CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LITERATURE

MUNDUS ARTIUM
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CONTENTS

RAINER SCHULTE
The Emergence of Multiple Voices: Contemporary German Poetry 8

WIELAND SCHMIED
Contemporary Art: Developments in German Painting from 1945 to the 70's 13

GÜNTER KUNERT—tr. Fritz H. König
Ideogram
Railways
Ad
Statue 18

SARAH KIRSCH—tr. Almut McAuley
Stop-Over
Attraction
The Window
Black Beans
Beside the White Pansies
I in the Sun of the Month of Your Dying
My Words Won't Obey Me
Bird of Prey 24

MICHAEL KRÜGER—tr. Von Underwood
Additional Poem
A Commissioned Poem 32

HELGA NOVAK—tr. Sammy McLean
A Shirt
Respect
Reborn 38

PAUL MONACO
Across the Great Divide: Young German Cinema in the 1970s 42
ANGELIKA MECHTEL—tr. Gisela de Marco  
Katrin  

GABRIELE WOHMANN—tr. Reinhard E. Walz  
Before the Wedding  

HEINZ LUDWIG ARNOLD—tr. Gisela de Marco  
Remarks on Literary Developments in the Federal Republic of Germany  

Eleven Poets translated by Herbert Kuhner  

CHRISTINE BUSTA  
Poems  

ERNST DAVID  
Steps  

ERNST NOWAK  
Without Thinking  

HEIDI PATAKI  
The Animal  

ERNST SCHEWIESE  
Everything is Only  

HELMUT H. STRADAL  
Words Between You and Me  

HELMUT ZENKER  
Note  

ERICH FRIED  
Speechless  

GERTRUD FUSSENEGGER  
The Word—This Boat  

HERMANN JANDL  
Aren’t to Blame  

ALBERT JANETSCHEN  
End Phase  

THEO BUCK—tr. Suzie Blaw  
Stages in the Development of German Drama Since 1945
BARBARA FRISCHMUTH—tr. Gisela de Marco  
Time to Read Chekhov  

WOLFDIETRICH SCHNURRE—tr. Gary Wilson  
Checking the Traps  

H.C. ARTMANN—tr. Derk Wynand  
Elk Tracks  
Tessa, The Girl in the Gas-Light of Nightfall  
The Wrecker of a Renowned Bordello  

HANS JÜRGEN FRÖLICH—tr. Zsuzsanna Ozsvath  
Intimidation Attempts  

KONRAD BAYER—tr. Reinhard E. Walz  
Criminal Attempts  

ROMAN RITTER—tr. Von Underwood  
The Neutron Bomb  

JÜRGEN THEOBALDY—tr. Von Underwood  
Something Like Peace  

Notes on Contributors
Diversity characterizes the contemporary German poetry scene. Hundreds of poets have been published in journals and anthologies during the last few years; the richness of that diversity can almost baffle the reader who tries to absorb the many voices that these poets have created and formulated. Some of them write with journalistic ease, while others engage in experimenting with the possibilities of language or redirect their attention to ordinary daily subject matters that sharply clash with poetic intentions of previous generations. It is too early to crystallize specific aesthetic directions among all of these poets. They are prolific in their diversity, but not necessarily in their poetic intensity.

Many of the same names appear regularly in German literary journals and on the list of German publishers: Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Peter Rühmkorf, Erich Fried, Helga Novak, Jürgen Theobaldy, Nicolas Born, Volker Braun, Reiner Kunze, Karl Mickel to name just a few. Those who have been translated into English have appeared mostly in literary journals rather than in book form. It is difficult to assess what kind of readership German poets have in America. When a German poet is translated into French, the context of the historical and cultural environment is still a European perspective. Many subject matters and ideological and aesthetic inclinations are shared by these two cultures; therefore, the sensibility of a new poet might become more directly accessible to the reader in the new language. When transplanted into the context of American culture, those premises frequently no longer hold true. Literary and historical traditions have followed totally different paths and goals, many of which are outside a European perspective. Therefore, a work that received attention and acclaim in France might find a totally opposite reaction in America. American internationalism includes the whole world, whereas German or French internationalism often focuses mainly on Europe. That difference in perspective has caused many difficulties and misunderstandings in the transferral of European works into the context of America. German poets compete with those of Latin America—Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, and others—who have gained a rather large readership in the United States and whose power of expression and imagination finds its roots and nourishment in mythological and historical traditions that recreate mystery and ambiguity rather than ordinary daily simplicity. Perhaps our times
crave a strong sense of impenetrable mystery to embellish our daily lives.

