsere Entwicklung waren und

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<sup>177</sup> Manfred Krug, later dissident actor and 90's star of *Liebling Kreuzberg* was particularly prominent in this respect. "Er saß vorn in der Mitte, ein Kleiderschrank, und lachte gröhrend über jeden Witz. Einige Genossen mußten dann auch lachen und haben nicht mehr protestiert, dadurch wurde es zur Katastrophe." *ibid.*, p. 168.

sind ... Ich lehne das Stück als antikommunistisch, konterrevolutionär und antihumanistisch ab.<sup>178</sup>

The problem is thus not so much that *Die Umsiedlerin* is too avant-garde, but indeed quite the opposite – it is too realistic in that it portrays figures who might have existed but who are not seen as representative of the agricultural community as a whole. Another student remembers with distaste that his discomfort with some of the more colourful language in the play was met with an unsuitable response from the director Tragelehn. The latter evidently seemed to insist that the realism of *Die Umsiedlerin* consists precisely of the representation of the heterogeneity of any community, whether the characters portrayed were symbolic citizens of the GDR or not.

The play is found wanting for the lack of positive symbolic examples of socialist characters and this demand for symbolism finds further expression in some of the students' self-criticisms, even when taken to the most absurd lengths. Not only did the performance of *Die Umsiedlerin* rock the cultural boat somewhat at an uneasy period for the GDR, it threatened, unbeknown to Müller, to provoke a Third World War:

Das Stück dient dem Gegner, unsere Republik von innen her aufzuweichen, leistet den militaristischen und revanchistischen Kreisen in Westdeutschland Vorschub, die Welt in die Katastrophe eines dritten Weltkrieges zu führen.<sup>179</sup>

Müller was accused by others of holding up the state to ridicule by making it an object of comedy (in that it is seen implicitly to acquiesce in the appointment of corrupt officials such as Beutler). One *Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter* of the *Stasi* filed a report on the performance, recounting with horror the reaction of well-known Berlin actors, whose crime was, like Manfred Krug, simply to laugh.

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<sup>178</sup> *Aus den Stellungnahmen der Studenten zu 'Umsiedlerin'*, *ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

Es ist interessant, daß eine Reihe von Schauspielern Berliner Bühnen, die anwesend waren [...], sich köstlich amüsiert haben unter lautem Lachen und auch im Saal von einer großen Anzahl von Freunden, [und, daß] die widerwärtigen Beschimpfungen unserer Staatsmacht, die hesslichen [sic] Szenen, die schmutzigen Szenen, die enthalten sind, mit Lachen quittiert wurden.<sup>180</sup>

The role of art in the GDR, according to some of those who were asked by the Ministry of Culture to provide references for the play, was not to provide amusement, a critical standpoint or even just entertainment. Socialist art had one goal, and one only: the enhancement of the accumulation of the means of production through encouragement of the spectator.

Sozialistische Kunst [soll] die Menschen zu wahren Erkenntnissen über die gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungsprozesse führen und sie für den Kampf zur Vollendung der sozialistischen Umwälzung begeistern.<sup>181</sup>

This goal was best achieved with particular artistic forms and narratives. Socialist Realism, especially in the theatre, could not afford to be *too* realist (hence the horror at the earthiness of the language in *Die Umsiedlerin*, as well as at the depiction of distasteful characters), but instead had to demonstrate the development of the characters towards a socialist self-understanding. This process would then be repeated by the audience, spurred on not only by the uplifting content of the play, but by the manner in which it was told – in the form of the fable.

Matthias Braun (see note 179 above) sees the events of September 1961 and the efforts of Müller and Tragelehn as the first attempts to break apart the strictures of socialist realism which had always regarded the fable – a narrative brought to a

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<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> *Bericht von 13-10-1961 von IM "Ökonom"*, in Braun, *Drama um eine Komödie: Das Ensemble von SED und Staatsicherheit. FDJ und Ministerium für Kultur gegen Heiner Müllers "Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande" im Oktober 1961*, p. 29. This fascinating study, commissioned by the *Gauck Behörde* suggests that the IM was probably a section head in the *Staatssekretariat für den Hoch und Fachschulwesen*.

<sup>181</sup> *Gutachten von Wagner, Engelstädter, Köhler*, *ibid.*, p. 43.

conclusion involving typical human actions out of which an ethical or political lesson can be learned – as the most appropriate form of theatre. The suitability of this form for teaching ethical and political standards is obvious, but its relevance in the debate on *Die Umsiedlerin* can also be seen from the criticisms voiced by members of the *Berliner Ensemble* (who were presumably among those "well-known Berlin actors" who laughed so ostentatiously):

Es gibt keine Entwicklung der Figuren, keine Fabel. Anscheinend hat Müller etwas "Überepisches" vorgeschwebt. Dabei hat die Regie Hilfestellung gegeben: unter anderem durchgehende Ironisierung fast aller Figuren machen alle Ansätze zur Entwicklung von Figuren zunichte.<sup>182</sup>

Another member of the company complains that the denouement of the play is presented not as the completion of a process by the characters within it, but rather as a situation – collectivisation – which because of the lack of any obvious link to those characters, appears as "antihumanistisch" and "wirklichkeitsfremd".<sup>183</sup>

It is particularly puzzling to read time after time that plot and character development is lacking in *Die Umsiedlerin*, for it is clear that those characters who do develop (Flint, Niet, the peasant farmers) are "rewarded" with the rational result of their efforts in collectivisation. Those who do not develop, who remain incorrigible, leave, are arrested or expelled. Nevertheless, the reaction of the cultural authorities to the play is summed up by Franz Fühmann, who was engaged to write an opinion for the literature section of the Ministry of Culture. Due to the lack of development in the plot and characterisation, he writes,

stellt sich der seltsame Effekt ein, daß nicht der Weg von 1946 bis 1960 sichtbar wird, sondern daß alles, auch Vorkommnisse, die eindeutig der Vergangenheit

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<sup>182</sup> *Brief des Berliner Ensembles an das Kulturministerium* in Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 391.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

angehören wie die Verletzung der Gesetzlichkeit, in die Gegenwart projiziert erscheinen.<sup>184</sup>

Given that development of plot and character indisputably does take place during the play, one is left only to conclude that the failings of *Die Umsiedlerin* were, for the authorities, to be found in the incomplete nature of the denouement rather than the course of the play itself. It is because not every single strand is resolved in the last scene of the play that the cultural authorities were uneasy. Indeed the sudden workshy attitude of the self-proclaimed industrious kulak Treiber points to further contradictions to be solved outside the framework of the play and thus in the world beyond the theatre. Thus while the fable would bring the environment back to an equilibrium, gesturing towards the reconciliation of all contradictions in the historical telos of communism, Müller seems to show historical progress at a cost. The heterogeneity in the agricultural community still visible at the end of the play is a reminder instead of what had to be expelled in order for the goal of collectivisation to be attained.

The fundamental difference between the fable and Müller's drama, therefore, even as early as 1961, lies in the temporality of the two different forms of performance. While the former has no meaning until it reaches its conclusion, the latter is more concerned with the actual finite experience that takes place in the theatre. For Müller, what happens in the course of the play to the spectator is as important as his/her reaction on seeing the curtain come down, so that the audience in Müller are encouraged to experience the passing of time within the theatre. In the fable on the other hand, the decisive moment is at and after the death of the performance when the lesson of the play can be encapsulated in the symbol of the final tableau. This difference is essentially that

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<sup>184</sup> Bemerkung zu Heiner Müllers Volksstück 'Die Umsiedlerin', *ibid.*, p. 406.

of *symbolic* and *allegorical* theatre which will be addressed in the next chapter, but it can already be seen in *Die Umsiedlerin* that Müller is interested in bringing about an experience of the finitude of the human condition. This might happen primarily in his early work through the content of the work (the comedy in *Die Umsiedlerin* for example), but there is also the beginning of an understanding on Müller's part how the form of the work of art and its relation to the theatrical tradition can bring about a very different experience of theatre from that which was officially sanctioned.

Just such a moment occurs towards the end of *Die Umsiedlerin* with the appearance of the *Landrat*, whose credentials the audience has already heard about (he refused a bribe from Rammmler), and who now enters the scene in order to bring the play to its close. As an external figure, untouched by the machinations in the environment in which the play is set, imported to resolve any outstanding contradictions in the play, and finally as a figure who does not share the same foibles and day-to-day concerns of other characters in the play, the Landrat serves a function akin to that of the *deus ex machina*. This is one god with a class consciousness, however. When a farmer strikes Beutler after having being insulted by him, Beutler turns to the Landrat for help, asking him if he had witnessed the assault. The Landrat, evidently already aware where the problem lies in the village, states with a curtness that is just as eloquent, "Nein."<sup>185</sup>

Müller uses the Landrat to exploit the theatrical tradition of the *deus ex machina* for his own ends, that is, the repetition of a classical trope or figure is used for the first time in Müller's work in order to show the nature of the theatrical tradition in which he is working. Furthermore, and also for the first time in Müller, one can glimpse the results of the repetition of tradition: the theatrical experience becomes an experience of

allegory. The experience of the allegorisation of a figure *as* allegory (where the audience are made aware of the history and tradition of the repetition of a figure or trope) illuminates the finitude of the theatrical experience by placing it firmly in its own historical context. Theatrical experience itself becomes a narrative that undergoes time. Müller thus aims to show that neither the figures on the stage, nor the nature of the theatrical experience are *symbolic* of the world outside. Neither a reconciliation in the plot which allows the curtain to fall, nor the theatrical experience itself being brought to a close can be used directly for ends outside the theatre.

Such considerations, of course, remain marginal in *Die Umsiedlerin*, where the primary concern of the play is with the problem of the general economy of the GDR in the early 1960's. It is only with the increasing experimentation with form in later years which aims to emphasise the *theatrical* nature of watching a play by Müller that the seed sown in this early play begins to bear fruit. It is, however, crucial to understand the nature and effect of this early employment of the tradition and how important the consequences (the banning of the play and Müller's subsequent marginalisation) prove to be in the development of Müller's work. The use of the *deus ex machina* proves to be the final and most important impediment which prevented the play from taking the shape of a fable, thus in turn making *Die Umsiedlerin* useless and therefore dangerous to the GDR authorities.

The *deus ex machina* was conventionally used in order to establish or confirm the ideology of absolutism which governed the work of art and its environment as a whole. Not only does the figure of the *deus* confirm who is in absolute power, but it confirms it *absolutely*. When one thinks of the gods of Greek tragedy, the kings in

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<sup>105</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 88.

Molière, and perhaps the commodity in Dickens, it is the manner of their appearance which brings order to mortal confusion once and for all by offering a frame of reference which is absolute, about which there can be no debate and which offers no more room for further narrative. In Müller, however, the figure of the Landrat throws up enough contradiction for him to act as a god who reflects on his godlike status, thus bringing the repetitive nature of the *deus ex machina* to the fore. The Landrat does not appear in order to resolve contradictions through the exercise of his absolute power, but to allow the farmers to find their own solution through the *abdication* of such power. The purpose of his entry into the play is therefore to undermine his own status as symbol of power in the land, returning the decision-making to the proletariat and he undertakes this task from his very first entrance.

Siegfried and Heinz, the FDJ activists have prepared a banner for the upcoming meeting, emblazoned with "Vorwärts zum Kommunismus". The concern of the still disguised Landrat, however, is not simply to praise their agitational zeal, but rather to discover whether this enthusiasm comes from the bottom up or the top down:

*Auf den Text zeigend zu Heinz und Siegfried: Eure Erfindung?  
SIEGFRIED Auftrag vom Bürgermeister. Erfindung von Karl Marx.  
FREMDER Mit zwei Traktoren? Was sagt die Partei dazu?<sup>186</sup>*

The provocation of the Landrat, which has allowed him to have his fears confirmed, namely that the agitation and impulse to progress is coming from the bureaucracy rather than from the workers themselves, leads Siegfried in his eagerness to denounce him as a spy, to comic effect for the rest of the scene. The Landrat himself carries on with his tactic of provoking the workers to see that the answer to their problems, and the solution to the contradictions with which they are faced, lies with them taking the reins of power.

Not surprisingly, few understand what he is about. Flint is horrified, Beutler turns this way and that in order to keep up with the apparent changes in policy, but finally the farmers themselves do not need either of these two figures to see what has to be done.

The central problem which faces the village is how to organise the employment of the newly arrived tractors. Although they are communal property, there are simply not enough to go around and thus one farmer suggests drawing lots to decide which single farmer gets to win the tractor for good. For once Beutler and Flint are united in their opposition to the plan, not only because it involves the surrender of state property, but also more importantly of state power. The Landrat, however, seems to regard the idea as a good one and orders Beutler to prepare the lots. While the latter readily agrees, concerned only to stay on the right side of the Landrat, it proves to be too much for Flint.

*zu Siegfried:* Beinah glaub ich jetzt, daß du recht hattst, Junge.

*Zum Landrat:*

Ich kann nicht zusehn, wie du unsre Macht  
Deine und meine, aus den Händen gibst.<sup>187</sup>

The tractors are won by Henne and Treiber, an opportunist and kulak respectively, and the consequences for the relations within the village are made immediately clear. Henne proposes the direct reestablishment of the conditions of production whose overthrow is the goal of communism.

Weil ich aber  
Gut weiß, wie Armut schmeckt, erbiet ich mich  
Den Trecker notfalls, pflegliche Behandlung  
Vorausgesetzt, gegen entsprechende  
Vergütung, Hilfe bei der Rübenerte  
Zum Beispiel, an Bedürftige auszuleihn.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.

Naturally, those farmers who have lost out feel aggrieved and Flint is able to see immediately how successful the tactics of the Landrat has been. It becomes clear to the farmers that in order to prevent such conditions reappearing, it is imperative to hold the means of production in common: firstly the tractors and later, the fields themselves. The real importance of this realisation, however, is that the farmers have reached it on their own, rather than having the decision handed down to them by others.

Beutler, however, reacts in exactly the opposite way: thinking that he must now use the position to impose the solution of the *Kolchose*, he threatens the use of state power in order to achieve it, and thus retain his position of privilege within the bureaucracy.

Ich bin dafür, wir gehen auf ganze jetzt  
Und schmeißen auch den Boden gleich zusammen.  
[...] Der Kommunismus braucht den ganzen Menschen  
Und was der Kopf nicht faßt, begreift der Hintern  
Gott hat euch aus dem Paradies geprügelt  
Wir prügeln euch ins Paradies zurück.<sup>189</sup>

This proves too much for the Landrat, who finally intervenes to remove Beutler from his office.

Kollege Beutler hat sich hier gezeigt  
Als blind für die reale Lage, taub für  
Kritik, kalt gegen die Bevölkerung, also  
Unfähig seinen Posten zu bekleiden.<sup>190</sup>

Flint now suddenly finds himself installed in the position of mayor, but claims to realise also that the role of the state is to transfer power to the masses, rather than the other way around:

Mit Beutlers Hilfe hab ich umgelernt  
Die Macht im Staat ist nicht die ganze Macht

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<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

Das Bajonett ersetzt nicht die Traktoren  
Der Mensch hat seinen Kopf nicht für den Knüppel  
Der Knüppel ist das letzte Argument.<sup>191</sup>

The aim of the Landrat is thus to demonstrate that the importance of power consists of its being given up in a sovereign manner for the benefit of the subjectivity of the masses, in contrast to Beutler's attempt to hold on to what he claims to be the objectivity of power (but which he can in fact use for its own ends), backed up by the monopoly of violence invested in the state.

It would not be surprising if some of the bureaucrats in the audience in Karlshorst in 1961 had not shifted somewhat uneasily in their seats at the actions of Beutler and the comments from the Landrat on the nature of their work. Müller hints at their distance from the reality of events by the Landrat's remarks on how the reports on his desk and in the daily papers bear no resemblance to the real existing conditions on the land.

Ich habe noch nichts gehört, was soll ich reden.  
Was in der Zeitung steht? Die habt ihr selber.  
Hier sitz ich, weil ich hörn will, was nicht drin steht.  
Sonst kann ich mich im Schreibtisch schlafen legen  
Auf dem geduldigen Papier mit euren  
Schönfärbrischen Berichten.<sup>192</sup>

However, despite such implicit criticism and the Landrat's actions in apparently giving power back to the masses, what is renounced by the Landrat is not sovereignty, but power. The apparent transfer of power from state to farmer does not undermine that power's essential nature – that in Bataille's terms, the producing classes renounce their sovereignty in order to concentrate on producing the means of production, accepting the neutral objectivity of power as the result. Indeed by transferring that power to the

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<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

farmers, the Landrat only goes to bolster the objectivity of its importance. In this scene from *Die Umsiedlerin* it is power which is regained by the masses in order objectively to provide the conditions for better production. In addition, this transfer of power is underwritten by the state in a number of ways, demonstrating that the real conditions of power have not changed at all. It is the Landrat who has the authority to relieve Beutler of his position, not the democratic will of the masses; it is the Landrat who installs Flint as *Bürgermeister*; finally, when the question arises as to who should have first use of the tractors, it is Flint, in his new position of power who decides to put them at Niet's disposal: "Gut, *ich* schick den Trecker/Auf dein Feld erst."<sup>193</sup>

In spite of this deference to the synthesising character of state power, the manner in which the Landrat leaves decisions open for the farmers, thus preventing a second synthesis at the end of the play itself, meant that the conditions of production of the play are seen as incomplete. Since Müller was then concerned to accord by extension the audience a degree of autonomy, the closed symbolic ending of the play fails to arrive. As a result the last scene, where the last stages of collectivisation are presented, only succeeded in raising hackles all the more because the development of the play up until that moment did not lead to the rational conclusion of collectivisation. Indeed, the idea of the Kolchose is criticised a number of times throughout the play, although the benefits of its communal nature are also mentioned.<sup>194</sup> Finally, the contradictions still present in collectivised agriculture are also revealed, thus making clear once more that

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<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>193</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99, my emphasis.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 83, where a tractor driver recalls a Soviet farmer he confronted during the war: "Hier alles mein Feld. Wir: wo sein Feld war/ Eh alles kollektiv war. Der zeigt bloß/Wie ein Großgrundbesitzer ins Gelände/ Wo kilometerbreit brusthoch der Mais stand./ Der hatte wo sein Feld war glatt vergessen."

there are still problems to be solved, not by the Party or bureaucracy but by the producing classes themselves.

As argued above, Müller's attempt to write a theatrical piece which in its content and performance emphasises the importance of power resting with the proletariat as a whole must be seen to fail. His recourse to state power in order to achieve such a goal is seen not only in the figure of the Landrat, but in the still immature theatrical structure of the play in contrast to his later work. The ambitious goals set in the writing of the play, which might be summed up in Bataillian terms as the communication of sovereign experience and its relevance in the general economy of the GDR, need, in order for them to find expression in the production of the play, an intercourse with the theatrical tradition. As will be seen in the next chapter, such an intercourse demands in addition the complete rejection of any idea of unproblematic reflection between the outside world and the events on the stage. The residual belief and hope in the programme of the GDR state, despite the misgivings which would explode such a belief in later years, prevented Müller from distancing himself fully from the determination of the work of art by the hegemony of the state and of men.

*Die Umsiedlerin* witnesses therefore an attempt to address the relationship of Müller to his other, be it women or the other in the community, but in both cases he suppresses their heterogeneity by returning to the paternalist structures of well-meaning male dominance and state control. It is vital to regard this slippage back to the dominant discourses of GDR politics as determined not only by ideological pressure on the content of the play, but also as a result of the form of *Die Umsiedlerin* which displays that lack of intercourse with the theatrical tradition mentioned above. As Müller attempts to demonstrate in later works, the other cannot be addressed as an alterity

within the theatre unless the traditional modes of representation of that other are repeated, reworked and allegorised. It is this repetition through a signed, allegorised discourse which becomes Müller's most important way of addressing the tradition of the theatre in which he works.

The literary nature of *Die Umsiedlerin*, that is, wherein this signature of Müller and other participants can best be witnessed, is to be found in the story of the play's failed links to politics. This failure becomes thus the object of literary critique. The decay of the heterogeneous (laughter and sovereign expenditure) into the paternalism of misogyny and state power tells the story of *Die Umsiedlerin* as a work of art: the play slips back into the ideological conformity of the day (reinstating the GDR state as the bulwark of power) even though it attempted to teach a lesson to the audience on the necessity of giving power to the masses. However, this very attempt to forge the direct link of stage and politics was firstly another confirmation of state power (by conforming to dominant Socialist Realist aesthetics), and secondly turned out to be useless because the play was banned. *Die Umsiedlerin*, in its attempt to be useful, displays the uselessness which the comedy and heterogeneous behaviour of some of the characters pointed to in the first three-quarters of the play. This uselessness survives any slippage back into the ideology of progress and instrumentality because the play bears most clearly the signature of Müller's authorship. It is because of the manner in which *Die Umsiedlerin* was written, signed by Müller, that the play still manages to keep its literary character and resist sublation into the idea of a process of history which turned out itself to be utterly anachronistic. The play survives also the post-production self-criticism of Müller which he was forced to write in December 1961.

That self-criticism was written with the assistance of Helene Weigel, who insisted that there was little point in Müller trying to justify what he had done: "Du darfst nichts erklären, nicht entschuldigen. Du bist schuld, sonst hat es gar keinen Zweck."<sup>195</sup> Müller focuses in the short document firstly on the inadequacies of form. The peculiar political situation of the GDR at the end of 1961 demanded a quite different form of drama than *Die Umsiedlerin*. The latter was

ein Stück, das die Hauptfragen ausklammert und dadurch Nebenfragen zu Hauptfragen macht, das den Zuschauer allein läßt mit den Fragen und Verwirrungen, die es hervorruft, ohne deutlichen Hinweis auf mögliche Antworten und notwendige Lösungen [...], das deprimiert, statt aktiv macht.<sup>196</sup>

Müller had isolated himself from the Party which might have been able to offer him useful criticism and had insufficient understanding of the political environment of the play to handle adequately such a sensitive issue. In the third section Müller sets out his wishes:

Ich wollte ein Stück schreiben, das dem Sozialismus nützt. [...] Ich wollte der Partei mit meiner Arbeit helfen, selbst isoliert von ihr. Ich sehe das Ergebnis meiner Arbeit in der Isolierung: einen Schaden für die Partei. Ich sehe, daß ich ihre Hilfe brauche, wenn ich ihr nützen will, und nichts anderes will ich.<sup>197</sup>

Müller, forced into such extraordinary self-denial and cant was one of the victims of the uselessness of his art and the failure of a link to politics, one of the victims of the fact that his work carried the finite signature of writing itself. The reality of that failure and its repercussions in the world outside of the theatre will on the one hand make his later work so important as work made politically, but will on the other be achieved at the price of a certain victimisation. Müller's primary concern then becomes the

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<sup>195</sup> quoted in Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 178.

<sup>196</sup> "Selbstkritik Heiner Müllers (an die Abteilung Kultur beim Zentralkomitee der SED)", *ibid.*, p. 401.

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 402-3.

remembrance of these victims through a form of theatre which, by refusing a direct link to political praxis, locates itself politically in a community.

The victims to be remembered in *Die Umsiedlerin* are not only those on the stage who suffer the heavy hand of expulsion or suppression in the GDR, be it Fondrak, Niet and the other women or the proletariat; the other victims and subjects of remembrance for literary critique are those who in the experience of the play and its consequences faced a similar fate. This would include those who laughed and were punished, those who had to repress their laughter, those who recanted – in other words, those who suffered in the name of the signature of Heiner Müller.

In this context of the history and decay of a work of art, the history and decay of the signature and thus art *as* art, one image stands out in particular from the play. In Scene 11 Fondrak argues with Flint over the former's attitude to work:

FONDRAK Ein Bier und vor dir steht ein Kommunist, Flint.  
FLINT Ein Parasit steht vor mir.  
FONDRAK Du verkennst mich.  
Zeig mir ein Mausloch und ich fick die Welt.<sup>198</sup>

As microcosm of the play, these four lines provide as good an example of any other of the theme of heterogeneous expenditure and useless consumption (sex and beer) as well as the coarse language in which it is expressed. They also point toward the fact that this transgression is generally regarded as male within the play and that it is viewed by the state in the most unfavourable manner. All this could be communicated to the audience in the performance of the play, but the audience would not necessarily be aware of the origin of Fondrak's memorable and much quoted line, "Zeig mir ein Mausloch..." Literary critique, on the other hand, if it is to take the work's signature over time

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<sup>198</sup> Müller, *Die Umsiedlerin*, p. 79.

seriously, and thus that which makes literature offer itself up *as* literature would be interested in just that origin however.

One such victim of the first performance of *Die Umsiedlerin* was the director B.K. Tragelehn. He was made far more of a scapegoat for the Karlshorst fiasco than Müller: right from the very beginning his part in the proceedings was singled out for special condemnation.<sup>199</sup> Tragelehn was expelled from the Party, all contracts with theatres were cancelled and he was sentenced to hard labour in a *Braunkohl* quarry. Müller recounts that he was there doubly victimised because "er dort dann der einzige in seiner Brigade war, der für die DDR eintrat und für die Partei, und die Arbeiter meinten: so blöd darf man nicht sein, und haben ihn nach jeder Diskussion verprügelt."<sup>200</sup> It was during his labour in the quarry that Tragelehn heard the phrase "Zeig mir ein Mausloch, ich fick die Welt" which Müller improved with a conjunction to make the line scan better as verse. The line was one of the few alterations in the 1964 re-write of the play.

Knowledge of the origin of this line draws the limit between a particular aesthetic experience of the play and literary critique on the one hand, and the possibility of the symbolic and allegorical theatrical experience. In both literary critique and allegorical experience Tragelehn's line stands forth as the moment of signature, history and finitude which offers up the work of art as art for critique and as drama within a tradition for allegorical theatre. The particular suitability of the allegory of this line for Müller's work is that it encourages the remembrance of the victims of the homogenous

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<sup>199</sup> Cf. the contributions from the Berliner Ensemble to the criticism of the play: "Das Stück wird nicht besser, aber die Regie kommt verschlechternd dazu. Sie ist nahezu verbrecherisch, denn sie hat aus Menschen Marionetten gemacht (auch in Beziehung auf die Studenten)"; "Die Regie erweist Müller Bären Dienste, indem sie alle Negativen unterstreicht. [...] Der Regisseur des Stücks, das einen so wichtigen Abschnitt unserer Entwicklung behandeln will, zeigt sich als völlig unreif und unfähig." in Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, pp. 390-1.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, p. 171.

utilitarian society against which Müller's work seeks to operate, as well as the victims of the signature of theatre itself and its decision to remain useless and to be art. As such, such remembrance represents the possibility and potential of Müller's early work, rather than its realisation in early the GDR of the 1960's. *Die Umsiedlerin* was not to see the footlights until 15 years later, and even then the production bore a great similarity to its controversial predecessor. *Der Lohndrucker*, premiered three years before *Die Umsiedlerin* (although the writing had begun later) had had a very different fate. Initially banned by the Berlin local authorities, even though it had already been performed in Leipzig, the censorship was then lifted by the Party Central Committee and went on to win the Heinrich-Mann-Preis, which then secured Müller a job and financial security until the *Umsiedlerin* debacle.<sup>201</sup>

#### ***Der Lohndrucker***

If *Die Umsiedlerin* was concerned primarily on a thematic level with the problems of the production of the means of production on the land, then *Der Lohndrucker's* milieu is most definitely urban and industrial. Indeed, the problems resulting from an economy of accumulation, whose effects are seen in the former play on the land, are almost by definition going to be heightened when transferred to the engine room of such accumulation – the industrial factory. *Der Lohndrucker* portrays workers who are even more alienated from the end product of their labour than their peasant counterparts, even though they are supposed now, in the socialist society, to own that labour themselves.

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<sup>201</sup> Müller had hoped to win the FDGB (*Freie Deutsche Gewerkschafts Bund*) prize, "das waren mindestens 10,000 Mark mehr als der Heinrich-Mann-Preis. Aber dazu kam es nicht, weil kurz danach Ulbricht den Kampf gegen das sogenannte "didaktische Lehrtheater" eröffnet hatte, was auch schon als Formulierung eine Leistung war. Der muß wirklich schlechte Referenten gehabt haben." *ibid.*, p. 151.

The central conflict thrown up in the play is therefore that between the particular workers and their employment as *labour*, as a general category to be used in society's self-fulfilment. Such a homogenisation of the highly differentiated forms of labour and conditions of production is seen to come up against resistance in the shape of the finitude of the human condition. Not only is the labouring community structured by such finitude, as argued in Chapter One, but the play also deals with the issue of labourers working less hard than, or as hard as *before*. This "before" is not just any epoch, however, but that traumatic period of German history between 1933 and 1945.

If labour is the most important homogenising force in the GDR, in that the accumulation of the means of production is dependent upon material labour, then how can it also at the same time be regarded as a form of human activity which shows the heterogeneous nature of community? And, more importantly for Müller' work, how can such heterogeneity be witnessed in the work of art?

The play is based on the heroic efforts of one worker, Balke, to repair a furnace while still in operation so that it does not have to be shut down, a break in production which would have endangered the chances of meeting the pre-set norms and targets for the factory. Balke has already proven himself to be an exemplary worker, having overshot all other production norms and raising the general level of productivity of the factory. This has meant, however, that he has shown that higher norms are possible and the other workers now have to work harder than before in order to maintain the same income. Balke on the other hand has received premiums for his high productivity, thus alienating himself from his workmates who regard him as the eponymous scab. The situation is made more complicated when the audience finds out that Balke was just as productive under the Nazi regime, and compounded such reactionary behaviour by

denouncing a communist who had attempted to sabotage the Nazi wartime production. This same communist, Schorn, is now the party official who has to oversee the factory where Balke works and the two are faced with an almost identical problem as before. Balke knows who has sabotaged his repair work and it is Schorn, once the victim of denunciation, who must now persuade Balke to betray a fellow-worker once more. Similarly, just as Schorn relinquishes his possibility of revenging himself on Balke, the latter must also put the interests of the collective before his own when he agrees to work with a colleague, Karras, who had recently beaten him up for betraying shop-floor solidarity.

*Der Lohndrucker* is thus similar to *Die Umsiedlerin* in that it discusses the conflict of interest between the interests of the individual and those of the collective as a whole, or between the subjective and objective. Writing in such vocabulary of the central problem in *Der Lohndrucker*, Schulz comments:

Mit der Bedeutungslosigkeit von individueller Psychologie wird man unerbittlich auf das Feld der politischen Analyse verwiesen. Der *Pluralisierung* von Gründen für die individuellen Verhaltensweisen steht die *Einhelligkeit* ihrer objektiven politischen Bedeutung gegenüber.<sup>202</sup>

The problem is thus, in Bataille terms, how a productive society comes to terms with the heterogeneity of individual subjects actions, and more importantly for any analysis of this play, how can the heterogeneous power of labour be thought, and, as mentioned above, how can it be thought in the theatre? The treatment of the heterogeneous in art

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<sup>202</sup> Schulz, Heiner Müller. p. 24. Although Schulz, as ever, grasps the central problematic of Müller's work, the vocabulary of subject and object betrays a residual attachment to that philosophical tradition which, I argue, Müller's work does its best to undermine. For one could argue that to speak of subject and object, and individual and collective as oppositions whose conflict is resolved in a new synthesis is to ignore or repress the constitutive alterity of the subject which allows us to conceive the collective in the first place and which will continue to constitute that collective and undermine any putative absolute synthesis. More seriously, the relations of heterogeneity and alterity which are to be found between the human subject and his/her environment become totalised in the concepts of subject and object

has already been seen in *Die Umsiedlerin* to have important repercussions for the political effect of the play. By retreating to the attempt to regard the relationship between stage and outside world as directly political, as symbolic, Müller ended up in suffocating the possibility of the political itself. Accordingly in *Der Lohndrucker*, the manner in which labour is reflected upon aesthetically will determine whether it can allow an experience of its heterogeneous potential or whether it will be felt as a homogenising force, simply by treating labourers and labour on the stage as symbols of the world outside.

This danger of symbolisation is made all the more real by the direct connection of the play to real events in Berlin in the late 1940's. Balke is modelled very closely on the "DDR Held der Arbeit" Hans Garbe who had engaged in just such heroic acts as Balke, whereas the characters and events in *Die Umsiedlerin* on the other hand are based on a generalisation of the events surrounding land reform in the GDR. It was precisely this attempt to represent such an uplifting moment in the recent history of the GDR which no doubt allowed the play to be performed. As will be demonstrated, it is also this engagement with the past and with history which will prevent the play from falling into the ill-repute of Socialist Realism even while maintaining the right of the Party to rule, while simultaneously opening possibilities up for very different productions and interpretations of the play itself.

Labour is not itself a force which produces either a homogeneous or heterogeneous society, for as reproduction of the environment, that is, as expenditure on the environment in order to produce something for consumption it can be organised

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themselves. The individual is not other to the collective in Marxism-Leninism, just as the object is not other to the subject; they are merely moments in the dialectic awaiting *Aufhebung* into the Same.

either into a project as accumulation or system of sovereign expenditure. However as Bataille points out, industrial society was bound to turn labour into a means to an end when the development of productive forces dictated that the only thing which the labourer without access to capital could sell was his or her labour itself. Labour became the means to accumulation of the means of production: in capitalism for the benefit of the capitalist who allowed himself a degree of luxury but primarily concentrated in building the business; in the socialist command economies for the benefit of an idea of "man" who would become realised at a later date.

Even as early as *Der Lohndrucker*, however, Müller is interested in the other forces that human activity – and in particular labour – releases. In this early play, rather than introducing a figure such as Fondrak, such an embryonic interest takes the form of the presentation of the struggle or contradiction between the perceived interests of particular labourers and their supposed interests as a class. This struggle is not merely symbolic of the contradiction between general and restricted economy, but presented as one of the defining problems of the early years of the GDR. How should the desires of workers be realised within the legacy of the tradition of labour within Germany? How could the GDR use the productive forces within labour when the labourers had previously used them to build up the Nazi war and terror machine?

Müller presents the essential conflict within labour in the play as between those who work according to or in excess of state imposed norms and those who do not. Both claim to be acting in the best interests of workers as a whole. The former insist that the means of production and thus labour belongs to the workers through the state, while the latter claim that this means that anything the workers do is in their own interest. Lerka, whose interest in working hard is based solely on the premium he will receive, ignores

Balke's warning that his slapdash work will endanger the productivity of the whole factory. Lerka replies,

Tempo oder Qualität. Alles können sie nicht haben. [...] Wer hat mir was zu sagen? Der Laden hier ist volkseigen, stimmts? Ich bin das Volk, verstehst du.  
*Balke schweigt.*<sup>203</sup>

While Lerka's actions are irresponsible according to almost any yardstick, it is the Party officials who give the workers ammunition for such assertions. They insist that the State is not only acting in the interests of the workers, but also that what the state owns is thereby property of the workers, even though there is no evidence that the workers receive anything other than the exchange value of the labour.

GESCKE zu Schorn: [...] In Amerika gibts keinen Sozialismus, aber Arbeiter, die im eignen Auto fahren. Im Sozialismus gibts Schuhe auf Bezugschein. Erklär mir das.

SCHORN Das Auto gehört dem Arbeiter. Aber wem gehören die Arbeiter? Unsre Schuhe gibts auf Bezugschein. Aber die Autofabriken gehören uns.<sup>204</sup>

Therefore any industrial action or refusal to work to the raised norms is an attack on themselves. As Balke says when he is attacked: "Ihr schlagt euch selber ins Gesicht."<sup>205</sup> Similarly, those who do not work to the norms are described thus: "Ihr schneidet euch ins eigne Fleisch."<sup>206</sup> The identification of proletariat and party is complete, it is the latter who plan the norms, away from the workplace: "Wir nehmen eure Interessen wahr, wenn wir die Norm hochsetzen."<sup>207</sup>

The sublation of individual or group interests and desires into the non-contradictory identity of a totalised subject leads to the debate around the title of the play. Balke's motives for working are questioned at the very start of the play. Although

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<sup>203</sup> *Der Lohndrucker* in Geschichten aus der Produktion 1, p. 21.

<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

he has discovered a new work technique that means "man schafft mehr", the immediate response is "Fragt sich für wen"<sup>208</sup> as Balke also received a premium for it, although it is recognised that he could not have achieved it without the aid of his comrades: "Der Aktivist kriegt eine Prämie. Die Steine haben wir geschleppt."<sup>209</sup> This leads to the central problem of the play: who *is* the 'Lohndrücker'? On the one hand it is clear that quite literally Balke fits the description in that his work raises the norms which depresses the wages of the others as they are unable or unwilling to work to the new norms. On the other, however, after the first case of sabotage, it is Balke who argues: "Es war kein Unfall. Das wißt ihr so gut wie ich. *Pause*. Wenn ihr von der neuen Norm nichts wissen wollt, wer drückt dann den Lohn, ihr oder ich?"<sup>210</sup>

As could also be seen in *Die Umsiedlerin*, the inevitable consequence of the homogenisation of the industry of labourers within an economy to a force called "labour", where the interests of workers are identical not only to each other but to the state as well, is a conflict between those who are productive and those who are not. Those who are unproductive, be they the representatives of the *Lumpenproletariat* such as Fondrak, or of the reactionary legacy of German history such as Zemke in *Der Lohndrücker*, put a brake on accumulation because they do not see the use of their labour. Whereas the Marxist striker in the capitalist economy slows accumulation because s/he does not regard the value of his/her labour as being adequately remunerated, the shirker in the command economy cannot identify with the subject who is deemed to be the goal of socialised labour, namely "man". The attempt to reify the conditions of production by describing the producing classes as producing for

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>209</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25

<sup>210</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27

themselves (albeit an idea of themselves in the future) runs into difficulties because the actual reward for their labour is still expressed in terms of its exchange value. In the course of *Der Lohndrücker* this value is decreased by the raising of production norms. The reification of the conditions of labour by the dominance of exchange value in the capitalist economy is thus repeated in the command economy as the *ideological* reification of labour relations. Through the raising of norms, the same use-value is accorded a lesser value and justifies a decreased exchange value. In sum, the *use-value* of the product of the labourer's efforts is not returned to the worker but to the idea of "man" who inhabits a future telos.

Such instrumentalisation of labour had, of course, an appalling history in Germany. Instead of submitting production to the goal of future man, the Nazi regime substituted the goal of returned archaic man. Without slipping into an obscene comparison of the GDR and Nazi Germany, it is clear that both goals were absolutely dependent upon the development of the accumulation of the means of production. The workers therefore, by being homogenised into a force directed by the state towards a single goal, ended up producing for an economy which actively sought to maintain that homogeneity on a social level – with cataclysmic results in the case of Nazi Germany, with less horrifying but still repressive consequences in the GDR.

In *Der Lohndrücker* Müller points out the victims of the homogenisation of production, not so much in the GDR, but through the memory of the victims of the Nazi's. What is more, Müller seems to be saying, such remembrance would enable the GDR to realise the heterogeneous desires of the labourers in post-war Germany. At this stage Müller still maintains a certain amount of belief and hope in the party (as the *deus ex machina* of *Die Umsiedlerin* partly shows) but he does not shy away from portraying

those in positions of power who have lost touch with the needs and desires of the workers in whose name the GDR was set up. The boss of the factory, for example, while showing little understanding of the situation in which his charge finds itself, does focus on the problem of the historical legacy. His mistake, however, is to identify all opposition to his plans as residual fascism:

Der Arbeiter hat kein Vertrauen zur Partei. Der Faschismus steckt ihm in den Knochen. Granaten haben sie gedreht mit allen Vieren, jetzt schreien sie "Akkord ist Mord". Wenn du mich fragst: ich traue keinem.<sup>211</sup>

Indeed, there is a distinctly brown tinge to some of the workers in the factory, who see no difference between the two regimes in power since 1933. Zemke, for example, proclaims "Ich war rot wie keiner. Mit Faust und Stuhlbein für die Weltrevolution."<sup>212</sup> He then joined the SA, and himself repeats his behaviour from that era by beating up the defenceless Balke.

Schorn, the incorruptible party official does not want to trust Balke because the latter also behaves as he did under the Nazi's, even though this repetition is for the benefit of the GDR state. Anyone who produced for the goals of that state must by definition be a questionable figure.

Es hängt viel von ihm ab. Zu viel. *Pause*. Ich habe mit ihm in der Rüstung gearbeitet. Handgranaten. Seine Handgranaten waren immer in Ordnung. Er war ein guter Arbeiter. Er hat die Aufrüstung nicht sabotiert. Ich frage mich: Wird er den Aufbau sabotieren?<sup>213</sup>

Thus while on the one hand Müller clearly wants to distinguish between the goals of the two German states, he also points out that one of the most important – the goal of production – itself homogenised workers into a unified labour force who then, like Balke, produced simply for the sake of production. In order to differentiate itself fully

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<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

from its predecessor, the GDR state must therefore make the goal of production a matter for discussion in the present, that is, a subject of politics. This in turn means that the goal of production cannot be completely displaced onto a futural telos, but the productive apparatus and the society it serves must direct some energy to the satisfaction of needs and desires in the present.<sup>214</sup> However, in order to achieve this it also has to be realised that such politicisation of the goal of production also brings with it the attendant dangers of conflict, heterogeneity and expenditure in the present. Moreover, labour itself could be seen as demanding to be treated in this manner as it is the most profound expression of the heterogeneity of any community, expressing as it does the action of singular, finite and different *bodies* on the environment.

In a number of places in *Der Lohnrücken*, emphasis is placed, just as in *Die Umsiedlerin*, on the elemental nature of labour, on how the body works on the environment. The work on the furnace is undertaken by labourers working until exhaustion, sweating, drinking, expending energy. The play demonstrates two reactions to this fact. One uses the body as a symbol of the utility of production, presenting it as a necessary sacrifice for a worthwhile goal in the future; the other insists on the particular finitude and particular history of each body. The first alternative is seen in the words of the reporter who needs an uplifting story for the Sunday newspaper.

Während eine Kammer nach der andern stillgelegt, abgerissen und neu  
ausgemauert wird, brennt nebenan hinter einer dünnen Wand das Feuer weiter.  
Es kommt vor, daß die Pantinen der Männer in Brand geraten. [...] Von den

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<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>214</sup> Cf Müller's comments on the contrasting temporalities of socialist and capitalist economies, *Gesammelte Irrtümer II*, p. 154: "Es gibt im Westen allgemein eine totale Besetzung mit Gegenwart. Das ganze ökonomische Potential geht auf Besetzung mit Gegenwart. Das heißt: Auslöschung von Erinnerung und Gegenwart. [...] Das ist eine absolut kunstfeindliche Situation. [...] Bei uns ist es noch nicht so. Die Regierenden möchten es vielleicht gern ändern. Aber das ökonomische Potential reicht nicht für die Besetzung der Gegenwart. So gibt es viel Erinnerung und auch immer noch Erwartung."

nackten Oberkörpern rinnt der Schweiß, aus den Gesichtern sprechen Entschlossenheit und Zuversicht.<sup>215</sup>

We also witness towards the end of the play the injured body of one of Balke's assistants, while another remarks that the heat near the furnace was in excess of his tank in the war, even though he had earlier boasted "Ich hab in einem Panzer gesessen, bis fünfundvierzig. Das war auch kein Kühlschrank. Ich mach mit."<sup>216</sup> In Müller's play the bodies are thus presented in their constitutive finitude; the fact that they decay, lose strength or get exhausted is just as much a characteristic of the labouring body as producing. Müller emphasises in addition that these bodies and subjects have a *history*, a fact that is once again made possible by the finitude of their existence. Balke's activities in the war are repeatedly discussed and the audience discovers, however briefly, the history of most of the characters in the play. Müller thus attempts to prevent the labouring, embodied subjects being caught up in a reification and homogenisation of their relations with the environment, or at least to offer some resistance to such a process of homogenisation.

The reason for such resistance is to be found in the manner in which the past is repeated. While figures such as Zemke may change sides, the motives for their behaviour, as well as the consequences, remain the same. When repetition occurs within an economy of accumulation, it constitutes the return of the same structures of exploitation, expulsion and suffering. If, however, repetition occurs within the context of a heterogeneous community, this repetition becomes, for Müller, an opportunity. This

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<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32. Just such a fetishisation of the body as elemental force was reportedly the starting point a production of *Der Lohndrucker* in West Berlin in the mid-1970's, an interpretation of the play which sought to emphasise the "dignity" of labour in the face of insuperable odds. Müller was, however, not especially impressed. That his objections were also based on the form of the production is discussed below.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

opportunity consists of the chance to respect the constitutive nature of the other in the community. This is not to say that Zemke's behaviour when repeated within a more politically liberal society would be anything else than destructive, and Balke's industriousness might be seen in a different context as selfish. The point for Müller is rather that a society and economy displaying a desire not to homogenise labour into a single body lays the interpretation of behaviour and the repetition of that behaviour *open to debate*. Similarly, the goal of production would not only be open to debate but allow the possibility of numerous aims and achievements. Finally, the community can only engage in such political discussion on the nature of the present if it remembers the past, and engages in particular remembrance of the particular victims of the progress from past to present. It is in the name of such remembrance that drastic action might be taken for the sake of the simple justice of preventing future victims.

In 1956, Müller evidently had enough faith in the young GDR to entertain the possibility that the democratic society which did not exclude, which was open for debate and which would provide an equitable environment for the labour of the German population could be ushered into the GDR by existing state apparatuses. Thus while the central message of the play remains the need for the processes of production to take advantage of the heterogeneity of the labour force instead of trying to repress it, it is the Party, purged of the opportunists and fellow-travellers which remains the guarantor of such generosity. Balke is made to denounce the saboteur by Schorn, even though the latter had been denounced himself by Balke during the war. The repetition of his denunciation, however, offers the opportunity to put aside obstacles for a just and above all productive society. "Du mußt wissen, was du willst. Uns gehören die Fabriken und

die Macht im Staat. Wir verlieren sie, wenn wir sie nicht gebrauchen. *Schweigen*."<sup>217</sup> Similarly, the refusal by both Balke and Schorn not to indulge in personal revenge on those who have wronged them is not only done for the good of the productive process, but because it is the state which must mete out revenge (as we see in the case of Lerka and the saboteur). In *Der Lohndrucker* it is thus the state which underwrites the productive process and takes the lead in regulating the relations between workers by its rule of law.

There remains in *Der Lohndrucker*, therefore, a certain tension between on the one hand a degree of social heterogeneity through remembrance which becomes reflected in a more politicised attitude to production, and on the other, the necessity of this politicisation being grounded in the party. Müller engages in remembrance of the particular histories of German subjects in order to politicise their present, but the manner in which these subjects live their present demonstrates how it is sublated into the future goal of society. Thus when Müller remarks that the weak economic situation of the GDR provided the conditions for memory and expectation, in contrast to the West,<sup>218</sup> he conflates two different attitudes to the future. The first waits in expectation of the futural telos to come, and engineers its productive processes for the realisation of that telos. The second, more akin to the heterogeneous society of Bataille, expects the future to surprise us and to lay the foundations for further interpretation and political debate.

It has been the argument of this chapter that such an attitude to the future, which would determine to a certain extent the degree of heterogeneity in the present, is

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<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>218</sup> See note 214 above.

difficult to realise within the aesthetics of Müller's early work, be it *Die Umsiedlerin* or *Der Lohndrucker*. Not only in Müller's retreat into the arms of the state do the plays betray a residual belief in the party programme, but more importantly perhaps, the realist re-presentation of events outside the theatre on the stage undermines the aesthetic experience of labour as a potentially heterogeneous force in the community. In these early works, Müller finds himself in the deeply contradictory position of trying to *write community* – as open, politicised, heterogeneous – by reinstating that lost, unified, mythic community of interpretation which would agree with itself and come to more or less the same conclusion about itself. The restoration of such a community, especially one whose understanding of itself was underwritten or provided by the state would leave no room for precisely that interpretation and politicisation of the present for which Müller otherwise pleads.

Instead of this reliance on the state, interpretation of the plays would have to be premised upon the original difference in such interpretation; it would be consistently other to itself. Indeed, the work of art would attempt to elicit a response whereby interpretation was only possible if it was heterogeneous. The interpretation of one member of the audience would not only be opaque to another, but also most importantly opaque to the interpretation and interests of the state. But, as argued above, in Müller's early work it is precisely the state which grounds the events on the stage, their interpretation and the aesthetic and theatrical experience as a whole.

We thus arrive at the crux of the matter for Müller. If his work flashes up moments of heterogeneous expenditure, be it comedy, aesthetic experience of heterogeneous forces in the outside world, or remembrance of particular victims in the past, then such moments can *only* be interpreted in a manner which are always different

from themselves. The form of the work of art must thus answer to this demand and we will see in the next chapter how Müller's dramatic and political interests combine to produce a gradual change, perhaps his own *Kehre*, in his writing. Part of this change will be the realisation that in order for theatre to encourage a heterogeneous experience of its expenditure, that is, a political experience of the present, then the possibility must be allowed of an interpretation which betrays the concerns of homogenous society or its agents. The theatre therefore becomes not just a site of the pious celebration of alterity but an arena of political struggle between the *interests* of heterogeneous and homogeneous expenditure. Furthermore, such a struggle will not end up by being resolved, but will simply always reappear to be reinterpreted in the future.

Returning to *Der Lohndrucker*, it would therefore be imperative for Müller's interests in the political community for labour, as a potentially heterogeneous force, to be experienced *aesthetically* within the theatre. Were labour to be thus experienced, it would undermine the claims of homogenous society to instrumentalise everything it touches, providing the conditions for a possible interpretation of labour as heterogeneous and political expenditure. Thus the tension in the play referred to above is not resolved by art, but rather set free *as* tension, remaining at the level of the undecidable.

In addition, the form of memory which Müller calls upon in *Der Lohndrucker*, the remembrance of particular victims in the past whose reappearance is witness to the finitude and heterogeneity which structures community, has to take place in art which acts *as* art, an art which seeks actively to demonstrate its distance from conventional realist aesthetics which have been sublated into a programme of accumulation. By remaining within the theatre and addressing the tradition of those theatrical aesthetics,

Müller will address similarly the tradition of heterogeneous expenditure and remember the victims of that practice – theatre – which has set itself off from the normal day-to-day life of the population in modern society. In other words, two forms of victim have to be addressed by Müller if his interest in heterogeneous expenditure is to be consistent. Not only must he remember those victims who have suffered directly at the hands of homogeneous society, but also those who have been sacrificed by the theatre's refusal not to be sullied by direct involvement in politics.

As the next chapter will show, this latter remembrance will primarily take the form of how the bodies of figures on the stage are presented. For as *Der Lohndrucker* demonstrates clearly, the symbolisation of the body on stage ends up either in the presentation of the events depicted as an idealised history of the GDR, or (as with the example of the reporter's article or, allegedly in the case of the 1974 production in West Berlin) succeeds only in aestheticising those bodies outside of the theatre. Müller will instead take a different path, presenting the body not as symbol but as allegory, in an attempt not to end up with political theatre, but to write and produce *politically* by invoking a radical sense of finitude, interpretation, openness and surprise.

Just such a production took place in East Berlin in 1988, when Müller directed *Der Lohndrucker* before packed houses. This was no nostalgia for Socialist Realism, however, but a highly provocative, avant-garde interpretation of the play which sought to address the history and decay of the theatrical community over the 30 years between this and the first performance of the play. Judging by Marc Silberman's lucid and thorough essay on the production,<sup>219</sup> Müller altered the staging of the piece radically, firmly replacing it in the avant-garde tradition of his works since the early 1970's. In the

production the chronology of the play became more fractured whereby the juxtaposition of scenes was now exaggerated with the inscription of other texts, repetitions, omissions and tableaux. Most importantly the final scene, where Balke and Karras are reconciled for the good of continued production, was cut out. The production was characterised by discontinuity rather than by the smooth path of progress, be it of history or narrative, which corresponded to the official GDR state view of history.

This was also achieved through other effective means, most notably the relegation of the spoken word to an after-thought of the image. In this production, voices (not least that of Müller himself) were heard from off-stage, displacing the easy identification of speech and subject. In a technique that Müller had used increasingly since his collaboration with Robert Wilson, pieces of text are repeated over and over; for instance, the conversation between Balke and Lerka in scene 4. Certain scenes are turned, not into the next stage of a plot, but into tableaux, standing outside of the chronology of theatrical development.

Silberman thus suggests that Müller was attempting to re-establish not so much a community of interpretation, but rather one of memory, not only of the events which characterised the early years of the GDR, but also a memory of the tradition of theatre. This community, due to the opacity of the avant-garde theatrical performance, was almost bound to be riven by different interpretations, and thus Müller's aim seemed to have been the restoration of the heterogeneous community of memory which might address the history and tradition of labour, its subsumption under the economics of accumulation and possibilities of the transgression of that subsumption. Thus the *Der Lohndrucker* production of 1988 aimed to address the question of the legacy of labour

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<sup>219</sup> Marc Silberman, *Heiner Müller's Der Lohndrucker, 1988*, Theater, Summer/Fall 1988, p.28.

in the GDR by reflecting on the aesthetic presentation of it on the stage, referring to the history of such presentation, or in other words, *repeating* it.

As we shall discover in the next chapter, the repetition of ideas and events, however much they reflect homogenous society, however mythic they might be, can for Müller offer up an opportunity if that repetition takes place as a practice heterogeneous to the restricted economy of accumulation. One example of such a practice might be theatre and the opportunity would take the form of allegory. When allegorical art such as Müller's theatre refers to and repeats its own past and own tradition it hopes to achieve far more than self-reflection. Müller himself attempts to reflect instead on the tradition of heterogeneous expenditure as a whole, precisely by remaining within the theatre. The theatrical experience itself, therefore, and not just the events on the stage, thus take on the status of an allegory, but this form only seemed to be open to Müller once he had ceased to write realistic drama and instead turned directly to the past. In the case of *Philoktet*, this is achieved through the repetition of particular drama, while *Hamletmaschine* represents a more ambitious concern with the theatrical tradition and the nature of the theatre as such.

## Chapter Three

### *The Drama of Philoktet*

The play<sup>1</sup> is concerned with events on the island of Lemnos, where Philoktet, the master bowman and general of a vital part of the Greek army, was set ashore by Odysseus, the commander of the Greek forces some ten years previously. Philoktet had, through his bravery, enabled a sacrifice to be made at the altar of Poseidon, the sea god, which had allowed the fleet to embark from Greece. In so doing, however, he was bitten by the snake guarding the way to the altar and badly wounded in his foot, a wound so painful that he could not but help break the next condition of a safe voyage, the silence in respect of the victims of the events up until this point. Thus Philoktet is stranded on Lemnos to provide the means for the continuation of the voyage to Troy. Ten years later, the carnage of Troy shows no sign of abating, the siege no sign of breaking the Trojans defences; what is needed is the bow of Philoktet, presented to him by Hercules and which never fails to hit its target, but even more importantly the leadership of Philoktet himself whose men have grown restless and are demanding the return of their general. The despised Odysseus therefore travels to Lemnos to attempt to persuade Philoktet to save his hatred for the Trojans and return to the battle. He comes however not alone but with Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles, another victim of the Trojan slaughter, who has also been tricked by Odysseus and who hates him with scarcely less venom than Philoktet. In order to entice Neoptolemos to Troy, Odysseus had offered him the bait of his fallen father's armour, a trophy which he has still not received and which was promised him once again if he succeeds in tricking Philoktet to come aboard the ship bound back for Troy. Neoptolemos comes across Philoktet, manages to gain his

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<sup>1</sup> *Philoktet*, in Mauser, pp. 7 -42.

trust and is on the point of persuading him of the necessity of the return to Troy when Odysseus appears, a shock that sends Philoktet back into the state of naked hatred in which he had lived the previous ten years. He manages to regain the precious bow that he had given Neoptolemos and is about to murder Odysseus when Neoptolemos runs Philoktet through with his sword, to protect Odysseus, but more importantly to ensure the success of the odyssey to Troy itself. Neoptolemos and Odysseus leave Lemnos, carrying the dead Philoktet, intending to concoct a story for Philoktet's troops which would encourage them to fight on: Philoktet was murdered by the Trojans on his arrival in Troy, the corpse the none-too living proof.

It is important at this stage to point out the differences between the *Philoktet* of Heiner Müller and the *Philoktetes* of Sophocles on which the former is based. In the latter, Philoktet survives the machinations of Odysseus, largely because Hercules, the presenter of the miraculous bow, appears. His arrival in the drama, *semi-deus ex machina*, serves the purpose of solving the seemingly intractable contradictions and problems of the situation on Lemnos. The mortals seem incapable of bringing the events to a conclusion, tied up as they are in their worldly concerns. Hercules presents what amounts to a transcendental synthesis of the politics of the circumstances and thus manages to persuade Philoktet to return to Troy in peace with his soldier comrades.

Müller's version, written between 1958 and 1964 was not performed in the GDR until late 1977,<sup>2</sup> receiving its first performance in Munich in 1968 at the Residenztheater. The mildly enthusiastic review<sup>3</sup> interprets the play as "ein Stück über

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<sup>2</sup> 13.12.77 at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin.

<sup>3</sup> Rischbieter, H., "Ein finsternes Stück: Heiner Müllers *Philoktet* uraufgeführt am Residenztheater München" in Theater Heute, 8/1968, pp. 28-31.

Lüge, Lügengewebe, Dialektik der Lüge, Lüge als Herrschaftsmittel",<sup>4</sup> and as presenting the characters as being caught up in the web of deceit and corruption that transcends political systems but is rather the milieu of the human condition. Thus the performance and the play are linked to the philosophy that had swept through the Western European intelligentsia, and which was perhaps especially salient after the *Ereignisse* of that year: "Wenn Philosophie in diesem Text steckt, so ist es eine finstere Abart des Existentialismus, eine dialektische und eine skeptische."<sup>5</sup>

In the West, however, *Philoktet* has been more generally regarded as an allegory of Stalinism,<sup>6</sup> and this has been seen to be confirmed by some statements of Müller himself although others, not least the notes to the director of the Munich production,<sup>7</sup> seem to have been worded to prevent a too hasty appropriation of the piece for Western concerns possibly hostile to the GDR. However, in an interview in 1982,<sup>8</sup> Müller states explicitly: "I wrote the play about the stalemate situation of Soviet Socialism, and more generally about the Russian revolution in the context of world revolution."<sup>9</sup> The necessity for the allegorisation of such a subject matter is obvious and is also addressed by Müller. "I wouldn't write another antique play or adaptation now. In the early sixties, however, you couldn't write a play on Stalinism. You needed this kind of model in order to confront the real questions."<sup>10</sup> There was also a general return to mythic subject matter in much of the literature of the GDR at the time. Herbert Arnold and Roland

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See especially Schulz, *Heiner Müller*, pp. 71 - 83 and Wieghaus, *Zwischen Auftrag und Verrat*, pp. 115 - 128.

<sup>7</sup> In Rischbieter, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Walls. An Interview with Sylfère Lotringer*, in Müller, *Rotwelsch*, pp. 9 - 48.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

Heine<sup>11</sup> discuss the treatment of myth in Müller, as well as in Christa Wolf, Peter Hacks and Hartmut Lange and mention various explanations for the wide ranging investigation of mythic themes. On the one hand, and especially relevant in the case of Müller, the reaction to continual censorship and outright proscription of work leads to the necessity of allegorisation. Müller is interpreted as having found a particular niche, just as was supposedly the case in the wider GDR society as a whole, where work could be carried on undisturbed. On the other, a general disillusionment with the direction of *real existierende Sozialismus* results in an interest in more personal day-to-day concerns, such as the problem of lying, for example. Finally, the treatment of myth is seen to accompany the state-induced debate on the nature of the relation to the cultural and wider historical *Erbe* of the GDR.

Any allegory of Stalinism succeeding the demolition of the personality cult surrounding Stalin himself must inevitably address the problem that the whole population was lied to and therefore the possibility that it is still being spun a lie, simply a different one. It may just be the case that the lie is inevitable, not simply in the Soviet economies but in the structure of human communication itself. Language would thus seem to be *necessary dissimulation*. Philoktet, on seeing Neoptolemos for the first time expresses this universal dissimulation in all cultures, in language itself: "Mit welcher Sprache, Hund, lernstest du lügen",<sup>12</sup> Odysseus points similarly towards the inevitability of lying; simply by telling the truth will Neoptolemos be forced to deceive:

In allem brauchst du nicht zu lügen.  
Sei der du bist, [...]  
Und weil du nicht zu lügen brauchst in dem

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<sup>11</sup> *On Myth & Marxism - the Case of Heiner Müller & Christa Wolf*, *Colloquia Germanica* 21, 1988, pp. 58-69 and *Mythenrezeption in den Dramen von Peter Hacks, Heiner Müller und Hartmut Lange. Zum Versuch der Grundlegung einer 'sozialistischen Klassik'*, *Colloquia Germanica* 14, 1981, pp. 239-260.

<sup>12</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 15.

Wählt ich zum Helfer dich für meinen Plan  
Denn glaublich wirst du lügen mit der Wahrheit<sup>13</sup>

The inevitability of language and its dissimulation represents the ineluctable nature of culture, the subject in its intercourse with others will inextricably be caught up in its net. Whilst Odysseus and Neoptolemos speak continually of the net that needs to be cast to catch Philoktet, it is simultaneously a metaphor for the binding of Philoktet, the subject who was cast outside of culture and history, within the confines of civilisation. At the beginning of the play Odysseus orders Neoptolemos to be "das Netz, mit dem ich ihn zurückfang"<sup>14</sup> to which the latter replies, at this stage convinced of the idealism of truth, that Odysseus who has been proven to be an inveterate liar will not succeed in his task if he continues to lie. "Dein Wort hat weite Maschen"<sup>15</sup> he says, unknowingly linking the Word itself with the lie, forgetting that in order for the net to have its full effect, it must have wide enough holes for the victim to intricate himself. A net without wide enough holes is easily shrugged off, that one with the gaping rip surrenders its integrity as net, as would a culture its consistency and identity if the dissimulation reached such a point that it represented a return to a State of Nature as characterised by the excluded Philoktet on the island.

After having tricked Philoktet out of his bow, Neoptolemos still suffers the guilt of the representative of culture who has exploited the innocence of nature for its own ends:

Ich wollt, ein andrer Weg wär aus dem Krieg[...]  
Als der, den ich im Netz der Schande geh  
Zum Strand jetzt, den erlognen Sieg zu melden  
Die Schläfen rot mit Scham und auszuliefern

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

Mit schwarzen Händen den erlognen Fang[.]<sup>16</sup>

For the outcast Philoktet, however, the return to culture, even if it means the carnage of Troy, is a return to identity, of undergoing recognition, of becoming a part once more of the dialectics of needs, demands and desires.<sup>17</sup>

Beug deinen Nacken wieder, Gaul, ins Joch  
Und lern das Leben neu, vor Troja schlachtend.  
*Steht auf.*  
Du wirst gebraucht, du bist ein Netz wert wieder.  
Renn, Fisch, um deinen Platz in seinen Maschen.<sup>18</sup>

Language and society may lie but the subject needs them as much as Philoktet is needed now. His reaction to the re-appearance of the symbolic in his environment is one of remembrance and regret for having lost them (although the memory of how this happened will provoke his death), and a desire to enter again whatever the cost.

Laut, der mir lieb war. Sprache, lang entbehrt  
Mit der das erste Wort aus meinem Mund ging [...]  
Red, Grieche. Red von mir das Schlimmste, red  
Von meinen Feinden Gutes. Was du willst.  
Lüg, Grieche. Allzu lang hört ich nicht lügen.<sup>19</sup>

The lie becomes a necessity, not merely an ontological given, but vitally in *Philoktet*, the necessity is governed by the nature of the lie as means to an end. The end

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>17</sup> The re-entrance of Philoktet into the symbolic order, the net of the law, would seem to encourage a Lacanian reading of the problematic of the play. Before the arrival of the other two Greeks, Philoktet lives in a realm analogous to the pre-Imaginary, where need is articulated by the drives, where there seems to be a re-sealing of the *Spaltung* constitutive of the subject, complete identification with the body and his wound. It is a state which exists before the gaze of recognition of the mirror stage produces a demand of the Other. In several places in the text, Philoktet, thrust out of the symbolic, and even more, deprived of the "mirror" of the Other, speaks of the lack of the gaze of the Other that has been the determining characteristic of his ten years on the island. This is interestingly enough expressed as the lack of the Other face, opening up the demands of culture that are here represented as being repressed by the stronger demands of instrumental reason. It is noticeable that Philoktet in the following quote speaks of his 'place' in the net of the symbolic order, the site where he can be gazed at, desired, a place before the Law which is his and his only. The problems that arise almost immediately demonstrate merely that the body can never be completely *aufgehoben* into the symbolic, it is always present as *Rest*, a theme that Müller was interested in throughout his productive life.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

for which all is forsaken in the play is, for Odysseus, clear: "Zum Dieb und Lügner bist du schlecht begabt/ Ich weiß es. Süß aber, Sohn Achills, ist der Sieg."<sup>20</sup> Neoptolemos' attitude is that of the politically naive, or rather the non-politician. For him, the goal is contaminated if the means are not pure: "Aus faulem Grund wächst wohl ein Gutes nicht."<sup>21</sup> He would rather retreat, to a position effectively analogous to that of Philoktet, his hands clean, his senses uncorrupted: "Hätt ich kein Ohr für dich und keine Sprache./ Sag mir die Lügen, die ich sagen muß."<sup>22</sup> He thus abnegates all responsibility for his actions, preferring to slot in to the power structures of the receiving and giving of orders and tasks, rather than questioning the conditions and politics of the situation that he finds so repellent.

As Odysseus shows, on the other hand, the necessity of the lie is its justification, and that necessity is further more inevitable, at least if thought proceeds along those lines as portrayed in *Philoktet*. There will always be goals, there will thus always be a journey towards those goals. The tragedy of the play, the tragic moment that Müller insists was missing in Western productions, mostly through the one-dimensional characterisation of Odysseus,<sup>23</sup> is the inability of the subject to see the need to intervene and involve oneself in what is at stake in the necessity itself. The retreat sounded at various points of the play, helplessly by the victim Philoktet, in a more dangerous way by the idealist Neoptolemos, is little less than the desire for a full presence of meaning, one untainted by the vagaries of symbolic practices. There is a vast difference, however, between the victim and the idealist. The one is placed in this position, the other enacts a

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> see Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 189-190.

full scale withdrawal from politics. In his unreflected use of language in the retreat, Neoptolemos in turn cannot regard or consider the violence enacted upon the object, and even more wishes to compound this violence in its complete subsumption into an identity of full presence. However, as Odysseus shows, the world of the *Macher*, for all its blood and grime, is the arena of politics and the only possibility and hope for change.

Müller does not shirk from the presentation of the qualities of this world. Its brutality is naked, its continuance catastrophic. The unnegotiable victory over Troy justifies the necessity of a whole series of actions both within the timespan of the play as well as those which have brought the characters to this point. Troy needs every man without exception: "kein Leben ist / Auf Lemnos, das der Krieg nicht braucht vor Troja."<sup>24</sup> While Neoptolemos retreats into the contemplation typical of the intellectual, more comrades are being sacrificed:

NEOPTOLEMOS

Nicht solchem Sieg will ich mein Leben danken.

ODYSSEUS

Und seins und andre hier und andern Orts.<sup>25</sup>

Odysseus had indeed made it explicitly clear a little earlier: "Und jeder Augenblick, versäumt hier, tötet / In der entfernten Schlacht uns einen Mann."<sup>26</sup> and is later prepared to have a lie told about his possible murder by Philoktet if it will benefit the Greeks' cause. Neoptolemos is in contrast disturbed by duty's encroachment on truth rather than the necessity of duty and attempts to paint himself as victim rather than as someone whose detachment allows not only the catastrophe to continue, but also the thinking behind it to remain unchallenged.

ungern betrog ich

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<sup>24</sup> op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>25</sup> ibid., p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> ibid., p. 30.

Den viel Betrognen, viel betrogen selber  
Doch war kein anderer Weg, die Lüge Pflicht.<sup>27</sup>

Philoktet himself had been cast away from the fleet, because he was "[u]ns nicht mehr dienlich". His sacrifice was the means of the fleet sailing: "Der Weg nach Troja, unsrer, war dein Fuß".<sup>28</sup>

For the political and social conditions presented in the play, the journey had to be undertaken and Müller seems to suggest that once having set sail, once this history has been set in motion, the instrumentalisation of all thought is unavoidable; it is directed towards the goal of victory. As the victim of this pattern, Philoktet curses the first moves on the journey as well as him who was the prime mover himself.

Wie lang verflucht ich den, der damit anfang  
Und ging den ersten Schritt, beschuht mit Schiffen  
Erfinder meines Auslands[.]<sup>29</sup>

However, as he considers a return to history, he seems to have steeled himself for the consequences of such a restitution: "Leb für den nächsten Fußtritt. Süßes Leben/ In der blutsaufenden Gemeinschaft wieder."<sup>30</sup>

Neoptolemos never shows such clarity, albeit not consciously. The price to be paid on such a journey is clear: he retreats instead into the impotence of nostalgia, into the quietism of the apolitical. "O wär ich keinen Schritt gegangen auf/ Dem Weg, der mit mir selber mich entzweit"<sup>31</sup> Odysseus also reflects on the time that he wanted to stay

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23. See also note 17 above. It would be important to note that the *Entzweiung*, the *Spaltung* that the subject undergoes, once it has set off into the Symbolic as it were, has itself its particular place and time in a particular subject. How the imaginary and Real play themselves out in the lives of the Symbolic is subject to a conflicting set of teleologies, all of which may envisage an action for a particular goal (see also the next quote). This is reflected most strongly in the different teleologies towards death, as I hope to show in relation to *Philoktet*. The essential difference is between the existence of conflictual, always-already agonistic teleologies and the homogenisation of these into the one telos of Enlightenment,

in the one place, the tactics he used "[um] mich zu behalten" but he too was forced into service by the generals of his time and since then can see the hopelessness of the desire to turn in and back on oneself.

So weit sind wir gegangen in der Sache  
Im Netz aus eignem und aus fremdem Schritt  
Daß uns kein Weg herausgeht als der weitre.<sup>32</sup>

The wrath of the gods was directed at the attempt "uns zu behalten" and the sacrifices made to placate them (Philoktet, Odysseus' child) the necessary price to start history on its development. This view would seem to regard the movement of history as an inexorable course, but as will be discussed later, for Müller the catastrophic repetition of the same conditions, the continuation of war and of the conditions of its possibility open up, in this repetition, a fissure and a site for politics.

The allegory to Stalinism is not difficult to recognise and has been commented on in previous chapters; the goal is communism, and the real existing socialism in the conditions of the GDR the manifestation of the development of history up until that point. The tragic course of events that makes up the history of the Soviet block do have for Müller a particular poignancy for Germany. As discussed in Chapter Two, the failure of the German revolution culminated in the doctrine of "socialism in one country", which, with mental and material powers directed towards the communist telos, led the Party to the colonisation of its own people, an ideology then set in place by the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe after the Second World War. "Die Revolution konnte nur *für* die Arbeiterklasse gemacht werden, nach der Dezimierung der Avant-

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a one goal whose unrepresentability is not that of the sublime, like death's, but which sees itself as present in each stage, as a projection of its completion. It is thereby apolitical, suffocating any basis to praxis.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34 - 35.

Garde, ....nicht von ihr."<sup>33</sup> Democracy thus became the rule *for* the people rather than *of*, allowing the instrumentalisation of even those excluded by the process of the definition of identity that forbade any constitutive role to excess.<sup>34</sup> The effect of this problem in relation to a post-revolutionary society is explored in other plays of Müller, notably *Mauser* and *Zement*. In *Philoktet* too, the unavoidable exploitation of individuals and groups in any class society (that is, in every society that has as yet existed) as means towards an end, and their emergence as victims in this process, becomes a determining point of contention. The play shows an unsurprising disquiet with this situation, but the answer is not seen as a retreat into the self-defining and solipsistic apolitical but rather a further radicalisation of the political process. Politics produces victims but the radicalisation of politics with the aim of producing fewer victims can only happen through the remembrance of past victims. That this is effected in the *theatre itself*, as well as coming over as the pedagogical impulse of the play is typical of Müller's work at this stage and it demonstrates the shift in Müller's work to a concern with the tradition of theatre as being the basis for making theatre politically.

Müller also expressed the same view in countless interviews, one noteworthy example being in *Neues Deutschland* on 10<sup>th</sup> October 1973, where he describes his task as being to show through "Erinnerung, was er [der Sozialismus] gekostet hat." This was interpreted as tribute to the victims of the revolution, the heroes for the struggle for socialism, as well as reminding the GDR population of how fortunate they were. Müller's aim was thus "die Gewöhnung an den Sozialismus und in den Sozialismus aufzubrechen."<sup>35</sup> Such a praxis is one in which Müller wishes to indulge in a politicised

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<sup>33</sup> Müller, *Fatzer +/- Keuner*, in *Rotwelsch*, p. 145.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter Two and the discussion of Fondrak in *Die Umsiedlerin*.

<sup>35</sup> Bernhardt, Rüdiger. *Antikerezeption im Werk Heiner Müllers*, *Weimarer Beiträge* 3, 1976, p. 115.

remembrance of victims, not only of a revolution, not only of political opponents within a totalitarian society but most of all of the victims of any social structure, especially one based so starkly on a politics of *Ausgrenzung*, whose maintenance and development has proved necessarily to involve sacrifice. This problematic is demonstrated most forcefully in the figure of Philoktet himself.

*Philoktet – die Wonne des Getretenen*

It is indeed Philoktet's exile from the journey to Troy, as well as from the history that was made there, which enables the first step to be taken. It is thus fitting that his *foot* was the price to be paid for the journey of others. He is unable to engage in 'Fort-schritt' and even when he feels able to do so ("Lauf, Einbein in den Schlamm, der alles heilt."<sup>36</sup>) his foot refuses to move, his body is in rebellion against the instrumentalisation of itself. He has been so long out of society that there is almost no conceivable way of a return. His remark on hearing Odysseus' approach - "Was für ein Schritt?"<sup>37</sup> - signifies the consequences of a possible return but finally disallows it: his exclusion can only bring about in him a hatred of any society based on Greek civilisation that can never be sublimated:

Denn Freund nenn ich dich, wenn von deiner Hand  
Ein Grieche starb und frag nach deinem Grund nicht  
Er war ein Grieche, keinen Grund brauchts weiter.<sup>38</sup>

His hate for Odysseus is such that he hopes that the latter has not been killed "[d]urch zufälliges Eisen" for he knows that he "[d]as tote nicht noch einmal töten kann",<sup>39</sup> and

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<sup>36</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

yet later he wishes precisely this, when finally faced with Odysseus himself: "Wären wir unsterblich / Daß ich dich töten könnte jetzt und immer."<sup>40</sup>

The consequence of Philoktet's exclusion becomes the desire to return to pre-cultural state that is nothing short of psychotic, as evidenced by the extremity of the murderous lust mentioned above. More importantly this psychosis as a complete involvement in the present moment takes place by definition outside of a historical temporality<sup>41</sup>. Identification for Philoktet is thus only possible with himself and there seems to be no hope for this victim of history: "Ich der die Geier fraß unter dem Reißzahn / Wohnend der Jahre. Ich und Ich und Ich."<sup>42</sup> The complete presence of identification, not displaced or deferred by the difference of the social environment leads thus to a return of the body, or rather to an undifferentiated relation of the subject to his own body: "Ich war die Wunde, ich das Fleisch, das schrie."<sup>43</sup> Philoktet has become therefore little more than an animal which must be trapped in the "net", whose elemental nature has to be overcome and dominated in order for the journey to continue. The contrast between the human subject and Philoktet is made clear at the first sight of their appearance together on the stage. On seeing Neoptolemos, Philoktet remarks:

Ein Lebendes auf meinem toten Strand  
Ein Ding, das aufrecht geht wie vordem ich  
Auf anderm Boden mit zwei heilen Beinen.  
Wer bist du Zweibein? Mensch, Tier oder Grieche?<sup>44</sup>

One of the outstanding features of Philoktet's expulsion out of the social realm is his relation to time, and his re-introduction to society is made impossible by the

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<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> As argued in Chapter Two this complete and never-ending transgression, this total immersion in the present is therefore not the sovereignty of a figure such as Fondrak, but rather psychosis.

<sup>42</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 15.

inability to take up the challenge of the conflicting temporalities that make up the political environment. Time is bearable only in sociality, it is otherwise experienced as constant death.

Grad gut genug mein Sterben zu verlängern  
Bis du mich aufhobst aus vieljährigem Tod  
Ins Leben, das den Tod nicht kennt vorm Ende.<sup>45</sup>

Death outside of the temporality of the social is constantly present and cannot be displaced into something with which the subject can engage in a personal teleological relationship. As Müller himself explains:

Das Entscheidende ist der Umgang mit Zeit; Zeit des Lebens, Zeit des Sterbens, Zeit des Todes. Die bewußte Wahrnehmung des Ablaufs der Zeit hält niemand aus - also muß Zeit "totgeschlagen" und das heißt nicht weniger als: Todesangst verdrängt werden zum Beispiel mit Arbeit.<sup>46</sup>

The 'primary repression' of time which thus defines the social environment is not, however, to be viewed negatively. Müller's comments are rather a recognition of the death of the other as constitutive of society. The social is defined by the limits between human subjects, otherwise life is experienced as constant death.<sup>47</sup>

Philoktet becomes acutely aware of the relation of time to the social, for he realises that the passing of the time of the task of Troy, that homogenous conception based upon the repression of the political, is undermined by different temporalities. If he were to stay on the margins of the social, to remain on the island and thus keep

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<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 22.

<sup>47</sup> One could, on the other hand, accuse Müller here of employing an absolute conception of time which necessitates the interpretation of work (or an ethical act) as the repression of the fear of death. An understanding of originally antagonistic temporalities which are recognised as such by the subject would allow different teleologies to death to overcome the homogenous social order's 'Totschlag'. There would thus not be just one 'Umgang mit der Zeit', but many. This is further problematised in *Philoktet* by the insistence that the homogenisation of temporality is indeed violent but simultaneously the realm of politics.

Odysseus and Neoptolemos there as well, then the time of the excluded, the time of excess would threaten the whole existence of the project.

Behalt den Bogen, bessere Waffe ist  
Die Zeit mir. Keine Hand beweg ich und  
Ein Grieche stirbt. Und wieder stirbt ein Grieche  
Und keine Hand. Zeit, Mörderin, alterslose  
Zehn Jahr lang deinen Gang verflucht ich, der  
Mir keinen Schritt ausließ [...] und nicht  
Genug zu preisen jetzt [ist] dein Ablauf[.]<sup>48</sup>

One could therefore interpret Philoktet's actions as a brake on instrumentality, he lives the time of excess on the island and seeks to entrap those from the outside world of politics into the immediacy of animalistic hate: "Dein Gang ist mein Gang, dein Schritt ist mein Schritt."<sup>49</sup> The danger of such an interpretation is, however, made clear in the actions of Neoptolemos, whose retreat into the self-presence of the immediacy of extra-social temporality merely represses political practice. *Philoktet* (the play) thus demonstrates that the brake on 'progress', that is, on an *idea* of history that suffocates difference and politics, can only be applied by those *in* history or by those who recognise that the hegemonic idea of history has to be substituted by one which remembers its victims. The tragedy of the play is that Philoktet himself is the victim and as marginalised, is unable to effect a return to the possibility of political action. This re-entrance into the demands of the symbolic arena would necessitate a different temporality to that of his life on Lemnos. At one point, he almost seems capable of it, moving on from the psychosis of desire discussed earlier to its sublimation, or more accurately its *deferral*.

Schluck deinen Haß, die Nahrung, lang gekaut [...]  
Auf seinen Tod die Hoffnung war dein Leben

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<sup>48</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

Wart länger und mit besserer Hoffnung jetzt.<sup>50</sup>

Here, the self-presence of absolute animalistic hate is mitigated and deferred to a goal in the future. Philoktet never comes closer than this to a re-entry, but the audience is left in no doubt that its price would be to re-establish the catastrophe of the continuity of carnage. And yet *on the other hand*, it provides the only means to political action. This aporia of political engagement is, however, then set out by Müller as providing the means for further judgement and further political action itself. In contrast, hatred and the desire for self-presence are thereby linked: both are politically solipsistic and both must be deferred in order to enter the social realm (at the price of being caught within the net of the political hegemony); one is exemplified by Philoktet, the other by Neoptolemos. This necessary deferment of self-presence involved in sociality, in other words the fact that identity is achieved through the difference from other members of society, finally finds its expression in the attitude which the community takes to death.

Philoktet develops throughout the play before finally returning to the state from whence he came. Each of the positions he takes in the play shows his status as victim, each points to his being acted upon as the object of events rather than as an agent of history. One important turning point comes after Neoptolemos takes his bow, expressing regret for the trickery involved in the theft. This is then interpreted by Philoktet as the intention to leave him behind once more:

Zum zweitenmal den Geiern geben willst du  
Mich, weil dir graut vor dem Gestank der Wunde  
Der mich den Geiern gab zum erstenmal.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

He sees the events as a simple repetition, without being able to conceive what is exactly at stake in the return of the same. The return to Lemnos and the return to the instrumentalisation of Philoktet shows up the difference between the two events. Philoktet is unable to grasp that a journey has been undertaken, that there has been history in between. Once the reasons for the return are revealed to him, he retreats once more into the desire for a complete schism from culture, a gap which is revealed in his desire for a particular kind of death:

Und nicht eingraben sollt ihr meinen Leib  
In fremden Grund oder in heimischen  
Daß nicht mein Staub begegne eurem Staub [...]  
Und nicht verbrennen sollt ihr mich und streun  
In augenscheinlich Leeres meine Asche  
Daß nicht die euerm aschnen Rest vermengt wird  
Von zufälligem Wind.<sup>22</sup>

He goes on to forbid his being fed to the vultures or the fish as well as his preservation in salt, all for the same reason, to retain the purity of his death, a death which must be utterly uninstrumental. Philoktet's stance, from our position *within* history and politics in the audience appears as the critique of that instrumentalism. In other words, his excessive and transgressive behaviour only offers the chance of criticising the idea of instrumental progress for those who are *not* transgressing fully. This dynamic is heightened by the audience's witnessing Philoktet's transgression in the theatre. They experience *Philoktet* as a politically autonomous work of art which stands on the limit of instrumentalism through the manner in which the play brings forth different interpretations, different teleologies and different temporalities in the autonomous work or art. As such, art repeats for Müller the political interpretation of death in the community - the political act of burial that defines culture:

Kunst aber stammt aus und wurzelt in der Kommunikation mit dem Tod und den Toten. Es geht darum, daß die Toten einen Platz bekommen. Das ist eigentlich Kultur.<sup>52</sup>

Thus Philoktet's wish to be thrown into the volcano, so that nothing remains of him, is as powerful a rejection of culture as can be.

Furthermore, once Odysseus arrives and almost all hope of the return to the social has gone, Philoktet offers Neoptolemos the chance of purity:

Wasch den Fleck von deinem Namen  
Mach ungetan, was du nicht gern getan hast. [...]  
Wasch ab die fremde Farbe  
Gib mir den Bogen, dir den Namen wieder.<sup>54</sup>

Philoktet seems to suggest that Neoptolemos is only true to himself and able to retain his name if he joins Philoktet in the psychosis of the extra-social. He forgets thereby the irreducibly social nature of the name: that to have a name at all is to dissimulate oneself in and through the other.

There is a vast difference, however, between the space which constitutes the tragedy of the piece, which is represented by Philoktet's rejection of culture and civilisation, and the cowardice of Neoptolemos' retreat from the political. The latter represents the intellectual class with which Müller has continually identified and concerned himself, thus lending the play once again the force of Heiner Müller's signature.

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 23.

<sup>54</sup> Müller, *Philoktet* *op. cit.*, p. 30.

*Neoptolemos – Ruhm und Schande*

Writing about his own adaptation of the Oedipus myth, Müller describes the subtext of the play *Oedipus Rex* to be about "der Dualismus Praxis Theorie [...]. Seine (blutige) Geburt beschreibt das Stück, seine radikalste Formulierung ist der Atompilz über Hiroshima."<sup>55</sup> Oedipus' act of blinding himself is a retreat into pure theory ("denn süß ist wohnen / Wo der Gedanke wohnt, entfernt von allem") which has become the model for the behaviour of the intellectual in history, not least in Germany. Just as Oedipus solves the riddle set by the oracle, so has the intellectual claimed to have solved the riddle of history, by positing an end to history which will allow the intellectual to shelve his/her responsibility for the events in that history. Neoptolemos sits full square in this tradition.

Neoptolemos [...] ist von dem Stoff aus dem die Denkmäler gebaut werden. Das Kapitel Philoktet beschreibt den ersten Schritt auf seinem Marsch in die Versteinerung, den ersten Arbeitsgang des Bildhauers, der die Geschichte ist, an der Skulptur[.]<sup>56</sup>

It becomes clear that Müller's own interpretation of the play is not so close to the dominant Western idea that Odysseus is the representation of the classical Stalinist bureaucrat and bogey man, but that instead Neoptolemos is the agent rather than the tool in the processes of the play. He repeatedly gestures to his wish to retreat from the responsibility of his actions ("Hätt ich kein Ohr für dich", "Ich wollt, ein andrer Weg wär aus dem Krieg"), adding usually that he does the particular action "ungern", but "Doch ist kein andrer Weg, dich zu befreien."<sup>57</sup> It ought to be remembered that his reason

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<sup>55</sup> quoted in Schulz, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> Müller, *Brief an den Regisseur der bulgarischen Erstaufführung von Philoktet am dramatischen Theater Sofia*, in *Herzstück*, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 31.

for coming to Lemnos can barely be described as duty; he wants simply that which is his property: his father's armour.

*Philoktet* thus describes for Müller:

den Abstieg des Neoptolemos [...] in den Ruhm des ersten Schlächters vor Troja [...], ein Wunschkonzert für den Intellektuellen, der kein Blut sehen kann und es doch saufen will.<sup>58</sup>

The running through of *Philoktet* from *behind*, so that he can avoid the eyes, the gaze and the face of the murdered victim corresponds neatly to his historical cowardice.

Neoptolemos, as the typical intellectual, would rather simply talk about the actions to be undertaken, involving himself and Odysseus in a complicated metaphorical argument on the nature of task ahead. Odysseus finishes the exchange, almost in exasperation:

Oder, den Grund umgrabend ganz, die Flut  
Am dritten stirbt das andere, was kommt geht  
Und weitres reden wir auf Trojas Trümmern.<sup>59</sup>

Here, once more the essential difference between *Philoktet* and Neoptolemos becomes clear: while the former ranges on the border of the symbolic, sometimes regressing into a pre-symbolic psychosis, the latter remains firmly caught in the net of figure and trope (inevitable in itself) but attempts to deny all responsibility for the consequences. He seems to be intent on doing what is "right", without reference to what Odysseus regards as the more important goal. Neoptolemos thus represents an ethical absolutism which at first sight seems admirable but which reflects the priority of his concern about his being

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<sup>58</sup> Müller, *Brief an den Regisseur...*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>59</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 11-12. This dialogue is, in Müller's eyes at least reminiscent of the conversation between Polonius and Hamlet in Act III, Sc. ii over the shape of a cloud. Müller remarks in a number of places that he sees Polonius' comparison of the cloud's shape to a particular animal a retreat of the intellectual e.g. "Polonius... ist nicht meine Rolle, am wenigsten in seinem Dialog mit Hamlet über das Aussehen einer gewissen Wolke, der am Elend der Vergleichens das wirkliche Elend von Machtstrukturen demonstriert." (*Das Schrecken die erste Erscheinung des Neuen* in Rotwelsch, p. 95.)

personally instrumentalised rather than about a politicisation of theory and practice as a whole.

Exactly how far removed from engagement in human affairs Neoptolemos wishes to be is revealed shortly before he murders Philoktet: "Nicht du bist der mich hindern wird am Rechten/ [...]Der Tod spart Götter, lügen muß kein Mann."<sup>60</sup> Once again, a retreat into a deathless self-presence is signalled, unriven by the fissure of language and dissimulation of meaning and the self. The offer made earlier to Neoptolemos by Philoktet to become once more what he was, to regain his name, is stamped by the same metaphysical nostalgia as the preceding quote. As argued above, there can for Müller be no possibility of naming out of the demands of the culture whose exigencies and responsibility Neoptolemos wants to evade, and so by remaining uninvolved, he simply becomes the butcher.

The turning point in Neoptolemos' fortunes comes when he allows himself to be impressed by the 'nobility' of Odysseus' speech at the end of the play when the latter seems ready to die for the goal ahead and to sacrifice his life for the return of Philoktet to Troy. Even though this means that a lie would have to be found for his death, Odysseus is willing to enter into the deception, even in his death, in order to maintain his troops' willingness to fight. Neoptolemos must therefore recognise that he is inextricably locked up in the death of one of the participants.

He chooses, of course, Philoktet but the motives for this murder can be variously interpreted and this ambiguity can be (and has been) used to project various characterisations into the performance of the play. Either Neoptolemos can be seen as

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That Hamlet starts the conversation and Polonius only seems to be using the opportunity to gauge Hamlet's seeming slide into insanity hints at a possible misunderstanding.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

simply coming round to Odysseus' way of thinking, or the murder can be seen as a calculating move to regain his father's armour, whereby the regret shown afterwards compounds the cowardice that he has shown throughout the play. Or again, he could be interpreted as succumbing once more to the power structures to which he has demonstrated no *effective* opposition throughout the play. He steps in merely to protect his general. Müller himself has described the constellation of figures in the play thus:

These are the three attitudes to history, to politics: Odysseus is the pragmatic one and Neoptolemos the innocent. He kills because he is the innocent. Philoktet is beyond history because he is the victim of politics.<sup>61</sup>

Neoptolemos kills not just because of his pre-lapsarian state, but because of his wish to *remain* so, to retain a blemish-free life outside of the dirty hands demanded of a political existence.

The continuation of the conditions where the play started is confirmed by the tableau in the last scene. Neoptolemos has to carry Philoktet's corpse, relieving Odysseus, corroborating his position as the latter's servant. He now needs Odysseus to lie for *him*, to provide the alibi for the murder of Philoktet; his initial plan to murder Odysseus as well cannot be carried out because of his hatred of him:

Ein guter Schild ist die geborgte Stierhaut  
Ein bessrer im Genick der Tote, ganz  
In Eisen kleidet mich dein Haß.<sup>62</sup>

Odysseus will tell Neoptolemos the lie that he has to tell on return to Troy:

Vor Troja werd ich dir die Lüge sagen  
Mit der du deine Hände waschen konntest  
Hättst du mein Blut vergossen jetzt und hier.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Müller, *Walls*, in *Rotwelsch*, op. cit. p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

The confused temporality in the quote reflects the conflicting temporalities in the political on the one hand, on the other the final humiliation of Neoptolemos and his inexorable slide into the instrumental world of politics is confirmed by Odysseus promising to tell him the lie that he in effect had already acted out and which would have exonerated him from the blame of Odysseus' death. Neoptolemos has been acting the lie throughout the course of the play's events - his will to truth itself is dissimulation. Odysseus holds out therefore some hope that he will be able to instruct Neoptolemos in the ways not only of politics, the world of the *Macher* but also of the political, the condition of the always-already agonistic.

*Odysseus – so weit sind wir gegangen*

Müller bemoaned in a number of places the portrayal of Odysseus on the Western stage.

The director of the Munich production

konnte schwer begreifen, warum für mich Odysseus die wichtigste, die tragische Figur in dem Stück ist. Odysseus war für ihn einfach der Böse, der Stalinist.<sup>64</sup>

Müller, however, sees the character as a "Grenzfall", one who cannot simply be dismissed as a totalitarian henchman or a political realist. As mentioned above Odysseus belongs to the world of the *Macher*, his actions are directed purely towards one goal, that of victory over Troy, but done so with a glimmer of self-reflection which allows for the possibility of intervention into the conditions of instrumental thought. When he returns to the stage after the long self-indulgent monologues of Philoktet and Neoptolemos, the change of gear in the dialogue is striking. Odysseus has no time, literally, for the navel-gazing of the intellectual. He has a task to fulfil, and his principal

means of doing so is to accelerate the actions of Neoptolemos. The last lines of the play confirm this: "Geh schneller, daß nicht deine Wut verraucht./ In Troja ist dein Tisch gedeckt, geh schneller."<sup>65</sup> The degree, however, to which Odysseus is capable of reflection because of his position within the context of the political task is strengthened by his ability to reflect on his situation without allowing it to distract him from his task. He explains, for example, the impossibility of the complete deferral of meaning and thus of continually lying:

Kann sein, Odysseus ist so sehr ein Lügner  
Daß er sich glauben macht, er wär Odysseus  
Und lügt in dem auch und ist nicht er selber  
In Wahrheit, auch kein Lügner also und  
Wenn er dich Philoktet nennt, bist du der.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst subjectivity is a precarious disposition, prone to the duplicity of the signifying systems through which it is constructed, Odysseus calls upon Neoptolemos to "be himself", the son of Achilles in his encounter with Philoktet. That seemingly fixed subjectivity however, is one *that deceives*, simply by telling the truth; by stating "I am Neoptolemos", a deception is entered into. Odysseus thus provides the instructive comparison to Philoktet's plea to Neoptolemos that he should regain his name through purity of action. For Odysseus, any melancholic contemplation upon the lost self-presence of identity which would rectify this state is pointless mourning:

Bewein die Fische, wenn du Tränen hast  
Weil ihnen Flügel weigerte der Gott  
Oder das Schiff, weil es kein Blatt mehr treibt[.]<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Müller, *Krieg ohne Schlacht*, p. 189 - 90.

<sup>65</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit p. 42.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

In contrast to Neoptolemos' wish to live the blameless life of the immortal, Odysseus is relentlessly *diesseitig*: "Frag nach den Göttern nicht, mit Menschen lebst du/ Bei Göttern, wenn die Zeit ist, lern es anders."<sup>68</sup>

Odysseus, in a reference to the Prometheus myth (and clearly to the Sophocles version of the Philoktet myth) declares that there can be no *deus ex machina* which will relieve Neoptolemos of his obligations. The social conditions can only be changed from within.

Und Herakles erscheint dir nicht wie dem  
Den der beraubte Gott an sein Gebirg schlug  
[...]Nicht von der Art die nachwächst ist dein Fleisch  
Dich werden ganz vom Stein die Geier pflücken.<sup>69</sup>

The human body *decays*, unlike those of the immortals in myth, and hence there will always be a need for the burial that defines the culture from which Neoptolemos seeks to escape.

Odysseus' uncompromising focus on the particular goal allows, however, little freedom of movement. He makes clear that the situation that they are in is not of their own making but "the only way out is to go deeper in order to put it to an end."<sup>70</sup> To repeat once more a passage quoted earlier:

So weit sind wir gegangen in der Sache  
Im Netz aus eignem und aus fremdem Schritt  
Daß uns kein Weg herausgeht als der weitre.<sup>71</sup>

The characters in the play are thrown into their roles, the most important factor being the conditioning of the inter-subjective relations through the class nature of the society. Müller claims to have chosen mythic themes because they portray the move from clan to

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<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Müller, *Walls*, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, *op. cit.*, p. 34 - 35.

class; the model of the play is determined by "der Klassenstruktur der abgebildeten Gesellschaft [...] und von der Eigentumsform."<sup>72</sup> Odysseus is aware of the basis of his power ("Mit tausend Speeren ist mein Speer begabt") and also its origin ("Vom Zufall der Geburt"<sup>73</sup>). In this vital respect, he is unlike the Stalinist party apparatus that he has been interpreted as representing. While his wish to take a further step towards the goal is unrelenting and he is prepared to sacrifice anything to achieve it, he is also able to explain the conditions of this movement, and perhaps opens up the possibility for new conditions which will present the gap in the return of the same. He is thus all too aware of the costs of the journey and of its first steps:

Mich selber vorher fingen so die Fürsten  
In ihren Krieg [...]  
Rissen sie von den Brüsten meines Weibs  
Den Sohn und warfen den mir vor den Pflug  
Kaum hielt ich das Gespann [...]  
Eh mir das teure Blut den Boden düngte  
Den ich mit Salz verdarb, *mich zu behalten*.<sup>74</sup>

He had tried to avoid the necessity of the journey, of having to take the step forward, but by the next occasion on which an attempt is made to hold up history, this time by the Gods ("der Gott [...]hielt seinen Atem an, uns zu behalten"<sup>75</sup>), he is prepared to sacrifice Philoktet. Such a sacrifice of victims is prevented by not moving, but in an always already political environment other sacrifices will be being made in any case (in Troy, for example) and the only chance of changing the conditions so that the victims' suffering is not pointless is to move within history. History *is* mythic. Sacrifices *will* be made. The idea that one can alter this process by stopping its movement from outside is

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<sup>72</sup> Müller, *Drei Punkte*, in *Mauser*, p. 73.

<sup>73</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13 (my italics).

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

decadence itself<sup>76</sup> and inevitably the position of the privileged. The only hope is to continue history and seek the possibility of political action when the same exploitative conditions repeat themselves. The subject would thus involve him/herself in politics while remembering its catastrophic nature. The subject's (and especially the intellectual's) position must be to the margin, a simultaneous approach and withdrawal from politics, but an unremitting commitment to the political and the aporia of community. For the Heiner Müller of the GDR, this position of commitment to the political community had to be within a theatre of remembrance. Müller's comparative unproductivity after 1989 might therefore be seen as his insecurity as to the role of his theatre in the liberal capitalist economy.

The marginal about Odysseus, in this sense, is his reflection, not only mentally, but historically. Odysseus remembers, and can therefore draw attention to the repetition in the mythic which on the one hand forms the catastrophe of the never-changing conditions of history, but which also opens up the possibility of intervention. The murder of Philoktet is, of course, another barbarous repetition and Odysseus at the end of the play finally seems to have had enough. It would seem that certain things cannot be put to use. He resolves to give Philoktet a burial, keeping only his bow, in contrast to

Der Leiber, die den Grund begraben, der  
Sie zu begraben nicht mehr ausreicht, zu viele  
Getötet und zu schnell.<sup>77</sup>

But just as Odysseus returned to fetch and coerce Neoptolemos, so he now realises that he has returned to Lemnos to put Philoktet to use. The 'use-value' of Philoktet was his

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<sup>76</sup> Müller thus regards Faust's entreaty, "Verweile doch, du bist so schön", made from the ahistorical isolation of the intellectual, as the epitome of his decadence. This should, however, not be confused with Benjamin's notion that the task of the proletariat is to "put a brake" on progress. The latter achieve this cessation from a position *within* history.

<sup>77</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 40.

expulsion, but now, even if he can only be reintroduced to cultural demands through his death, what is left of him will be exploited. He returns to the instrumentality of what has come to be called history only through his corpse. Thus the demands of culture - a decent burial - are replaced on the one hand by the exigencies of a barbarous history, but on the other, the use of Philoktet's body to persuade his troops to fight represents, in his obtaining a culturally sanctioned burial, the interpretation of his death by the community. Odysseus' refusal to retreat from this history is less a confirmation of the hegemony than a particular historical stance that calls into question the conditions of possibility of 'history' as normally conceived. For Müller, this is an irrevocably political stance precisely because it opens up the aporia of judgement which is simultaneously a consequence and condition of community.

*Philoktet* might therefore be seen as a political piece not only as a work of art in the political community, but also thematically about the necessity of politics. The positing of a structure so uncompromisingly differentiated, of an unavoidable necessity of language and the social and the original agonistics configuring them made the play, like *Die Umsiedlerin*, unrepresentable in the GDR until a way could be found to recuperate it into the totalitarian tradition and heritage.

### ***The Reception in the GDR***

*Philoktet* was not performed in the GDR until 1977, some 13 years after its being written, even though some of the comments made by its author, not least in the notes from Müller to the director of the Munich production, seem calculated to prevent an unproblematic appropriation of the piece for anti-communist ends. As late as 1980, with

the appearance of *Der Auftrag*, Müller states "es ging mir auch darum, wieder einmal zu betonen, daß ich doch in der DDR wohne und finde, daß da was dran ist."<sup>78</sup> It would therefore be misleading to portray Müller as an outright opposition figure, at least in the sense of being anti-socialist. One should also, on the other hand, not be tempted to read interviews and statements at face value. The selective quoting of Müller by GDR critics or those sympathetic to the GDR regime often represses the dissimulation that was perhaps consciously built into his public pronouncements. The interview for Müller takes on the status of performance as much as the re-presentation of one of his texts. Wieghaus discusses the problem briefly<sup>79</sup> in the context of his thesis that *Philoktet* is a de-historicised piece and understands the following comment in an interview as confirmation of his thesis of an original intention on Müller's behalf.

Frage: Und da [Interview in *Sinn und Form*, 1966] habe ich mit Verwunderung gelesen, was sie über *Philoktet* sagen, weil ich das Stück ganz anders gelesen habe.

Müller: Ich auch.<sup>80</sup>

This interview then appeared in the West under the title "Hat Heiner Müller bisher gelogen?" and Wieghaus goes on to consider the possible reasons for such untruthfulness. It could be interpreted as acting "entgegen eigener Absicht" in that Müller allowed the play to be read as only relevant to those societies displaying antagonistic contradictions, in contrast to those contradictions in the GDR which could be *aufgehoben*. This in turn was designed "um sich vor weiteren administrativen Repression zu schützen" after the problems with *Die Umsiedlerin* and the attack on Müller at the 11th plenum of the SED's *Zentralkomitee* a few months previously. Whether this problem can best be understood in a discourse of truth and lying is

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<sup>78</sup> Müller, *Schreiben aus Lust an der Katastrophe. Gespräch mit Horst Laube*, in *Rotwelsch*, p. 181.

however open to debate. The dissimulation in *all* Müller's texts, in this case in the interviews and *Philoktet* alike, would seem to point to the particular problem of the slippage of meaning in the site of totalitarianism, not just on the level of individual agency but on the very level of the political itself. A political space in totalitarianism *is* dissimulation.

It is perhaps then in a society, such as the GDR, where the degree of transparency of civil society to the state was so great, that the nature of the heterogeneous political community can best be seen simply because its appearance was so rare. For Müller, one opportunity to allow such a community to appear was in the theatre. The dissimulation which can be witnessed in his interviews in the GDR represents an autonomous space, which also was to be found in the autonomy of theatrical discourse. This will prove to have important consequences for a historical and political aesthetics of remembrance which in turn becomes the art of making theatre *politically*.

*Philoktet* was for the authorities and theatrical institutions in the GDR simply not considered as relevant. The class structure presented in the piece was regarded as superseded, an interpretation readily confirmed from this viewpoint by the prologue and once more by an interview of Müller's:

Die antike Tragödie ist entstanden eigentlich mit der Klassengesellschaft, und da werden beschrieben die Konflikte bei der Entstehung der Klassengesellschaft. Da es jetzt um die Aufhebung der Klassengesellschaft geht, bietet sich an, diese Mythen neu zu sehen.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Wieghaus, *Zwischen Auftrag und Verrat* pp. 125-6.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>81</sup> Dramatiker Studio am 24-11-75 im Fernsehen der DDR: *Heiner Müller in Gespräch mit Rolf Rohmer und Horst Wandrey*.

A different interpretation of this statement and of what is at stake in the return of myth will be discussed below. There can be no doubt however that East German critics pounced eagerly on such comments in order to support their reading of the piece. The prologue was also seen as confirmation of their thesis:

Damen und Herren, aus der heutigen Zeit  
Führt unser Spiel in die Vergangenheit  
Als noch der Mensch des Menschen Todfeind war  
Das Schlachten gewöhnlich, das Leben eine Gefahr<sup>82</sup>

The vital temporal context that was picked up on in a number of ways, is that of the present and the past, of today and yesterday, of *Geschichte* and *Vorgeschichte*. The dominant interpretation of history in the GDR was that of the pre-revolutionary pre-history, enacted under exploitative social relations and its real post-revolutionary counterpart where the proletariat became for the first time the subject of history. The antagonistic contradictions of yesterday have been resolved to leave open a smoother path towards the already defined goal of communism. Any contradictions that do appear along the way are non-antagonistic in that they represent the stages of the dialectic of social progress which draw everything, every manifestation of social and economic life into its ambit. The GDR was thus seen as the transitory stage, embodying real existing socialism as an hors d'œuvre to full blown communism. Müller himself is interpreted as holding this view of the present "welche die der Übergangsgesellschaft DDR ist, und das heißt nicht mehr Vorgeschichte."<sup>83</sup> The GDR represented an "Epochenkollision" which would allow a conscious process of self-enlightenment against the background of the barbarity of German history before 1949. "Die Aufhebung 'eiszeitlicher'

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<sup>82</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> Iversen & Servos, *Sprengsätze*, in *Die Hamletmaschine. Heiner Müllers Endspiel*, p. 130.

Verhaltensmuster [...] bedarf eines historischen Lern- und Selbstaufklärungsprozesses der sozialistischen Gesellschaft"<sup>84</sup>

War and the social conditions that lead to the inevitability of war are regarded as being superseded. War is not a socialist event. As such *Philoktet* was interpreted as standing uneasily between affirmative socialist drama and the depiction of the result of capitalist social development which was now irrelevant east of the Wall. This involved regarding the material of the play as a historical precedent - something that could be understood from the prologue - rather than as myth.

The pre-history of myth, however, is strikingly different from a pre-revolutionary *Vorgeschichte*. The first results from an attempt to represent collective memory and narratives. The second claims a conscious mastery of the past whose form of thinking about that past is only possible with the project of demystification that characterised the Enlightenment whose goal was to produce a society where myth was no more, replaced instead by rational goal-directed thought. In the GDR however, or at least in the reception of certain plays dealing with mythical characters and events, the myth as defined above is swallowed up by myth as pre-revolutionary pre-history. Myth is not treated *as* myth but rather as events in history displaying 'mythic' elements; that is those elements which have been surpassed by socialist society. Thus one critic describes the

Spannungsraum zwischen dem Mythischen, einem der menschlichen Bewußtheit weitgehend entzogenen Bereich, und dem historischen Subjekt, das mit seiner Bewußtheit die Geschichte der menschlichen Gesellschaft immer deutlicher bestimmt.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>85</sup> Bernhardt, Rüdiger. *Die 'antike' und die 'literarische' Bearbeitung. Antikerezeption im Werk Heiner Müllers* in Schied, J., (ed.) Zum Drama in der DDR: Heiner Müller & Peter Hacks, p. 49.

The further result of this will be an inability to recognise the return of myth in both senses - either as 'mythic' violence and repression or as the employment of specific narratives to represent historical processes. To repeat, *the repression of myth under the sign of history disallows the possibility of dealing with the return of myth*. It is precisely this situation which Müller seems to want to tackle, not least in the relationship of the subject to those ontological questions which often form the backbone of myth, in particular the attitude of the subject to death. The difference of Müller from Homer lies in the original *politicisation* of these ontological questions.

As befits the thorough-going rationalist historiography in the GDR, the relationship of the present to the past is one of rational distance, reflected also in the attitude of theatrical spectator to the historical material. This explains the term *Vorgeschichte*, that is, something that has been left behind, which is perceptible and representable. Müller, at least in GDR or sympathetic Western literature on the subject, is seen as employing such a model:

Diese Absichten Müllers zielen auf das Verständlichmachen des historischen Gesamtprozesses von der Herausbildung der Klassengesellschaft bis zur Aufhebung der Klassengesellschaft.<sup>86</sup>

This is only possible in drama if the "Distanz zwischen Zuschauer und Figuren rational zu erfassen [vermag]".<sup>87</sup> Müller is seen thereby as seeking "die Entwicklung des Sozialismus [zu] beschleunigen durch die beharrliche Auseinandersetzung mit der Vorgeschichte."<sup>88</sup>

*Philoktet* appeared at the same time as a debate was developing in the GDR about the nature of the relationship to the cultural heritage, *das Erbe* of socialist society.

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<sup>86</sup> Bernhardt, Rüdiger. *Antikerezeption im Werk Heiner Müllers*, *Weimarer Beiträge* 3, 1976, p. 88.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 61.

Honecker himself defined the importance of the appropriation of this heritage: "Die Aneignung der Schätze [...] dient der Entwicklung allseitig gebildeter und überzeugter Erbauer des Sozialismus."<sup>89</sup> The establishment of a socialist character further serves to bring about the completion of history:

Die massenhafte Aneignung des sozialistischen Erbes erscheint so als ein unentbehrliches Mittel zur Lösung jener ungleich schwierigeren und wesentlicheren Aufgaben, die der Arbeiterklasse und ihrem Vortrupp nach der Eroberung der Macht bis zum Aufbau bzw. der Vollendung des Kommunismus erwachsen.<sup>90</sup>

This act of appropriation is intended to establish firm lines of tradition between the present and the past, while recognising at the same time that what is past in the GDR is still present in the West, that is, exploitative social relations. The mention of the proletariat's avant-garde points toward what is at stake in the handing down of the society's heritage. It is centrally controlled, a revolutionary tradition which leads to that transparency of civil society to the state which can produce "gesellschaftliche Festigkeit", a phrase of Marx's which is taken to be "ein Element von Regel und Ordnung, das zwingend nötig ist, um gesellschaftliche Entwicklung von Zufälligkeit und Willkür zu befreien."<sup>91</sup>

The problem is therefore how any centrally controlled narrative can avoid taking on a mythic character, or rather what is more important is that the mythic explanatory nature of this narrative becomes mythic in the second sense outlined above - myth refuses to regard itself as myth, because its central tenet in the GDR was that it has superseded the mythic forms of social exploitation. Myth's overcoming of itself is

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<sup>89</sup> Honecker, Erich. *Bericht des Politbüros an die 13 Tagung des ZK der SED*, Berlin, 1974, p. 102, quoted in Koch, Hans. *Aktuelle Fragen der Aneignung des Erbes*, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 3, 1976, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup> Klein, Alfred. *Tradition und Gegenwart. Zur Aktualität des sozialistischen Literatur und Kunsterbes*, *Weimarer Beiträge*, 3, 1976, p. 28.

<sup>91</sup> Koch, *Aktuelle Fragen...*, op. cit., p. 16

inextricably tied up with the overcoming of the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) in the movement of both toward a futural telos. The past is appropriated in the same action as myth attempts to supersede itself, through the discovery of objective laws of history proceeding inexorably toward communism.

Interestingly enough it was precisely the objectivity of this process that allowed GDR scholars to reject such charges of Party control.

Unlehrbar werden freilich diejenigen bleiben, denen die ihnen verpaßte antikommunistische Brille nicht einmal das Schielen nach wissenschaftlicher Objektivität erlaubt und die demzufolge in der künstlerischen Parteinahme für den Sozialismus eh und je nur die Befolgung von Partei und Staatsbefehlen sehen.<sup>92</sup>

Both Müller's texts and those of classical myth were seen as a heritage, part of a revolutionary tradition of completion. Tradition itself is seen in these GDR theoretical texts as a movement of structural growth and progress. Müller's own texts were of course seen as confirming also this idea. His declaration that his work consists of "einsame Stücke, die auf Geschichte warten"<sup>93</sup> is taken to mean that they are waiting to be appropriated into the cultural heritage. Müller is seen as hoping "daß das Zusammenspiel von Theater und gesellschaftlicher Entwicklung irgendwann einmal - und nicht zu spät - nicht mehr Fragment bleibt, sondern sich vollendet."<sup>94</sup>

This waiting for history involves the appropriation of the barbaric pre-history which is only of use in that it is superseded. Müller is thus considered, along with GDR society as a whole, as standing at a point exterior to this history, the only point from where lessons from history can be drawn. "Die Bedingung der Möglichkeit des Lernens

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<sup>92</sup> Klein, *Tradition und Gegenwart*, op. cit., p. 34

<sup>93</sup> Müller, *Verabschiedung des Lehrstück*, in *Mauser*, p. 85.

<sup>94</sup> Iversen & Servos, *Sprengsätze*, op. cit., p. 132.

[...] ist mit der realen Distanz zur kapitalistischen Gesellschaft geglückt."<sup>95</sup> In other words, it is only when a new stage in the historical dialectic has been reached, where history reveals itself as itself as free from myth, that one has the necessary distance to learn from (mythical) history. But the model of history represented in *Philoktet* is one of an antagonistic, mythic, social formation that was regarded as superseded in the GDR thus making the play largely irrelevant to the east of the wall. Thus the learning from a history that has been left behind is purely a process of self-justification of the status quo, a deadening of raw political nerve ends, a history of progress disqualifying change.

Müller aims to break through this intellectual stagnation by politicising his theatre. One way of regarding these efforts would be to suggest that he attempts to politicise the sign in the tradition of earlier 20th century avant-garde theory:

[T]he community [...] is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result differently orientated accents intersect in the every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of class struggle.<sup>96</sup>

This would be to underestimate what is at stake in Müller's plays, however. What becomes clear time and time again in his work is not simply the struggle for linguistic hegemony which will unleash the semiotic dictatorship of the proletariat but rather the necessary dissimulation and excess in language and communal practices whose repression would lead to the repression of the political itself. The community is not so homogenous that it can ever use the "same set of signs", but rather is that heterogeneous collection whose difference from itself allows the very possibility of community. This is why Müller does not simply write 'symbolic' drama or parables. It should perhaps instead be suggested that he engages in *allegorical* representation, that for example

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 131.

*Philoktet* can be interpreted as an allegory for Stalinism, as it always has been outside of the GDR. This would entail, however, examining what precisely is involved in the use of allegory by Müller, and even more pertinently, in the return of myth as allegory.

Interestingly, Müller's adaptation of the Sophocles piece was itself a return of issues that had concerned him for some time:

Ich hatte das Stück von Sophokles schon in Sachsen gelesen, Ende der 40er Jahre. Es hatte mich seitdem immer beschäftigt. Die Erfahrungen, die gerade hinter mir lagen, haben mir den Stoff ganz anders aktuell gemacht.<sup>97</sup>

Müller had just been expelled from the *Deutscher Schriftstellerverband* and had undergone a gruelling process of censorship and self-criticism at the hands of the cultural authorities.<sup>98</sup> It was the very presence and possibility of a return to 'pre-history', witnessed by the very events surrounding Müller himself, which made *Philoktet* such a problematic play. It is the informative presence of mythic pre-history in the play which sheds light on the possibility of the return of mythic qualities in the GDR itself, a state which has supposedly overcome this exploitative stage in history. This informative nature is not simply because of the content of the mythic events that are shown, but in the very act of showing them, in their *return*. This return is the appearance of allegory, linking the latter inextricably to a particular historical and temporal philosophy which seeks to politicise not only theatre and the GDR community but history and temporality itself. The return of myth as allegory is 'shot through' with history itself, not in a self-sufficient present or a 'real' history beyond the caesura of a revolution, but with a history that is constituted by that radical sense of finitude which conditions allegory itself.

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<sup>96</sup> Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 23.

<sup>97</sup> Müller, *Krieg ohne Schacht*, p. 188.

<sup>98</sup> See discussion in Chapter Two.

### *Allegory*

Throughout the neo-classicist epoch and after, allegory had been dismissed as the inferior mode of poetic expression, secondary to the presumed essence of poetry, the symbol. Goethe, in his now canonical definition defined allegory as that where the poet "zum Allgemeinen das Besondere sucht [...], wo das Besondere nur als Beispiel, als Exempel des Allgemeinen gilt,"<sup>99</sup> in contrast to the symbol where the general is seen in the particular. Benjamin also discusses Schopenhauer's description of allegory as starting from the concept and working out, so that "ein Kunstwerk absichtlich und eingeständlich zum Ausdruck eines Begriffes bestimmt."<sup>100</sup> Benjamin's criticism of these definitions is not so much drawn from their hierarchy of symbol and allegory in the structure of their argumentation but rather with the "logizistische[n] Grundzug der Darstellung"<sup>101</sup> of that argument which accepts the opposition of the expression of the idea on the one hand and of the concept on the other. Allegory is therefore imprisoned in a structure that sees it as designation, where it can only be regarded as inferior, instead of a mode of expression in its own right.

The essential difference for Benjamin between symbol and allegory is established in a discussion of Friedrich Kreuzer's *Mythologie* where their determining feature is seen to be a temporal one.

Es ist daher auch der Unterschied beider Arten in das Momentane zu setzen, dessen die Allegorie ermangelt...Dort [im Symbol] ist momentane Totalität; hier ist Fortschritt in einer Reihe von Momenten.<sup>102</sup>

Benjamin quotes Joseph von Görres, who in a satisfyingly no-nonsense way states:

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<sup>99</sup> in Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, Gesammelte Schriften, I, 1, p. 338.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 341.

Wir können uns vollkommen begnügen mit der Erklärung, die das Eine [das Symbol] als in sich beschlossenes, gedrungenes, stetig in sich beharrendes Zeichen der Ideen nimmt, diese aber [die Allegorie] als ein successiv fortschreitendes, mit der Zeit selbst in Fluß gekommenes dramatisch bewegliches, strömendes Abbild derselben anerkennt.<sup>103</sup>

The informative contrast is between the world of "Berg- und Pflanzennatur"<sup>104</sup> and the course of human history. The essential difference can now be seen: allegory employs a narrative temporality, one of the passing of events, their happening and successive ruination. Time is the decisive category, not the differentiation of idea and concept. Just as in the narrative one looks back to tell the story, so, in the case of the Baroque, "[die...] weltliche[n] Exposition der Geschichte als Leidensgeschichte der Welt, [... die] Stationen ihres Verfalls"<sup>105</sup> was regarded in "retrospective contemplation".<sup>106</sup> Allegory is only possible in an epoch of decay, that is, where in some way a consciousness of this decay is present. This was clearly the case in the Baroque in its ruminations on the inescapability of ruination and disintegration, and Benjamin argues for a similar understanding of commodity culture whose modernist dynamic inevitably produces the superfluous, out-of-date debris of industrialism. But how can such a process of decay be applied to the GDR, a state whose ideology, as argued throughout this thesis, was one of inexorable progress? In order to discover the answer to this, we will have to investigate more closely the argument of Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*.<sup>107</sup>

Benjamin is first of all concerned to differentiate between *Trauerspiel* and tragedy, the latter being rooted in myth and where the hero is subject to a chain of

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p. 343.

<sup>106</sup> Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, p. 168.

<sup>107</sup> The translation of *Trauerspiel* has always caused some difficulties - one more recent suggestion has been to render it as 'mourning play' which has the advantage of distinguishing it from tragedy, just as Benjamin does himself.

events that forces or enables him to act out a suitably heroic sacrifice. The *Trauerspiel* on the other hand, not only in its subject matter of contemporary tyrants and martyrs, but in its implicit temporal attitude to them, is grounded in history and it is this which will make the allegorical attitude of the Baroque ripe for redemption in the modern era. The events depicted on the stage are seen as worldly and devalued.

Wo das Mittelalter die Hinfälligkeit des Weltgeschehens und die Vergänglichkeit der Kreatur als Stationen des Heilwegs zur Schau stellt, vergräbt das deutsche Trauerspiel sich ganz in die Trostlosigkeit der irdischen Verfassung. Kennt es eine Erlösung, so liegt sie mehr in die Tiefe dieser Verhängnisse selbst als im Vollzuge eines göttlichen Heilsplans.<sup>108</sup>

There was no virtue to be had or found on earth, and this was reflected in the constitution of the dramatic characters whose only response to the historical responsibility thrust upon them by the *Weltanschauung* that they inhabit is to achieve martyrdom. This will turn out to be Benjamin's main line of critique as regards the potential of the allegorical mode which is sold short by the Baroque's retreat into metaphysics.

The Lutheran standpoint of the major Baroque German dramatists meant that the emphasis on faith through grace, and the rejection of the importance of 'good works' produced a sense of civic duty in the populace but in the socially important figures who were portrayed in the *Trauerspiel* the result was more likely to be melancholy. Whilst the Calvinist retreated into the comparative comfort of pre-destination, the Lutheran had to come to terms with the literal meaninglessness of human actions since salvation was to be achieved through faith and grace alone and one could not simply point out the charitable and successful as those pre-destined to be saved. Hence the origin in an upright way of living as a proof of faith is not in itself enough to guarantee salvation.

Benjamin differentiates, however, between the ordinary citizen and those who had perhaps the time for the luxury of introspection: "Denn die tiefer Schürfenden sahen sich in das Dasein als in ein Trümmerfeld halber, unechter Handlungen hineingestellt"<sup>109</sup> It was this which produced a state of mourning from which the *Trauerspiel* takes its name:

Trauer ist die Gesinnung, in der das Gefühl die entleerte Welt maskenhaft neubelebt, um ein rätselhaftes Genügen an ihrem Anblick zu haben. [...] Die Theorie der Trauer [...] ist demnach nur in der Beschreibung jener Welt, die unterm Blick des Melancholischen sich aufzut, zu entrollen.<sup>110</sup>

It is also here that the laws which concern the *Trauerspiel* are to be found:

Indem man dies Symptom der Depersonalisation als schweren Grad des Traurigseins erfaßte, trat der Begriff von dieser pathologischen Verfassung, in welcher jedes unscheinbarste Ding, weil die natürliche und schaffende Beziehung zu ihm fehlt, als Chiffer einer rätselhaften Weisheit auftritt, in einen unvergleichlich fruchtbaren Zusammenhang.<sup>111</sup>

The other figure most often represented in the dramas, the intriguer, was seen not only as too ensnared in the futility of politics, but thereby of a different class:

Die eitle Geschäftigkeit des Intriganten galt als das würdelose Gegenbild der leidenschaftlichen Kontemplation, der einzig und allein die Gabe zugebilligt wurde, den Hochgestellten der satanischen Verstrickung der Geschichte, in welcher das Barock nur Politik sah, zu entbinden.<sup>112</sup>

History itself is thus a *Trauerspiel*. It is not the endless cycle of the seasons which determines the temporal attitude but "das unerbittliche Abrollen jedes Lebens zum Tode."<sup>113</sup> Allegory is thus based on the finitude of the human subject or the recognition of death as the founding event of community.

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<sup>108</sup> Benjamin, op. cit, p. 260.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*, p. 319. Dürer's engraving *Melancholia* is seen as a precursor to the Baroque in this respect.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, p. 320.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, p. 329.

It was in transitory nature itself that the allegory for human history was seen "not as a divine plan or chain of events on a 'road to salvation' but as death ruin and catastrophe."<sup>114</sup> It was in the essence of nature itself, as forsaken since the Fall, that it had to be read emblematically, interpreted without any sure ground. Interpretation itself was thus a constant reminder of the guilt of the Fall, that separated humans from nature but in so doing gave them the power to name. Nature is brought down with humankind. Nature was then over-burdened with a multitude of meanings, the meaning of nature itself came to be seen as arbitrary, settled only by a shift to the order of spirit. This occurred in place of a movement to that realm where the paradoxes of meaning could have been played out for Benjamin - in the arena of politics. As *Philoktet* shows, this would be achieved by providing, through constant re-interpretation and judgement, the possibility of the future. The future as such is only guaranteed by the political nature of the present, whose character is achieved by the judgement and interpretation of death and the remembrance of the victims of the political community.

In the profane world of the allegorist, meaning could be substituted for meaning in an endless cycle that only served to emphasise the lack of importance of the detail of those meanings because they were in any case condemned to decay into each other. It was because of this that the baroque allegorists attempted to escape the profanity of the written word and moved toward the visual to approach the sacred, even if that in turn involved the worldly act of interpretation again. Any meaning that came out of this process was thus a reminder of the process of decay and was liable to provoke mournful contemplation once more. There was no interpretative telos to be reached and so allegorical fragments could simply be piled up on one another, with no idea of direction.

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<sup>114</sup> Buck-Morss, op. cit., p. 174.

In the transient characters presented on the stage of the *Trauerspiel* the essence of nature was displaced on human history:

Die allegorische Physiognomie der Natur-Geschichte, die auf der Bühne durch das Trauerspiel gestellt wird, ist wirklich gegenwärtig als Ruine. Mit ihr hat sinnlich die Geschichte in den Schauplatz sich verzogen. Und zwar prägt, so gestaltet, die Geschichte nicht als Prozeß eines ewigen Lebens, vielmehr als Vorgang unaufhaltsamen Verfalls sich aus.<sup>115</sup>

There is therefore no hope of gathering the past up into the present in an eschatological moment, the past as ruin ruins the present and shows its hopes of enacting salvation to be earthly vanity when the only hope of salvation is death. "[Der Tod] ist nicht Strafe sondern Sühne, ein Ausdruck der Verfallenheit des verschuldeten Lebens an das Gesetz des natürlichen."<sup>116</sup> In tragedy death "marks a moment of fulfilment; all the events of a life gather significance from the anticipation of this moment"<sup>117</sup>; death in the tragic schema is understood as *individual* destiny, whereas in the *Trauerspiel* it is experienced more as a communal future. Those who die lose their "benannte Individualität und nicht die Lebenskraft der Rolle [...]. Ungemindert lebt sie in der Geisterwelt auf."<sup>118</sup> As was discussed in Chapter One, it is crucial to recognise this difference between the subject who grasps his death 'authentically' and individually in tragedy and the character who has the possibility of what I shall call for the moment a politicised relation to death, even if this possibility is not fulfilled in the Baroque, as argued below. This will inform the re-reading of *Philoktet* to follow which hopes to point toward the allegorical portrayal of the relation to death in Müller, one which will not sublimate its problems and paradoxes into the realm of spirit.

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<sup>115</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op. cit., p. 353.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>117</sup> Caygill, Howard, "Benjamin, Heidegger and Tradition" in Benjamin (ed.) *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy...* pp. 1-31

<sup>118</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op. cit., p. 314-5.

It is here precisely that Benjamin's critique of Baroque allegory becomes clear. He wishes not to repeat the practice of the German *Trauerspiel* but the practice of allegory itself, emphasising the fragmentary view of a world where the dominant temporal plane in the narrative behind the allegorical object is the process of decay rather than progress. *Allegory possesses a temporality of 'eternal passing', whereas the symbol captures the moment of 'fleeting eternity'*.<sup>119</sup> The organic flowing quality of nature is frozen (and betrayed) in the instant of the symbol, whereas the narrative of degeneration is expressed in allegory. This idea of the forsakenness of nature dominated the Baroque poets' thinking and produced the state of melancholy referred to earlier. Nothing could be done on this earth to alleviate this state of affairs and thus political action, as represented by the scheming courtier, was regarded as nothing more than vain intrigue. As Buck-Morss expresses it:

...this follows necessarily from the melancholic's politics of contemplation rather than intervention - allegory deserts both history and nature and (like the whole tradition of idealist philosophy that comes after it) takes refuge in the spirit.<sup>120</sup>

The determining shift is from the arbitrary and ever-displaced subjectivity of allegory to the pure I of the spirit. The decentered subjectivity of allegory, sublimated into politically solipsistic idealism, is exemplified by the relationship to death portrayed in the *Trauerspiel*.

The allegorical way of seeing the world views any object as an allegory for the natural state of things, that is, as the inevitable process of decay. The reaction to this can be to retreat into melancholic contemplation or to base a political practice upon this allegorical insight. Politics needs to be based first and foremost on the notion of decay

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<sup>119</sup> c.f. Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing*, op. cit. p 19 and 166-8.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, p. 175.

and ruin. "The implacable progression of every life towards death" is a given, but any relationship towards that death, however unrepresentable that death is, which is homogenised, that denies the antagonistic, differentiated nature of that relationship, robs the particular subject of its own relation and attitude to its own death. The subject is furthermore robbed of its relation to the one end of a particular process of decay by denying him/her the opportunity to interpret and judge the death of others. It is here that allegory can become subject once more to myth.

Soviel Bedeutung, soviel Todverfallenheit, weil am tiefsten der Tod die zackige Demarkationslinie zwischen Physis und Bedeutung eingräbt. Ist aber die Natur von jeher todverfallen, so ist sie auch allegorisch von jeher. Bedeutung und Tod sind so gezeitigt in historischer Entfaltung wie sie im gnadenlosen Sündenstand der Kreatur als Keime enge ineinandergreifen.<sup>121</sup>

This is evidently a very opaque passage. One could interpret it in the following way, however. The significance of events is lessened in the theft of the possibility of political action; the contemplative melancholic would deny that any political deed had any significance. Thus the subject who regards herself as committing politically significant acts grasps more fully the nature of her/his existence is one of decay, in other words that it is 'subject to death'. If death is just one more event amongst others in one's own existence, the decaying nature of one's earthly life is affirmed. Just as the existent is subject to death so it is caught up in the allegorical world of nature, where the latter can be forever differently interpreted, where subjectivity is constantly displaced onto a shifting ground of meaning. In fact it is precisely the character of nature's subjection to death which is the condition for this allegorical state. It is in "historischer Entfaltung" (note not historical progress) that the allegorical nature of existence, producing

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<sup>121</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op.cit., p. 343.

antagonistic political action which exemplifies the relationship of decay towards death is most fruitfully embodied.

There is also a vast difference between the relation to death being theorised here and that of the tragic hero who is often described as possessing an 'authentic' attitude to death.<sup>122</sup> In the tragic death the last moment of life that is death is the culmination of the hero's actions. His life is rounded off, in order to give it its final meaning. The tragic death seeks to deny the "die zackige Demarkationslinie," the limit, between death and meaning. The 'political' death recognises on the other hand that one's own death is yet another allegory for the Other. It is only other political agents who can interpret one's life at the moment of one's death, and as an allegory it can and will be interpreted differently. The meaning of a death is only judged by a community, it is gauged in such practices as burial and cremation, that is, in those events which define civilisation as such, as was shown in *Philoktet*.

If then the subject is robbed of a meaningful relation to death, that is, if the other subjects are robbed of the allegorical nature of the former's death in the process of homogenisation of these relations, then how much more so is this the case in a context of implacable progress. The subject's death in Marxist-Leninism, at least as practised in the GDR, is *symbolic*, a fleeting moment of 'eternity' of the natural pre-determined progression towards the communist telos. In Müller such deaths are not to be found - the community's heterogeneous interpretation of them always comes to the forefront, most potently in the understanding of the theatrical audience of the events on the stage. It would therefore be senseless for Müller to provide simply a different slant to events to that of the state, be it a more Westernised or more radical in the tradition of early 20th

century German socialist movements, for this would undermine the allegorical nature of his theatre. When *Philoktet* is therefore described as an allegory of Stalinism, there is far more at stake than simply understanding Odysseus as party apparatchik, or *Philoktet* as the marginalised Müller himself. The allegorical status of the play is more importantly the attempt at the establishment of a political discourse within a particular understanding of the environment as not being characterised by irrevocable progress.

#### *Allegory in the GDR*

How though can one understand the GDR as undergoing decay and how is this to be related directly to the use of allegory? Firstly, in the difference of teleological thinking and the conditions of *real existierende Sozialismus* one can witness the myth of progress in its stations of decline. Clearly one can imagine the situation in the GDR where the propaganda declaring the onward and upward drive to communism rang hollow in the ears of those in the Marzahn *Wohngebiet*. Stasis, in comparison to the supposed progress, is experienced as decline.

There are, however, a number of other ways in which this problem can be understood - as the decay that is inherent in any law making process, not least where that decay and the violence that is involved in this process is denied; or as myth's loss of its position of hegemony, where its power to interpret the environment declines, leaving the way open for allegory, provoking in turn either political action or melancholic contemplation. Such a recurrence of allegory leads to an epistemological guilt; the signifying and theorising powers of the subject always leave an excess that cannot be

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<sup>122</sup> See also discussion in Chapter One.

represented, unlike in the realist epistemological certainty of Marxist-Leninism. One can see these analogies in the Baroque and GDR environments in the following:

Da dergestalt nicht Rebellion noch Unterwerfung religiös vollziehbar war, richtete sich die gesammelte Kraft der Epoche auf eine gänzliche Umwälzung des Lebensgestaltes unter orthodoxer Wahrung der kirchlichen Formen. Das mußte dahin führen, den eigentlichen, unmittelbaren Ausdruck den Menschen allerwege zu verlegen.<sup>123</sup>

This was true for certainly the majority of the population in the GDR. Later Benjamin goes on to add:

Ihr geschichtsphilosophisches Ideal war die Akme: ein goldenes Zeitalter des Friedens und der Künste, dem alle apokalyptischen Züge fremd sind, verfaßt und in aeternum garantiert durchs Schwert der Kirche.<sup>124</sup>

The vital difference between the Baroque and the GDR is to be found, however, in the role of art and aesthetic judgement. Indeed, it can be argued that it only makes sense to speak of the latter after the separating of the spheres of truth, goodness and beauty that was part of the Enlightenment project. The decay can only be sensed at the margin of instrumental thought, which would otherwise be able to rationalise such degeneration, relative or not, as the means to the goal. The allegorising of decline is possible only in those spheres which transgress instrumental thought, which in other words, show their autonomy from the ideas of progress that dominate the extra-theatrical world. The Baroque *Trauerspiel*, holding a ideologically dependent position, reflected the accepted notions of decline and decay that were part and parcel of the philosophy of the period. The relation of any allegorical work of art in the GDR to its environment, on the other hand, was determined by the decay of interpretation and judgement and on the finite nature of human existence and the community itself. The latter's essence was not to be

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<sup>123</sup> Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, op.cit., p. 258.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p. 259.

found in a goal in the future but simply in the re-interpretation and remembrance of the deaths of others, treating these deaths as allegorical. It was only in the aesthetic realm, within the theatre, that Müller found a space to present and re-present allegory and thus decay. Thus while the act of declaring the nature of society to be one of decay was in itself a political one (in that it reacted against the ideology of progress), the political nature of Müller's theatre was in its very allegorical status. It provided an experience in allegory of the political community and could do so only by remaining in the theatre.

Müller's return to allegory is thus a reaction to the relative decay in human powers as the Utopia fails to be implemented, but it represents also the attempt to establish a practice of writing community in the performance of the theatrical work of art. History stays the same, the conditions are repeated in this catastrophic return of the same, where history is presented ever more emblematically. Just as interpretation after interpretation was piled up on nature in the Baroque, so as history fails to progress as promised it cannot avoid being seen as ever more enigmatic, and thus as a rich ground for allegory. For Müller, an opportunity is provided by the catastrophic return of the same but *only* as a marginal to instrumental thought, in other words in aesthetic practices such as theatre. It makes that remembrance and re-interpretation possible out of which the political community emerges. The repetition takes the form of remembrance, re-interpretation becomes allegory.

Both the degeneration of nature and of history in their ever more finite emblematic appearance produce the possibility of allegory. This in turn allows melancholic contemplation or political action. What happened in the Baroque and for the most part in the GDR, however, was the homogenisation of the relation to death central to any experience of decay and finitude which suppressed the always and already

antagonistic temporalities toward death. Just as instrumental thought must not be in and of itself deleterious but only if gathered together under the sign of one futural telos, so must for Müller the heterogeneity of the temporalities of relations to deaths be upheld in order to resist homogenous instrumental thought. It is this antagonistic difference which in turn allows the allegorical interpretation of the Other's death by the community and which might open up the possibility of a heterogeneous rationality.

In this schema, each citizen must have a relationship to her/his own death through the death of the other. This relation includes acting as a political agent, that is as an agent who is characterised first and foremost through the difference to other agents. The teleologies inherent in such action must be disseminated in such a way so that they cannot be brought under one homogenous goal, or amounting to much the same thing, so that the multitude of teleologies are opaque to the interests of the state, a dominant ideology, or by extension the power of commodity fetishism. Burial or funeral rites are important in this regard in that they are a recognition of the importance of the surviving subjects' own relationship to the death of the other. Burial defines community in that it is an interpretation of the Other's death. The degree to which this death of the Other can be interpreted allegorically, rather than as a symbol of each subject's identical relation to death, demonstrates the degree of acceptance of original antagonism in the political make up of that community. In the tragic, symbolic, 'apolitical' death its meaning can be passed on and handed down in an unproblematic understanding of tradition. Where the death is interpreted allegorically, however, the "meaning changes according to the circumstances of its transmission and reception".<sup>125</sup> There can be therefore little talk of an 'authentic' death in the *Trauerspiel*, contemporary allegorical theatre or the political

community, where the past is gathered up into the present in a final definition (unless authenticity is rethought as the recognition of radically heterogeneous relationship to death). The same relation to death is repeated at the behest of catastrophe; the mass burial of war is its sign.

So will ich säumen, bis der letzte Grieche  
Auf Leichenbergen, griechischen, gehäuft  
Auf was eine Stadt war.<sup>125</sup>

Would it thus be justified to regard *Philoktet*, in this instance, as a re-worked form of *Trauerspiel*? The myth on which *Philoktet* is based has failed in its task of offering a final interpretation of the world and thus in repetition can only return as allegory. Myth itself is interpreted over and over again. Myth itself is thus also subject to the process of ruination that pervades or rather *determines* history, for in its process of being handed down to be re-interpreted it must betray itself. It must therefore inevitably return as allegory if it is to return at all and thereby provides its own curative. "Es ist in der Allegorie das Antidoton gegen den Mythos zu zeigen."<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, as return, as an event whose possibility lies in the finite nature of time, allegory is irrevocably tied to history:

The *Trauerspiel* is not rooted in myth but history. Historicity, with every implication of political-social texture and reference, generates both content and style. Feeling himself dragged towards the abyss of damnation [...] the baroque dramatist [...] clings fervently to the world.<sup>128</sup>

There is, however, an important difference in the allegory being employed by Müller and that of the *Trauerspiel* dramatists. In the latter, it is an effect of the authorial intention and is ultimately completely arbitrary - the lack of a directed meaning is the

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<sup>125</sup> Cavgill, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> Müller, *Philoktet*, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>127</sup> Benjamin, *Zentralpark*, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 677

<sup>128</sup> Steiner, George, *Introduction to Benjamin, Origin of German Tragic Drama* (translation), p. 16.

result of the metaphysics of contemplation discussed earlier. In Müller, however, in the return of allegory as political, the effects of the piece are designed to produce precisely this political reaction - not one meaning (that of meaninglessness), but the establishment of an antagonistic, political environment with a particular history. This political environment thus forms the centre of the subject matter of the play, producing a focussed allegory whose starting point is not simply a state of ruination which can only produce a humour of melancholy, but a particular manifestation of this process of decay which demands a political response. Starting with *Philoktet*, however, this response is not to be seen as the result of a representation of the world outside on the stage in the theatre. Instead the experience of allegory begins to display its theatricality, one might say its very allegorical nature *as art*. As a practice autonomous from society's other concerns, allegory in Müller is neither woefully contemplative nor wildly voluntaristic; it reflects instead how the latent narrative of degeneration is displaced and condensed into a manifest politically structured experience within the theatre.

There is also a difference in the treatment of that which we can *name* myth, in other words those narratives whose epoch of explanatory power has passed, and of those mythic structures whose potency resides in its still being hidden. One such example would be the myth of progress, which has reached a hegemonic position attaining the status of 'common sense'.<sup>129</sup> The return of myth as allegory serves as an antidote for those mythic structures, which are unpolitical *par excellence*. Allegory seeks to explode the mythic narratives of hegemony simply by the allegorising of the particular political environment, defining it as based on the principle of ruination that is history. The mythic discourse that upholds the idea of progress is that of heritage and tradition. The

use of allegory explodes that precondition for the possibility of theorising any 'tradition of progress' in Western society. This is what I am arguing that Müller is gesturing towards in his comments in an interview in *Sinn und Form*. "Mein Interesse an der Wiederkehr des Gleichen ist ein Interesse an der Sprengung der Kontinuums, auch an Literatur als Sprengsatz und Potential von Revolution."<sup>130</sup>

When the same returns it allows a fissure to be opened, betraying itself in passing itself down. Thus when myth or the theatrical tradition return in Müller (they are, of course, very often the same thing), they return as allegorical experience in the attempt to explode the ideology of progress. Naturally this would be resisted by an idea or tradition that sees itself as unchanging over time, such as the notion of progress. It is a characteristic of the mythic that it sees itself as not subject to decay, its explanatory and legitimising powers being unaffected by the course of history. Benjamin wants to argue, however,<sup>131</sup> that there is no authentic relation to tradition within tradition. Tradition must necessarily destroy itself in handing itself down. Tradition is inhabited not only by its past but also by its fate in the future in becoming past. For the past, that was for itself the tradition in the present, to be handed down to what is now the present, it must destroy itself precisely in becoming past. This destruction is unavoidable, for without it it would not be possible to transmit anything over time. The consequence is that each present must face up to its destiny of becoming ruined, of being transformed into past. Thus community, which is based squarely on the handing down of tradition,

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<sup>129</sup> c.f. Gramsci, Antonio, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p. 323-33.

<sup>130</sup> *Gespräch mit Ulrich Dietzel*, Sinn und Form, 37,2 (1985), p. 210. Müller comments once again in a later interview (*Jetzt sind eher die infernalischen Aspekte bei Benjamin wichtig, Aber ein Sturm weht von Paradise her: Texte zu Walter Benjamin*) "Dieses Gespräch war zum Teil eine taktische Sache.", p. 354.

<sup>131</sup> In Benjamin *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* op. cit., and *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in Benjamin, Geammelte Schriften I, 2, p. 471-508. My argument is based also on Caygill's explication, op. cit.

so that it need not invent itself completely from new at every moment (an unthinkable proposition), is not merely haunted by the possibility of its ruination and finitude but always and already is a ruin.

Community can be imagined then as a place of mourning or remembrance which can provoke, as in the Baroque, a melancholic attitude to a 'lost' heritage, whose recuperation dominates the social and political agenda; or alternatively mourning and remembrance can be the condition of politics. The world that is handed down, in destroying itself, always becomes other than itself. It gives and withdraws meaning, or put simply, cannot help but become a site of interpretation. History is therefore allegorical, and just as in the *Trauerspiel* and in thinking about community, two paths are offered, one quietistic, the other interventionary.

The lack of reproducibility and the heterogeneity of performance can also be seen as emphasising the temporality of decay. The singular production of meaning and its exact irreproducibility due to the difference from itself of the aesthetic object accentuates the degeneration of performance itself. The decay of performance is that which makes that performance possible; decay is the moment of excess of performance which is excluded to enable the momentary production of meaning (however long that moment lasts). Just as in the workings of excess in theatre (through bodily experience for example) its effects must be recuperated in order to represent any *meaningful* discourse, whose meaning, however, owes itself to precisely those effects of decay and excess that it cannot contemplate directly. This double action of exclusion and recuperation is in fact the same process. The recuperation takes the form of the exclusion of excess, for it is the only way in which the excessive can be represented. But the latter interrupts the discourse of interpretation through ruptures and fissures in which

the constitutive nature of excess can be witnessed. One would thus regard this return of excess as the condition of possibility for allegory. Allegory is made possible by the constant "return" of the finitude of human experience which can only be represented as aporia. The quote from Müller above can therefore also be seen in this light; the return of the same becomes an opportunity for Müller because in returning it displays the finitude of history and human experience, thereby laying the 'royal road' to the constitutive moment of aporia which structures the human condition – the experience of finitude through the death of a particular other. The allegorisation of that which returns (as well as the event of return itself) can lead thereafter to the critique (or the explosion) of the dominant notions of tradition and temporality which stifle the heterogeneous political community.

### *Der Horatier*

The return of a mythic event and its relation to the problem of aporia and excess is portrayed in Müller's *Der Horatier*,<sup>132</sup> a play widely interpreted in the GDR as defending the revolutionary act of violence and the state's right to act in defence of the revolution, if necessary through violence. That this can be seen as representing the return of *mythic* violence forms the contradiction that runs through the play. The events of the mythic narratives are consigned to pre-history whose return undermines the project of progress and emancipation. When that return occurs, therefore, the refusal to understand myth as anything other than a past historical stage that has been overcome becomes reflected in the inability of the state to regard its own mythic narratives at work.

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<sup>132</sup> in Müller, *Mauser*, p. 45 - 54.

The GDR state and its supportive critics saw in *Der Horatier* the representation of "die historische Notwendigkeit proletarischer Gewalt",<sup>133</sup> which recognised also how the process of social development could not avoid the sacrifice of particular victims. This clearly justified the use of revolutionary violence in the midst of revolution and the sacrifice of those involved in the anti-fascist struggle was perpetually acknowledged by the GDR state, indeed it became one of its primary means of legitimising itself. Müller sees this as a positive aspect of the GDR, not least because it allows the possibility of the allegorical relations to death argued for earlier:

In der kapitalistischen Welt gehen alle Energien dahin, die Toten auszuklammern, auszusondern. Das war in der DDR anders. [...] Die Legitimation durch den Antifaschismus ist die Legitimation durch die Toten. Das ist nicht nur negativ, denn das legt auch den Grundstock für Kultur.<sup>134</sup>

The problem arises however when the permanent re-interpretation of those deaths is excluded by an idea that the revolution has been accomplished and that therefore any action by the state must be justified in defence of the memory of those who suffered in the revolution. In another interview, Müller develops this idea:

Die einzige Legitimation der DDR kam aus dem Antifaschismus, aus den Toten, aus den Opfern. Das war eine Zeitlang ehrbar, aber an einem gewissen Punkt fing es an, zu Lasten der Lebenden zu gehen. Es kam zu einer Diktatur der Toten über die Lebenden - mit allen ökonomischen Konsequenzen.

Denn die Toten brauchen keine Jeans, keine Kiwis, keinen Walkman. Was die DDR produzierte, waren im besten Fall Grabbeigaben.<sup>135</sup>

Müller was from early on concerned with the constant remembrance of "was der Sozialismus gekostet hat" but this referred not only to the victims of the revolution but also to those sacrificed in the name of the revolution afterwards.

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<sup>133</sup> Bernhardt, *Antikerezeption im Werk Heiner Müllers*, op. cit., p. 94.

<sup>134</sup> Müller, *Jenseits der Nation*, p. 23.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p. 74

*Der Horatier* was conceived as a *Lehrstück*, and indeed its first production was at the Billstedter Schüler- und Lehrlingstheater in Hamburg in 1973. No performance of the play was ever put on in the GDR, other than as part of the 1988 production of *Der Lohndrucker* in the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.<sup>136</sup> The short ten side text portrays the cities of Alba and Rome who face a common enemy in the shape of the Etruscans. The first two cities need to join forces in order to defeat the latter, but before this a "Streit um Herrschaft" needs to be settled. In order not to weaken the ranks for the approaching battle, lots are drawn and a soldier from each city is chosen to fight and settle the argument. From the Roman side comes the eponymous Horatian, from the other a *Kuratier* who is engaged to the sister of his opponent. The *Horatier* wins the fight and despite pleas for mercy kills the *Kuratier* with the words "Meine Braut heißt Rom."<sup>137</sup> He returns to Rome in triumph but is met at the city gates by his sister who recognises the bloody battle dress of her fiancé ("Gib mir wieder, was in diesem Kleid war."<sup>138</sup>), her screams of grief are then put to an end by her brother:

Und der Horatier [...]  
Stieß das Schwert, auf dem das Blut der Beweinten  
Noch nicht getrocknet war  
In die Brust der Weinenden  
Daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel. Er sagte:  
Geh zu ihm, den du mehr liebst als Rom.<sup>139</sup>

The adulation stops and the *Horatier* is put on trial for murder where the question is raised whether he should be honoured for his actions for Rome or executed for the murder of his sister. The answer is to do both and to recognise the actions of the whole man, both victor and murderer. The *Horatier* is thus paraded with laurels but thereafter

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<sup>136</sup> See discussion p. 252 ff. I am indebted to Georgina Paul for this reference.

<sup>137</sup> Müller, *Der Horatier*, *Mauser*, p. 45.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

executed. The question then arises as to how he should be remembered and the answer is once more given as the necessity of remembering both. The severed head and body are placed on shields and paraded as would be the corpse of a hero, but this same corpse, this time that of the murderer "wurde vor die Hunde geworfen" his sword broken out of his hand to be used by another. The piece ends with the judgement of Rome that it must not shirk from its duty to portray events as they really happened, that they must be adequately *represented* : "Nämlich die Worte müssen rein bleiben."<sup>140</sup>

It is not difficult to read once again an allegory for Stalinism in *Der Horatier*, or rather for an attitude to the legacy of Stalinism in the GDR. One needs to recognise the mistakes of the past, to be truthful about the costs that have been paid. In this respect it could be seen as being not essentially out of line with the general process of de-Stalinisation that had been claimed to be underway since his death. The example that has been made of the *Horatier* is

ein vorläufiges Beispiel  
Reinlicher Scheidung, nicht verbergend den Rest  
Der nicht aufging im unaufhaltbaren Wandel[.]<sup>141</sup>

It would seem that what is being proposed therefore is a strongly materialist line that would be in tune with Müller's interest in the constitutive nature of excess. The line "Tödlich dem Menschen ist das Unkenntliche"<sup>142</sup> could also be understood as the warning that those communities that attempt to exclude excess in their self-interpretation do so with possible fatal and repressive results. In the case of Rome, however, the audience (and players) are constantly reminded that the actions of the

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<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

community are expressly directed towards one particular goal, that of victory in war over the Etruscans.

This construction of a united front is undermined however precisely by those figures of excess in the piece that can never be *aufgehoben*. As Hans-Thies Lehmann puts it

Ein Schlag zuviel ist die Tötung der Kuratiers. Eine Stimme zuviel ist es, die im Jubel nicht aufgeht: die Schwester. Einmal zu viel gebraucht Horatius gegen sie das Schwert. In der "einen Stimme" des Volks geht nicht auf das hörbare Schweigen des Vaters.<sup>143</sup>

Thus the sister stands out as the only one to mourn the death of the Kuratier; the father of the Horatier is the only one not to condemn his son for the murder of his daughter; finally, the death through execution stands out in excess of the praise which the Horatier received for victory in battle:

Und der Sieger sprang von den Schilden, im Jubel des Volks  
Entgegnzunehmen die Umarmung der Schwester.  
Aber die Schwester erkannte das blutige Schlachtkleid  
Werk ihrer Hände, und schrie und löste ihr Haar auf.

Und das Volk antwortete mit einer Stimme  
(Aber der Vater des Horatiers schwieg):  
Da ist der Sieger. Sein Name Horatius.  
Da ist der Mörder. Sein Name: Horatius.

Einer hat gesiegt für Rom im Schwertkampf  
Ein anderer hat seine Schwester getötet  
Ohne Notwendigkeit. Jedem das Seine.  
Dem Sieger den Lorbeer. Dem Mörder das Beil.<sup>144</sup>

That which can least be superseded or sublimated is death itself. There is thus, as Lehmann also points out, an inherent imbalance between the praise on the one hand and the punishment on the other. Death outweighs the laurel wreath. Praise is inadequate to

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<sup>143</sup> Lehmann, Hans-Thies, *Der Horatier*, in Schulz, Heiner Müller, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>144</sup> Müller, *Der Horatier*, op. cit., pp. 46, 49, 49-50.

death. The meaning of this death cannot be represented as it is as such, for unlike praise the interpretation of death is defined by the knowledge of the inadequacy of that interpretation, leaving a space for further explication of the event in the future. The line "Tödlich dem Menschen ist das Unkenntliche" can therefore be understood in a different, more literal light.

The contact and acquaintance with this alterity which is most irredeemable – a death which cannot be *aufgehoben*, be it of self or other – forecloses the possibility of a semiotic or political synthesis around it. Death leads always to contradiction, to an interpretation that is never final, always to be disputed and hence finally, or rather always and already to allegory.

The inadequacy of representation is hinted at in another way in the play itself – one man from each city is drawn to represent the city on the one hand, but on the other the events that lead from this act prevent the substitution of one man for another. At the beginning, the decision is made:

Weil die Schlacht schwächt  
Sieger und Besiegte, laßt uns das Los werfen  
Damit ein Mann kämpfe für unsere Stadt.<sup>145</sup>

but later when the father of the *Horatier* pleads to let himself be executed for his son:

Und das Volk antwortete mit einer Stimme:  
Kein Mann ist ein anderer Mann  
Und der Horatier wurde gerichtet mit dem Beil  
Daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel[.]<sup>146</sup>

The problem of the inadequacy of the signifier, of the impossibility of complete representation comes to haunt the play in the attempt by the Romans to sublimate excess and alterity, to bring it under the complete order of their shared ritual and symbolic

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<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*, p. 45.

practices. Merely in the attempt to equate the laurel wreath and the execution, the otherness of death is *aufgehoben* in its representation. The play thus debates whether it is the case that by equating death and praise the community depicted in the play enacts an impure and temporary political compromise (the "unreine Wahrheit" of the "vorläufige[n] Beispiel") which would involve a recognition of the limit and thus allegorisation of death, or whether on the other hand the compromise is re-conditioned to suit the instrumental needs of the state over and against the heterogeneous desires of the community.

The problem of honouring and condemning the Horatian can only be represented in a contradictory way because of the original antagonism residing ontologically in the community. However, *Der Horatier* seems to go some way towards declaring that this necessitates all the more the taking of decisions, uttering them and judging further. Whether the Roman community represented in the play then makes the right judgement is up to the audience and players. The conclusion of the play seems to be based on a desire to follow the logic of this Roman community where it leads, thus to the honouring and death of the Horatian:

Länger als Rom über Alba herrschen wird  
Wird nicht zu vergessen sein Rom und das Beispiel  
Das er gegeben hat oder nicht gegeben [...]  
Fürchtend die unreine Wahrheit oder nicht fürchtend  
Und das halbe Beispiel ist kein Beispiel[.]<sup>147</sup>

This then leads to the severity of the 'law' based on this example:

Wer aber seine Schuld nennt zu einer Zeit  
Und nennt sein Verdienst zu anderer Zeit  
Redend aus einem Mund zu verschiedner Zeit anders  
Oder für verschiedene Ohren anders

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<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

Dem soll die Zunge ausgerissen werden.  
Nämlich die Worte müssen rein bleiben.<sup>148</sup>

But even this decision is caught up in the contradiction of death which outweighs all possible other judgements. To judge the deeds one must separate them from each other and the man, but to judge the man one cannot separate him from his deeds. The absolute judgement, such as is represented in the sentence of death, is utterly indifferent to this contradiction, and this is expressed starkly in the line: "Und der Horatier stand/  
Zwischen Lorbeer und Beil."<sup>149</sup>

The final decision is riddled therefore with its non-identity with itself and this is partly recognised in the "unreine Wahrheit [der] reinliche Scheidung". A decision has to be made, and this is better than a retreat into non-judgement, the end is purely temporary and can possibly be undermined in the future. This is simply in the nature of the political decision. As was seen in *Philoktet*, the attempt to retreat from such a decision is even more catastrophic than becoming immersed in the "blutsäufigen Gemeinschaft". No matter how abhorrent a particular state might be, no matter how drastically it homogenises the relations of its subjects to their deaths, there is no alternative to making political decisions. The manner in which those decisions are made, be it in the first instance in remembrance of the victims of previous decisions, or seeing those victims as necessary sacrifice, is what determines the nature and degree of heterogeneity of the community.

What must thereby be acknowledged, however, is the problem of representing the alterity of death as that which is in the interests of the law and state. It is emphasised

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<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

throughout *Der Horatier* that particular characters act for Rome; Rome is embodied in one man at the beginning of the play. He kills his sister for Rome:

Geh zu ihm, den du mehr liebst als Rom.  
Das jeder Römerin  
Die den Feind betrauert.  
Und er zeigte das zweimal blutige Schwert allen Römern  
Und der Jubel verstummte.<sup>150</sup>

Similarly, the crowd and the father and son are driven apart a number of times by the guards "mit Rutenbündel und Beil". This expression returns a number of times as a refrain, and the reference to the *fasces* allows immediately connotations of the totalitarian state, albeit of a different order. The guards, those who employ the monopoly of state violence, stand menacingly in the background, returning once more as a refrain, framing the events within a particular constitution which suppresses the voices of heterogeneity that rise up from time to time. Through the different refrains, through the very repetition of the same, the defining moment of community – the recognition of alterity of the community from itself so that the state cannot absolutely speak for the community with one voice – is drowned. Yet on the other hand, the refrains also provide the possibility, through their quality of repetition, of remembrance. Rome, in this play however, prefers to carry out the execution "in reinlicher Scheidung" instead of facing up to the difficulties and aporia of the political community. Thus as the verdict is carried out, the Romans put away their swords to separate the last act of honouring the victor (where they held up their weapons in tribute) from the coming execution.

Aber die Wachen  
An den vier Toren in Erwartung des Feinds  
Bedeckten ihre Schwerte nicht

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<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*, p. 46

Und die Schneiden der Beile blieben unbedeckt[.]<sup>151</sup>

Later, the citizens cover their heads in mourning for the victor,

Aber die Wachen an den vier Toren  
In Erwartung des Feinds  
Verdeckten ihre Gesichter nicht.<sup>152</sup>

Through the repeatedly expressed omnipresence of the state, the audience and players are constantly reminded of the immediate goal which is before the gates of Rome: the defeat of the Etruscans. The citizens have to act on behalf of Rome, to do what is *necessary* for her. The Horatier, for example, killed the Kuratier while representing Rome, and it was thus a necessary and justifiable act. He is led to the scaffold however in the

Tuch in der Farbe der Nacht  
In die zu gehen er verurteilt war  
Weil er einen Menschen getötet hatte  
Ohne Notwendigkeit[.]<sup>153</sup>

thereby not representing the state and acting against its monopoly of violence.

The key to the iron-clad instrumentalism directed toward the future goal, which was witnessed also in *Philoktet*, is that homogenisation of temporalities which simultaneously produces the fear of the historical continuum's standing still. If the goal, as set by the state, is not attained, the result is a cessation of progress, itself dangerous to the ability of the state to justify itself and its actions: "Was nicht getan wird ganz bis zum wirklichen Ende/ Kehrt ins Nichts am Zügel der Zeit im Krebsgang."<sup>154</sup>

There is thus a difference between, on the one hand, the political 'dis-position', where political judgement only regards itself as possible by the fact of its being

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<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, p. 52.

compromised by repeated future interpretation in the community (thus providing the promise of that community and democracy, as argued in Chapter One); and on the other, that judgement where any political reaction to itself is repressed by the irrevocability of a law which does not see itself as subject to any process of ruination.

It is, however, precisely the way in which *Der Horatier* as play and as events within a play is experienced *if performed as Lehrstück* that such a ruination comes to show itself. Once more, we see how the presentation of politics in the theatre *as theatre* defines the profoundly political nature of the art. The idea behind the presentation of the play as *Lehrstück* would be for the actors to regard their own actions as allegorical, subject to their own and others' interpretation. The contradictions in the play are to be worked out, if never resolved, experienced and discussed. This happens, however, not only on the level of the critical language which might be employed outside of the performance but in the aesthetic discourse of the play itself. Lehmann sees the use of poetic language to be inextricably bound up with the theme of "[dem] Rest, der nicht aufgeht":

Eine Sprache [der Kunst], die den Rest nicht verleugnet, der in keinen Begriff paßt: den Schmerz der Opfer, darf nichts verheimlichen. Nur das Aussprechen der "unreinen Wahrheit" bis hin zum Paradox, das poetische Sprache, quer zum logischen Begriff, faßt, kann Geltung beanspruchen.<sup>155</sup>

The only discourse that can do justice to the problem of excess, the only one that can *shudder* before the sublimity of death is the aesthetic. By being aesthetic and non-interested, that is, by separating itself from the instrumental use of language, aesthetic experience opens up the future of heterogeneous interpretation by concentrating on the present. As argued in Chapter Two, by being more immersed in the present, aesthetic

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<sup>155</sup> Lehmann, *Der Horatier*, op. cit., p. 96-7

experience can be *sovereign*, a moment of excessive expenditure which communicates the limits – and thus the death – of human existence. By contrast, the absolute claim to the interpretation of death which one sees the agents of the state employing in both *Der Horatier* and *Philoktet* is always instrumentalised into a homogenous telos. It sees for itself a transparent relation to the death of its subjects, the antithesis of the communal death argued for earlier. This transparency is also represented in the state's monopoly on violence where execution is the symbol of the law. By bringing about an experience of this instrumentality in the theatre, in a discourse of non-utility, Müller hopes to unveil its catastrophic brutality while insisting that the only politically responsible act (other than making theatre politically, of course) is to involve oneself in the dirty business of conflicting means, ends, interests and temporalities.

#### *Political theatre and its victims*

It has been argued that Müller was less concerned about producing art which fitted into the tradition of political theatre, but rather that he was interested in making theatre *politically*. As the years went by this was achieved through an allegorical theatre which, by means of the trope of repetition, provided the conditions for remembrance of victims past. In *Philoktet* this is accomplished through the concentration on the problem of Odysseus' and Neoptolemos' *return* to Lemnos to fetch their abandoned colleague. The central conflict of the play develops between Odysseus and Neoptolemos, whereby the former is concerned to stop the catastrophe and deaths at Troy continuing or being repeated. This he sees as only being possible through further political action, characterised by further instrumentalisation of heterogeneous subjects and thus their continuing victimisation. This, on the other hand, becomes the basis for his

remembrance of the victims of his action which undermines the homogeneity of the political goal for which so much was being sacrificed. Neoptolemos, however, sees the whole process as horrific, but his refusal to involve himself in the killing fields of Troy will only mean the continuance of the conditions which he finds so abhorrent. Neoptolemos refrains from repetition and thus misses the opportunity of remembrance which provides the conditions for future political action.

In *Der Horatier* such repetition comes most clearly to light through the use of refrains in the text. Although, as argued above, they illuminate on the one hand the constant repression of alterity within the community and this repetition offers for Müller the opportunity of allegorisation. Thus the refrains of "daß das Blut auf die Erde fiel",<sup>156</sup> "und das Volk antwortete mit einer Stimme",<sup>157</sup> "weil er einen Menschen getötet hat[te]/ Ohne Notwendigkeit"<sup>158</sup> and the repeated reference to the guards at the city gates provide the conditions for remembrance through the allegorisation of the refrain. The refrain, by being repeated, draws attention to itself and could be performed as allegorising itself in this self-reflection. This stands in stark contrast to the community portrayed in the play where the possibility of such future re-interpretation of the Horatian's death, which would guarantee the democratic, political nature of that community, is denied. The meaning of the deaths of the *Kuratier*, the Horatian's sister and the Horatian himself are all set in stone. In the case of the latter:

Wie soll der Horatier genannt werden der Nachwelt?  
Und das Volk antwortete mit einer Stimme:  
Er soll genannt werden der Sieger über Alba  
Er soll genannt werden der Mörder seiner Schwester  
Mit einem Atem sein Verdienst und Schuld.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Müller, *Der Horatier*, op. cit., pp. 45, 46 & 51.

<sup>157</sup> pp. 19, 51, 52, 53.

<sup>158</sup> pp. 50, 52, 53.

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

Any confusion through *future* interpretation threatens the pure use of language which Philoktet also found so necessary for his (psychotic) subjectivity. So while the Roman community refuses on the one hand in its judgement of the Horatian to omit any of his deeds which might be uncomfortable, it also refuses to acknowledge the possibility of the finitude of this judgement. This might be seen, as in *Philoktet*, as an understandable and indeed necessary action given the immediate threat of the enemy outside the gates of the city:

So stellten sie auf, nicht fürchtend die unreine Wahrheit  
In Erwartung des Feinds ein vorläufiges Beispiel  
Reinlicher Scheidung[.]<sup>160</sup>

However, the claim that this acknowledges the excess ("den Rest") of death that cannot be sublated is fatally undermined by the inability to remember those who died at the hands of the agents of the state as *victims*. The Horatian cannot be regarded as a victim of the state nor of the conditions of war between the Romans and Etruscans because the *necessity* of his execution is justified by the fact that he killed *without* necessity. Thus necessary death is simply defined by the state; it is necessary for the state to insist on its claim to monopolise recourse to violence and its necessity. In this sense, state defines death and those who die at the hands of the state cannot by definition be victims or be remembered as such in the future because they had been necessarily sacrificed for the state. If this is the case that certain deaths cannot be re-interpreted as victimisation, then the finite nature of the interpretation of the other's death - which itself provides the space for the future of the community - is denied in the strongest terms. While it is claimed that this is a temporary judgement, therefore, the simple fact that the state can

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<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

engage in execution shows who has first claim to the definition and interpretation of life and death in this state. Death outweighs the laurel wreath.

The use of repetition, allegory and remembrance is more than just a theme, however, in *Philoktet* and *Der Horatier*. Both of the plays demonstrate for the first time Müller's interest in the repetition and allegorisation of theatrical tradition and discourse. Thus while *Der Horatier* exploits repetition within the timespan of the play by presenting itself as *Lehrstück*, *Philoktet* reintroduces and reuses the Sophoclean myth of *Philoctetes* to demonstrate the effects of the return, not only of myth, but of mythic theatre.

As has already been mentioned, the Müller version of the tale differs markedly from the Sophoclean. In the latter, instead of being faced with the effects of Neoptolemos' act of cowardice and treachery, Odysseus is able to call on the gods to intervene. Thus at the end of the play Neoptolemos is about to take Philoctetes home, instead of bringing him to Troy, when Hercules appears:

*For your sake I have come from the heavenly seats, to show you the purpose of Zeus, and to stay the journey upon which you are departing. Give heed to my counsel.*

[...B]e sure, the destiny is ordained that through these sufferings of yours you should glorify your life. [...] But of this be mindful when you lay waste the land: show reverence towards the gods. All things else are of less account in the sight of our father Zeus. Piety dies not with men; in their life and in their death it is immortal.<sup>161</sup>

The human subjects in Sophocles' play have in the end no choice in what they do since they are guided by destiny: they simply need to be reminded from time to time what that entails. As such, their deaths, as events foreseen by the gods, become symbolic of their

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<sup>161</sup> Sophocles, *Philoctetes*. in *The Complete Plays*. p. 217-8.

life and close off interpretation in the future. Piety, that is, the ability of subjects to regard their actions as the will of the gods, becomes the symbol of these heroes' actions.

Müller's Philoktet, however, cannot not face his death at all. He is instead run through from behind, suddenly and unexpectedly. Through the non-fateful, non-heroic death, indeed precisely through a death which exemplifies that of the *victim*, Philoktet is used and judged for political ends. This Philoktet has the bad luck to be surrounded by unpious brethren who seek the solution for their conditions here below rather than through recourse to the gods. His death thus becomes automatically a point of conflict which simultaneously confirms the continuation of violence but also provides the conditions (simultaneously encouraging and unpalatable) for its cessation in the future. This is, for Müller, achieved through the future remembrance and re-interpretation such as will happen in Troy, albeit on the basis of a lie.

The crucial point for the audience, therefore, is not so much how sustainable such a lie is in any allegorisation of Philoktet's death on his return to Troy, but rather how that death is allegorised for the audience itself through the return of myth within the theatre. The character of Philoktet, spared in the myth, returns to become a victim in the allegory. The return of myth as the death of a victim provides then for Müller the means to write in remembrance of those who have been used, judged and victimised by the theatre itself. Through the conscious and obvious use and re-working of mythic theatrical tradition Müller turns Philoktet's death in his play into an allegory. This allegory consists of a process of representing the other's victimisation in Western theatrical discourse. To think that the theatre could avoid doing so is hubris, but allegory provides the means to remember and therefore re-interpret such victimisation and death. These deaths represented in the theatre would thus lose the status they have gained as

being justified through representing the outside world on the stage, or through their necessity for the internal dynamics of theatrical discourse and tradition. The primary example of such victimisation becomes then for Müller the "justified" sacrifice of the *gendered* other in which theatre finds its roots. The allegorisation of such deaths in the theatrical tradition serves the purpose of providing the conditions for the remembrance of the death of the other in the community as a whole but Müller's intention goes further than this. As will be argued below, the allegorisation of victims' deaths serves to strengthen the autonomy of theatre from politics and instrumental thought, but in so doing Müller seeks to reveal the theatre's real political import. This import can, however, only be demonstrated through the remembrance of the manner in which victims were represented on the stage, but also in the memory of those who became victims because of theatre's solipsism and powerlessness in autonomy, an autonomy which Müller seeks to prolong. Two more works by Müller, written in the 1970's explore in exhausting austerity these processes and their consequences: *Todesanzeige* and *Hamletmaschine*.

*Todesanzeige and Hamletmaschine*

Theatre for Müller is based on the sacrifice of individual subjectivity and the communication of community. In its oldest form it performs or enacts the mimesis of a sacrifice (originally ritualistic and religious) which communicates the death of the other, the origin of the community itself. This is enforced by the architecture and dynamics of the theatre which allow a representation of limits on stage – of stage/audience, stage/off-

stage, off-stage/theatre walls<sup>162</sup> – which confine the experience of the sacrifice to a restricted arena, building or amphitheatre. It is this tradition which Müller was concerned to use and repeat. He sought simultaneously to investigate the theatre's culpability in the continued representation of sacrifice when the link of theatre and outside world had been turned into a symbolic one.

It was not until the 1970's that Müller began explicitly to deal with this problem. In *Todesanzeige* (first published in 1975 under the title *Wüsten der Liebe*), Müller deals with the suicide in 1966 of his wife, Inge. Although she had attempted suicide a number of times over the previous eight years, each time Müller himself had been present. He recalls in *Krieg Ohne Schlacht* that his work was beginning to suffer:

Das Zusammenleben mit ihr war für mich inzwischen auch ein Arbeitsproblem geworden. Ich konnte in unserer Wohnung nicht mehr arbeiten. [...] Und dann habe ich noch lange auf einem U-Bahnsteig mit Adolf Dresen über die Zukunft oder Nicht-Zukunft des Marxismus diskutiert. Als ich nach Hause kam, war sie tot.<sup>163</sup>

*Todesanzeige* links the death of Inge, however, in a dreamlike and yet explicit way to theatrical representation, where she is sacrificed (as Müller seems to hint at above) for the sake of theatre and writing.

Ich hatte sie schon oft wie tot daliegen sehen, wenn ich nach Hause kam, und aufgehoben mit Angst (Hoffnung), daß sie tot war und der schreckliche Laut klang beruhigend, eine Antwort.<sup>164</sup>

We thus return once more to the culpability not only of the theatre but of writing itself, for if theatre is guilty in any way, then the signature of Heiner Müller, of him who writes theatre, is equally so.

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<sup>162</sup> See Andre Green, *The Tragic Effect*. The instructive comparison, for which there is unfortunately no room to explore here, is between the off-stage of theatre, and the off-camera of film. Theatre, according to Green is defined by the *limits* of off-stage, whereas in film off-camera is by definition unlimited.

<sup>163</sup> Müller, *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 209.

<sup>164</sup> Müller, *Todesanzeige*, in *Germania Tod in Berlin*, p. 31.

Sie war tot als ich nach Hause kam. Sie lag in der Küche auf dem Steinboden, halb auf dem Bauch, halb auf der Seite, ein Bein angewinkelt wie im Schlaf, der Kopf in der Nähe der Tür. Ich bückte mich, hob ihr Gesicht aus dem Profil und sagte das Wort, mit dem ich sie anredete, wenn wir allein waren. Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß ich Theater spielte.<sup>165</sup>

Inge had gassed herself in the oven. She had left no note which was then deemed to be enough reason to suspect Müller of a hand in her death; "WO IST DER BRIEF WAS FÜR EIN BRIEF HAT SIE KEINEN BRIEF HINTERLASSEN WO WAREN SIE VON WANN BIS WANN"<sup>166</sup>

*Todesanzeige* is written in three sections: a narrative of the immediate aftermath of Inge's death, a dreamlike sequence where the speaking subject murders three times a figure known only as 'Hühnergesicht', and the last section entitled 'Traum', a short presentation of a dream where the 'I', where Heiner Müller, approaches a naked, hanged female body, and is drawn ever closer and into the hanged woman's genitals. The second and third sections portray murder and rape committed in the first person, and the piece is written in such a way as to direct the reader directly back to Heiner himself in the first section.

The memory of an embankment he walked along as a child links Inge's death to the fantasised murder of "Hühnergesicht", while the exorcising experience of the dream provides the connection to the third section. Another narrative development throughout the piece is far more startling, however. Müller has the feeling that he "Theater spielte", but the shift from the 3<sup>rd</sup> person on the theatrical stage back to the writing and speaking subject in the first person is only effected by the identification of himself as murderer

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<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *ibid.*, p., 32.

and abuser. The identification of the three sections and their subjects, be they in the first or third person, is made clear once more through repetition:

Ins Nebenzimmer gehen (dreimal), die Tote NOCH EINMAL ansehen (dreimal),  
sie ist nackt unter der Decke [...]  
Er hat in meinen Träumen kein Platz mehr, seit ich ihn getötet habe (dreimal).  
[...]  
Über mir die ungeheuren Schenkel, aufgeklappt wie eine Schere, in die ich mit  
jeder Stufe weiter hineingehe[.]<sup>167</sup>

Inge's suicide provokes a memory of Müller's first thoughts on his own mortality "in dem kleinen Haus in Sachsen, in der winzigen Schlafkammer, drei niedrige Stockwerke hoch, fünf oder sechs Jahre alt ich[.]"<sup>168</sup> This then provides the link to the extended murder of "Hühnergesicht" where it becomes clear that one's own mortality is only to be grasped and understood through the death of a particular other. The figure is *sacrificed* for the subjectivity of the writer ("Er hat in meinen Träumen kein Platz mehr, seit ich ihn getötet habe (dreimal)"), and thus the possibility of subjectivity is for Müller to be found in the temporality of the murderer: "Die Unumkehrbarkeit der Zeit. Zeit des Mörders."<sup>169</sup> Müller performs these sacrifices in fantasy or dream, he signs them by writing in the first person, but this stands in direct contrast to the *theatrical* presentation of Inge's suicide. By writing Inge's suicide as theatre, Müller is attempting less to evade responsibility for Inge's death than instead to display the manner in which theatrical discourse sacrifices the other as necessity in order to exist and thereby to include himself among those culpable.

The only possibility of coming to terms with this death, not just the presentation of the Idea of death but the suicide of his wife, is by representation of it as murder and rape later in the piece. By means of this he comes to see his own finitude through the

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<sup>167</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 32 & 34.

sacrifice of the victim, a sacrifice which he *performs*. The culpability of theatre thus finds itself in the manner in which it represents the death, the sacrifice of his wife, the manner in which it thinks it, in the very possibility of thinking it within theatre. The performance takes place only after the event; in this sense the death (understood as the death of the other) succeeds the suicide, and thus any culpability must reside in the theatre's performance of the other's death. For Müller, such performance or writing of the other's death, *which makes theatre what it is*, inhabits a space which is analogous to that of the murderer. As soon as the cultic and ritualistic link between theatre and the outside world is lost, that representation of murder and sacrifice runs the terrible risk of presenting murder and sacrifice *symbolically*. Müller seeks to redress this through the allegorisation of theatrical experience, which in turn is expressed through the enactment of the finite signature.

Performing the relation to the other, in particular the other gender, is thus no less terrible a responsibility. Müller seeks more and more from this point on to engage in remembrance of the performance of the murderer when the death of the other is written in theatre. He does so not simply to harangue the theatre for its past, but instead to re-establish the possibility of theatre's representing the death of the other in a manner which would write community. This would involve communicating the sacrifice of solipsistic self-consciousness which is experienced by particular subjects (for example, Müller) through the death of a particular other (for example, Inge). Theatre can achieve this through the signed remembrance of the theatrical representation of particular

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<sup>168</sup> *ibid.*, p., 32.

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

victims and through the allegorisation of their sacrifice as telling the story of theatre and thereby the relation of community to death and its limits.

Theatre simulates the form of sacrifice that is made for community. An isolated self-consciousness sacrifices itself in order to make community possible at all in the first place, and the death of the other takes place in order to establish the limits of human existence which community expresses. To quote Bataille once more:

If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can subsist only *outside itself*...It is for this reason that it is necessary for communal life to maintain itself at a level *equal to death*.<sup>170</sup>

When the only possibility of representing my death is through the other, the possibility of self-presence and full self-consciousness is sacrificed. Each subject shares this fate, but that which the subject shares sunders him/her also. The other is sacrificed in theatre in order to mime that death of the self which would be the impossible experience in its fullest form. Murderer and victim meet in this theatre, in this region of subterfuge, only through the work of mimesis. Mimesis is the work of sacrifice, but the very mythical status of cultic theatre emphasises its ritual, *transgressive*, basis. Modern, autonomous theatre, on the other hand, attempts to symbolise the outside world on stage (thereby weakening its autonomy) and in so doing seeks to repress the very finitude of the hand that wrote it. In such symbolic theatre, the world is thus captured in its essence on stage.

Müller in contrast, as will be seen in *Hamletmaschine*, wants to link the signature of his writing to the possibility of producing a theatre that does not shy away from its representation of the sacrifice of the (gendered) other. This will result in a different relationship between theatre and outside world which, Müller hopes, will re-establish theatre as an act of community by insisting on its autonomy. Such a

relationship is achieved through an allegorical representation of remembrance which insists on its being performed on "a level equal to death." In this sense, theatre is culpable whatever it does. Either it continues to perform the sacrifice of the gendered other in order to exist; or it symbolises such sacrifice as capturing the role of that gendered other in the outside world; or finally it attempts to deny culpability altogether and then desists in performance or mimesis. The latter, however, represents a principle of retreat which Müller regards as intellectual privilege. Theatre instead must continue to remember and re-present the guilt of the theatrical tradition in order to produce a form of theatre which precisely in such remembrance gives witness to the finite nature of community and the necessity of forever remembering, re-interpreting and writing in the future. It is *Hamletmaschine* which addresses this impossible task.

*Hamletmaschine* was written in 1977 and has become one of Müller's most widely performed plays, even though it is without doubt one of his densest and most difficult. Although only eight sides, critics have spent much time and effort trying to decipher every hint and reference in the text and my purpose here is not to discuss the play as a whole, not least because this would be a thesis in itself. While in the most general sense, the play might be described as investigating the dilemma of the Marxist intellectual, it also does so in a manner where the signature of Heiner Müller comes through most strongly. In other words, the play investigates also the dilemma of the Marxist intellectual playwright, of Heiner Müller himself, working within a theatrical tradition of sacrifice of the gendered other.

At the beginning of the play we find immediate reference to this problem: "Ich war Hamlet. Ich stand an der Küste und redete mit der Brandung BLABLA, im Rücken

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<sup>170</sup> Bataille, *Oeuvre Complètes*, 7:245-46, quoted in Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 15.

die Ruinen von Europa."<sup>171</sup> This is Hamlet, one of the archetypal characters of the European theatrical tradition, standing with nothing to say in front of that tradition presented in its ruined form. It is this tradition and its ruin which the theatre must deal with and take apart. Immediately, as example of the implied violence of that tradition, Hamlet helps the murderer Claudius onto his mother, stretching her legs apart. Later, the Hamlet figure itself commits rape of his mother:

Ich werde dich wieder zur Jungfrau machen, Mutter, damit dein König eine blutige Hochzeit hat. DER MUTTERSCHOSS IST KEINE EINBAHNSTRASSE. Jetzt binde ich dir die Hände auf den Rücken [...] Jetzt zerreiße ich das Brautkleid. Jetzt mußt du schreien. [...] Jetzt nehme ich dich, meine Mutter, in seiner, meines Vaters, unsichtbaren Spur.<sup>172</sup>

This rape of the mother in the steps of the father represents simultaneously a retreat into the womb in order to escape both the natural time of decay and the finitude of existence as well as the fantasy of a world uncomplicated by the gendered other. Indeed the two are intimately linked as Hamlet reveals when addressing the ghost.

Ich wollte, meine Mutter hätte [ein Loch] zu wenig gehabt, als du im Fleisch warst: ich wäre mir erspart geblieben. Man sollte die Weiber zunähn, eine Welt ohne Mütter. Wir könnten uns in Ruhe abschlachten.<sup>173</sup>

Ich legte mich auf den Boden und hörte die Welt ihre Runden drehn im Gleichschritt der Verwesung. [...] Die Hähne sind geschlachtet. Der Morgen findet nicht mehr statt.<sup>174</sup>

It is consistently emphasised in this first scene that the characters on stage come from the European theatrical tradition.

die reizende Ophelia, sie kommt auf ihr Stichwort, sieh wie sie den Hintern schwenkt, eine tragische Rolle [...] Hast du deinen Text verlernt Mutter. Ich souffliere WASCH DIR DEN MORD AUS DEM GESICHT MEIN PRINZ/ UND MACH DEM NEUEN DÄNMARK SCHÖNE AUGEN.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Müller, *Hamletmaschine*, in *Mauser*, p. 89.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90-1.

*Hamletmaschine* presents in a nutshell the catastrophe of theatre: the continued repetition of sacrifice as mimesis in the place of the performance of mimesis as sacrifice. In other words, European theatre has, for Müller, remained the same: in a catastrophic state of affairs where nothing has changed, theatre has presented the symbol of the sacrifice of a woman as capturing 'fleeting eternity'. The sacrifice of women has been understood as the mimesis of the essence of the real world and this has been repeated in all "innocence" in a symbolic way.

Müller's task is to write a quite different form of theatre. He sees mimesis itself as the sacrifice of self-consciousness in the community, providing the opportunity for the experience of that community. In performing the sacrifice of the gendered other, Müller does not wish to evade his responsibility and culpability in the tradition, but by repeating it he seeks also to engage in remembrance that will make that performance of sacrifice an allegory of the mimesis and the theatrical tradition. In *Hamletmaschine* this allegory of sacrifice's performance is achieved through the remembrance of Ophelia and Gertrude's abuse, of Inge Müller's "murder" and the exploitation of a number of other female figures in the play. In so doing Müller seeks to perform the subject's sacrifice of immanence in the community – so that the community remains other – but what is more he does so as "Heiner Müller" against the background of a community which must be understood as eternally passing, always in decay and always to come.

That Müller himself is inscribed explicitly in this text is not left to doubt by the second scene. In order not to leave any allegorisation at the level of characters, or at the level of the theatre in general, Müller extends it, to a rigorous and exhausting degree, to include the process of his writing himself. The aim of the allegorisation of the theatrical

tradition – to provide the conditions for an experience of community and the radical sense of singularity and finitude which structures it – is given extra impetus by the emphasis on the signature in the theatrical text.

DAS EUROPA DER FRAU

*Enormous room. Ophelia. Ihr Herz ist eine Uhr.*

OPHELIA

Ich bin Ophelia. Die der Fluß nicht behalten hat. Die Frau am Strick Die Frau mit den aufgeschnittenen Pulsadern Die Frau mit der Überdosis AUF DEN LIPPEN SCHNEE Die Frau mit dem Kopf im Gasherd.<sup>176</sup>

The character of Hamlet in the play, on the other hand, seeks to evade his responsibility for the sacrifice in the "Europa der Frau" by re-enacting those same dreams of immanence which led to the rape of his mother through the abandonment of his gender:

SCHERZO

*Universität der Toten. [...] Galerie (Ballett) der toten Frauen. Die Frau am Strick Die Frau mit den aufgeschnittenen Pulsadern usw. [...] Striptease von Ophelia*

OPHELIA

Willst du mein Herz essen, Hamlet. *Lacht.*

HAMLET *Hände vorm Gesicht*

Ich will eine Frau sein.<sup>177</sup>

Finally the character of Hamlet renounces his role completely. Mimesis, theatrical representation, *words* have nothing to say – ("BLABLA") in the play or the stage of subjectivity. Nobody seems to be listening any more to the self-proclaimed grand designs of European theatre. Any claims to relevance it might have had to be the harbinger of universal peace, humanism and the completion of the project of Enlightenment have been annulled by its utter failure to live up to its own ideal of itself as bearer of knowledge that could be applied in the outside world.

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<sup>176</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>177</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92

#### HAMLETDARSTELLER

Ich bin nicht Hamlet. Ich spiele keine Rolle mehr. Meine Worte haben mir nichts zu sagen. Meine Gedanken saugen den Bildern das Blut aus. Mein Drama findet nicht mehr statt. Hinter mir wird die Dekoration aufgebaut. Von Leuten, die mein Drama nicht interessiert, für Leute, die es nichts angeht. Mich interessiert es auch nicht mehr. Ich spiele nicht mehr mit.<sup>178</sup>

Instead this Hamlet figure seeks to enact a retreat to the "drama" of uprising in the street, the fantasy of revolution which is first and foremost a well-structured narrative, which does not cause too much trouble, where the universal humanist outlook of European theatre can find its counterpart.

Auf den Sturz des Denkmals folgt nach einer angemessenen Zeit der Aufstand. Mein Drama, wenn es noch stattfinden würde, fände in der Zeit des Aufstands statt. Der Aufstand beginnt als Spaziergang. Gegen die Verkehrsordnung während die Arbeitszeit.<sup>179</sup>

The passage of events of a real uprising starts to take over, however. Violence is used, and lackeys of the secret police are hung up by their bootstraps. The reaction of the Hamlet figure, however, is to cling to the fantasies of the objective, universal and uniting relevance of theatre.

Mein Platz, wenn mein Drama noch stattfinden würde, wäre auf beiden Seiten der Front, zwischen der Fronten, darüber. Ich stehe im Schweißgeruch der Menge und werfe Steine auf Polizisten Soldaten Panzer Panzerglas. [...] Ich bin der Soldat im Panzerturm [...] Ich bin mein Gefangener.<sup>180</sup>

But this drama along the lines which the theatre had chosen has not taken place. Economics, politics and revolution have remained stubbornly autonomous from the entertainment value of a good script. The Hamlet character makes a further retreat into complete solipsism and timelessness, an eternal symbol of European theatre, characterising himself also as various machines ("Schreibmaschine", "Datenbank").

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<sup>178</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>179</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93-4.

<sup>180</sup> *ibid.*, p. 94.

Mein Drama hat nicht stattgefunden. Das Textbuch ist verlorengegangen. Die Schauspieler haben ihre Gesichter an den Nagel in der Garderobe gehängt. In seinem Kasten verfault der Souffleur. [...] Ich gehe nach Hause und schlage die Zeit tot, einig/Mit meinem ungeteilten Selbst.<sup>181</sup>

All that is left over for the theatrical intellectual is nausea, itself the most desperate signifier of privilege. Hand in hand with this nausea comes the impotence of that privilege:

Unsern Täglichen Mord gib uns heute  
Denn Dein ist das Nichts Ekel  
An den Lügen die geglaubt werden  
Von den Lügnern und niemandem sonst Ekel  
An den Lügnern die geglaubt werden Ekel  
[...] In der Einsamkeit der Flughäfen  
Atme ich auf Ich bin  
Ein Privilegiertes Mein Ekel  
Ist ein Privileg  
Beschirmt mit Mauer  
Stacheldraht Gefängnis<sup>182</sup>

This has now become a mime of Müller. The figure (who in some productions has been Müller's voice) wants, as a machine (*Hamletmaschine* – HM – Heiner Müller) to erase the signature of subjectivity and distance himself from the catastrophe in which his theatre is involved:

Ich will nicht mehr essen trinken atmen eine Frau lieben einen Mann ein Kind  
ein Tier. Ich will nicht mehr sterben. Ich will nicht mehr töten.  
*Zerreiung der Fotografie des Autors.*<sup>183</sup>

The wish to remain immortal, to evade the death which defines human life is, at least as regards the theatre, closely tied up with the desire not to kill anymore. It represents a theatre without risk, without politics. The attempt to shelve all responsibility for theatre demands in turn a writing without signature or author, or an infinite, heroic representation which would stand for all time. Hence the tearing up of

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<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

Müller's photograph is not a symbol of the "death of the author", as it is most often interpreted as being, but rather the allegorisation of theatre's attempt to repress the effects of finite time and signature.

Any retreat from that theatrical representation which engages in the sacrifice of the other is the action of the privileged intellectual (such as Hamlet and Neoptolemos) and would mean finally the end of theatre. Müller recognises that he cannot step outside of the theatrical tradition, he can only *transgress* it by personally writing and engaging in remembrance and thus allegorisation of its past victims who have been mimetically sacrificed. The alternative posted by the Hamlet character would mean the establishment of the theatre outside of the political agon which would seek to displace itself (*literally* in 1976) beyond the wall and barbed wire of the GDR. Müller would, like Hamlet, have had to turn his back to the ruins of Europe and its theatre.

Müller, however stayed in the GDR and remained in the theatre. In both cases he was hemmed in by a wall that represented his privilege - on the one hand as intellectual dramatist, on the other as citizen who could at almost any time travel abroad. He continued to write the sacrifice that structures community inside the walls of the theatre and the GDR. Any transgression of those limits was also a sign of his privilege. As such, and as *Hamletmaschine* most clearly demonstrates, his writing was achieved behind an Iron Safety Curtain at the cost of the possibility of drama that never took place on the streets in the GDR. Any uprising on the streets always failed, other than that one in 1989 about which Müller was especially ambivalent.

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<sup>182</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 95-6.

<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, p. 96.

While the GDR still existed, however, the choice to remain within the four walls of the theatre allowed his writing and performances to dwell in the agon - the finite, never completed political community which always lies in, and guarantees, the future. By performing mimesis as sacrifice (a performance that consisted of the allegorisation of the tradition of mimesis through acts of remembrance), Müller enacted the non-immanence of the theatre in the community, in other words the heterogeneity of the community to the theatre. Consequently he positioned theatre as opaque to the interests of the state.

In contrast the figure playing Hamlet can only retreat to the self-presence and the modern dream of immanence expressed in the technological Utopia of the machine:

Meine Gedanken sind Wunden in meinem Gehirn. Mein Gehirn ist eine Narbe.  
Ich will eine Maschine sein. Arme zu greifen Beine zu gehn kein Schmerz kein  
Gedanke.<sup>184</sup>

Such a theatrical subject without signature repeats for Müller the sacrifice as mimesis that would break down the four walls of the theatre, with the aim of establishing a politics adequate to the theatre - an aestheticisation of politics. Müller's theatre, on the other hand, remains as the excess or rest of a certain impossibility - that of establishing community once and for all. The impossible nature of this task demands therefore a never-ending theatre, the constant return of remembrance and re-interpretation which guarantees the future of community *as* impossible, finite and heterogeneous.

Müller attempts in the last scene of *Hamletmaschine* to strengthen the heterogeneous quality of his theatre by allowing the victims of theatrical representation to speak *as* victim. Given his, Heiner Müller's, culpability in the tradition of victimisation, such an attempt can only fail, for in the end it takes the form of Müller, as

playwright, speaking for the victims once more. This failure and contradiction does, however, point once more towards the impossibility of such theatre, to the always returning demand to produce new texts, and the hope of new interpretations, perhaps from those who until now have been the victims. In this scene Ophelia, bound in a wheelchair, repeats Hamlet's desire to stop birth and reproduction. The return of the same in Müller, however, provides an opportunity for explosion. Simply by giving Ophelia/Elektra this speech, Müller points to the fearful power of heterogeneity which is expressed when different desires come from the mouth of the gendered other. Although the women in the play can only be represented as other – because Müller is writing and signing as man – the shock of the speech makes Ophelia so heterogeneous that she cannot be subsumed so easily under patriarchal theatrical discourse. Through the repetition and remembrance of Ophelia, Inge Müller, Ulrike Meinhoff and Sharon Tate as victims<sup>185</sup> Müller does on the one hand point toward their sacrifice for European theatre, but on the other he recalls that they were sacrificed *as* other. Their heterogeneity can never be fully subsumed or repressed, it can always return again and again in moments of transgression and excess.

#### OPHELIA

*während zwei Männer in Arztkitteln sie und den Rollstuhl von unten nach oben in Mullbinden schnüren.*

Hier spricht Elektra. [...] Im Namen der Opfer. Ich stoße allen Samen aus, den ich empfangen habe. Ich verwandle die Milch meiner Brüste in tödliches Gift. Ich nehme die Welt zurück, die ich geboren habe. Ich erstickte die Welt, die ich geboren habe zwischen meinen Schenkeln. Ich begrabe sie in meiner Scham.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Müller claimed Meinhoff to be represented by the "Frau am Strick", see also *Krieg Ohne Schlacht*, p. 294. Tate, as victim of the Manson Family is brought to mind by the last line of the play, itself a quote from one of the arrested members speaking about Manson himself. Müller simply changed the "he" to "sie" in the translation.

<sup>186</sup> Müller, *Hamletmaschine*, op. cit., p. 97,

Bound and yet never fully suppressed, the simultaneous threat of the gendered other when she is remembered is made clear in the last lines of the play where she alone remains on the stage. That this threat gains its strength from its transgressive character is also emphasised in that the transgression remains within the discourse of the theatre, which must return her to her silent, motionless state.

Nieder mit dem Glück der Unterwerfung. Es lebe der Haß, die Verachtung, der Aufstand, der Tod. Wenn sie mit Fleischermessen durch eure Schlafzimmer geht, werdet ihr die Wahrheit wissen.<sup>187</sup>

This is no symbol of woman in the theatre, however, but the allegory of the culpability of Heiner Müller, the singular subject, writing. Through the remembrance by him of particular women in the theatrical tradition (which he, among others *wrote*), Müller seeks to address the constitutive role of the gendered other for his theatre. This constitutive nature can only be addressed aporetically for two reasons: firstly because that which constitutes his text is *other*; and secondly because what is constituted is *writing*. In other words, what is constituted bears the characteristics of signature, it was written by a particular person at a particular time. As such a signed and dated text it is structured in the most profound way by finitude. But finally, *by being* finite, singular and particular it is also iterable and repeatable, the text can be performed once again.

This is therefore the link between remembrance, the gendered other, signature and finitude. Each, by being an expression of the impossible and aporetic nature of community, helps Müller in his attempt to provide for the future of theatre, to ensure that it never sees itself as having completed its job. Such a completion could be achieved by theatre in two ways. Firstly, it would succeed in symbolising once and for all the world in its essence on stage, or furthermore theatre, in such symbolisation,

would enable society to reach its telos of development, thus making theatre superfluous. Müller seeks to resist both and he does so in order to maintain a degree of heterogeneity, social transgression and respect for the other – in other words, community – in the environment in which he writes. This, in turn, is not simply achieved by the political content of his work, but by dint of its having being written and performed *politically*. It is the nature of Müller's political community which this thesis has all along been attempting to address.

### *Conclusion*

We have come along way from the comedy of *Die Umsiedlerin* to the avant-garde challenge of *Hamletmaschine*. The fundamental argument of this thesis has been that the issues Müller was interested in addressing (the never-to-be realised community, the constitutive nature of the other in it, the importance of transgressive and heterogeneous practices in order to express it, and the necessity of remembrance in order to guarantee its future) could not be done justice given the form of his early work. The reasons for the development of Müller's theatre are thus to be found in the failure of this early work and its partial recuperation into the GDR hegemonic structures. *Die Umsiedlerin* and *Der Lohndrucker* nevertheless represent the beginnings of an autonomous theatre which seeks to bring about the effects of community through both the issues it addresses and the manner in which it is performed.

These earlier plays demonstrate that community could not be written and experienced by attempting to reinstate a homogeneous community of interpretation.

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<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*

Such homogeneity is expressed in the earlier texts by an implicit reliance on the state and the objectivity of its power. *Philoktet* represents a turn in Müller's writing. It is at this point that Müller seemed to recognise that the experience of community in the theatre (and thus the production of conditions which might be beneficial outside of the theatre itself) could only be effected by theatre showing its autonomy from outside concerns. Heterogeneous expenditure can only be experienced heterogeneously. By turning his theatre into allegory, Müller found a form of writing which allowed him to address the constitutive heterogeneity in community. Müller's allegory expresses finitude and singularity – the fact that time passes – and in so doing seeks to emphasise the importance of remembrance.

It is not only the victims of the political world outside who are caught up in this act of remembrance, however. Müller wants to remember those who have suffered either through the manner in which they have been represented in the theatrical tradition (in particular, women) or those who have suffered because of the necessity of theatre remaining autonomous. While on the one hand this autonomy allows theatre to effect an experience of community (by allowing the difference and heterogeneity which resides in community to come to expression in a heterogeneous manner), *on the other*, real political action and struggle to bring about the conditions of such heterogeneity in the society as a whole can only go on outside of the theatre. What is more, this political struggle necessitates succumbing to political goals and the instrumentality of more homogeneous discourses.

Müller's theatre remembers, therefore, not only the catastrophic nature of homogenous politics, but also its necessity. His theatre expresses in its transgressive and heterogeneous character (it is transgressive *because* heterogeneous) community, but also

the impossible, never achieved nature of that community. Finally, Müller's theatre brings about an experience of finitude and singularity, but does so in order to guarantee the future through the very fact that his theatre is always in decay and always needs to be performed again.

The most fitting testament to Müller's writing and theatre is just such one particular expression of finitude; that is, that Müller himself died. This thesis has (especially in Chapter One) attempted to examine what this demand means for literary critique and furthermore how literary critique must respond when faced with a literature (such as Müller's) which deliberately addresses this demand.

Just as Müller's earlier writing and what he wrote about – heterogeneity and transgression – fell victim to a recuperation by the GDR state ideology, so does critique run the risk of recovering for its own ends the surprise, alterity and danger of Müller's work, thereby repressing or *forgetting* its alterity. There would be a fundamental contradiction inhabiting any thesis which did not recognise this problem, also discussed in relation to comedy in Chapter Two, of *using* literature – that which is most singular – to make a point. And yet the singularity of literature's signature allows one to do just that. The response of the critic is thus analogous to that of Müller with regard to political intervention. S/he must retain the aporetic relation to the singular finitude of Heiner Müller and to the qualities that make his writing just that - a signed text. This is why this thesis has attempted to emphasise the importance of the "story" of the plays, of a finite history of Müller's writing career which ended in December 1995, when he died. By addressing the finitude and singularity of the author of *Die Umsiedlerin*, *Der Lohndrucker*, *Philoktet* and *Hamletmaschine* one approaches the problem of community, not only as theme in Müller's work, but as experience of his writing.

Müller himself chose to revisit his work and his signature, that is, to engage in remembrance of them and of their portrayal of victims (most importantly the other as gendered). This thesis has suggested that such remembrance, when one considers it in the context of transgressive practices within a community structured by the other and the other's death, allows the aporia of alterity and community to remain more-or-less intact. This then represents the demand, political or ethical, of Müller's work on the future interpreter, critic or producer which can either be taken up, ignored or denied. This thesis has attempted to do the former.

Müller himself declared himself disappointed with the attitude of some directors to his work. Instead of experimenting with his texts, with the history of those texts and with theatrical discourse as such, what often came out instead was precisely that form of theatre which Müller was trying to escape from. This, of course, can be regarded as the director's prerogative, but it is most puzzling when it is undertaken for the sake of Müller's name or his signature.

"Only when a text cannot be done in the theatre as it is now," Müller remarked in 1975, "can it be productive for the theatre, or interesting."

Müller considered his texts simply starting points for creation. "What often bores me in the productions [of my plays] is that they [the directors] simply illustrate what is already in the text, instead of using it as association material, as a kind of supernova, which inspires directors with ideas."<sup>188</sup>

The critic of Müller might thus be regarded as facing the same task. In order to respond seriously to Müller's work or, less polemically, to treat the works of literature by Heiner Müller *as* works of literature by Heiner Müller, s/he would do well to maintain the alterity of Müller and his work by addressing the *signature* which makes both possible. This also might help to keep Müller's work open for critics in the future.

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<sup>188</sup> Friedman, Dan. *Müller at Castillo*, <http://home.castillo.org/castillo/mullerbio.html>

This thesis has also hoped to demonstrate that the demands made upon the critic by the literariness and thus the finitude of the work of art might productively be answered by taking to heart that work of Walter Benjamin which concerns itself with this problem. The fact that both work of art and of critique are equally signed and finite is as strong an expression of the dialectical image as is possible. The very fact that remembrance and the dialectical image are possible, that one can remember the particular finitude of Heiner Müller and the decay of that which he wrote, demonstrates that any attempt to homogenise all lives and deaths under one sign can be undermined. It is not the case that the critic is thereby "faithful" to Müller, because these were his concerns as well. It is rather that the critic is thereby faithful to the work of literature as literature and not as anything else, and that Müller was concerned to produce literature and theatrical works which themselves resisted any attempt to suppress their literary, finite and signed nature. The critic can attempt, therefore, to enable them to resist any suppression of the fact that they were written by Heiner Müller himself.

Critique of Müller is thus the remembrance of his finitude and his signature, that is, of the possibility of iterability, the very possibility of literature itself, and finally, the very possibility of the argument of this thesis. It is precisely because Müller was able to revisit the theatrical tradition and engage in remembrance that I have described him as succeeding in producing a theatre which wrote community and effected its experience. The move from *Die Umsiedlerin* to *Hamletmaschine* represents the increasingly powerful expression of his signature and finitude and of the community in which he wrote.

It is because Müller's work is so clearly signed, I have argued, that the autonomy of the work comes equally clearly to the fore, thereby ultimately betraying and working

against any intentions, be they progressive or reactionary, that Müller may have had. The fact that his work is signed means that it does not belong to him, be he dead or alive. Such autonomy raises the danger, of course, of Müller's text being used for other ends. I have examined the problem of making life and work a symbol of a heroic figure, as well as that of philosophical *use* of a text, both of which ignore the signature of the work of literature. While such usage cannot be avoided (not least within the context of the argument of an academic thesis) I only hope to have shown, both through theoretical discussion and textual analysis, how criticism might proceed, in order at least to remember how Müller lived, wrote and died.

*Müller verraten, ohne ihn zu gebrauchen, ist Kritik*

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