Curiously enough, writers and poets from Latin America have not had a great impact on contemporary German letters. When several German publishers tried a few years ago to promote translations of Latin American authors, they met with little enthusiasm from either critics or readers. Apparently, the sensibility that surfaces in the works of these Latin American writers constitutes a foreign element for Europeans, especially Germans, where different aesthetic orientations dominate the literary scene. Transplantations of creative insights from one country to another have always been a rather precarious phenomenon and no satisfactory answers have been found for the success of a writer in one country and his or her non-success in another country.

For a writer to find a favorable reception in another country, either an affinity of aesthetic inclinations must be present or the otherness of a new literary movement in a particular country be so strong that it automatically attracts curiosity and interest. In the context of German literature, we have seen this kind of transferral from Germany to the United States during the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century. The literary imagination of authors like Goethe, Schiller, Thomas Mann, and Rainer Maria Rilke met a receptive audience in this country and their creative impulses were favorably received by writers in the English-speaking world. That atmosphere has changed during the last two or three decades. The power of aesthetic and artistic innovations no longer has one of its most prominent sources in German literature. South American writers and even Japanese writers have excited the curiosity of American readers and publishers. It would be extremely difficult to formulate the particular differences in sensibilities as they are manifested in the literary works of these countries.

If in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the flow of exchange moved from Germany to the United States, this flow has been reversed in the last few decades. Many American authors are being translated into German and they readily find a German publisher. Many German poets have complained that it is easier to get a translation published in Germany than their own works. The transferral in book-length translations into English of German literature, especially poetry, leaves much to be desired and the fact that quite a few German poets have been badly translated into English does not help the situation.

The reverse flow of cultural and literary crossfertilization between the United States and Germany prompted several German poets to take their initial creative impulse from American poets, especially those poets who had achieved popular recognition by using poetry to describe the flatness of ordinary life rather than transforming what they saw through the power of the imagination. For the German poet and reader this attitude indeed constitutes a "revitalization of experience," which Wallace Stevens considered to be one of the most important prerequisites of poetry. However, when these German poets then were translated into English, the novelty of their writing was obviously not as great in this country as it was in Germany. And for that reason, many of the contemporary German poets when
translated into English appear flat and in the context of American poetry somewhat repetitious in their perceptions and insights.

Very few contemporary German poets write with the intensity of a Paul Celan, who died in 1970. Intensity requires a tremendous effort at internationalization of emotions and thoughts; it forces the poet to adjust to the levels of nuances inherent in a word or a sequence of words in order to reflect as closely as possible the thrust of a poetic thought process. Quite a few of the German poets have lost that attitude toward the word and its relations to the internalization of a perception. Their poetry has become more descriptive and indeed quite accessible upon a first reading. That shift in perspective might be responsible for the fact that so many poets are writing and publishing in Germany today. Three major anthologies published over the last few years attest to the prolific outpour: *In diesem Lande leben wir*, edited by Hans Bender; *Mit gemischten Gefühlen*, edited by Jan Hans, Uwe Herms and Ralf Thenior; and *Und ich bewege mich doch*, edited by Jürgen Theobaldy.

In addition to those poets who took American poetic models as their starting point, there are those German poets who used poetry almost entirely for the purpose of promoting political and social issues. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who is now in his fifties, clearly represents this political trend in German poetry. He used the medium of poetry to air his own political attitudes and aggressions. Without doubt, these poems were topical when they first appeared and served a specific social and political cause. Ten or twenty years after their date of publication, however, they have lost the impact they had when they first appeared in journals or anthologies. The strength of these poems relied on the particular topical nature of a subject. Once the focus shifted away from these subject matters, the poem’s impact began to weaken. And since the subject matters dealt with in these poems often were particular German concerns, the translation of these poems into the cultural environment of the American tradition made them less accessible to the average American reader, whose concerns happened to be quite different from those of a German reader.

Traces of American poets and their poetic expressions can be found in the works of quite a few German poets. At times the influence can be felt in the choice of subject matters, at times in the transferral of specific English words and phrases. We read in the German poem “und so ein Typ sitzt herum / totally stoned,” which translates into “some character is sitting around / totally stoned.” Naturally, the foreign flavor experienced in the original German by the use of the English words is lost in the translation.

Influences from one culture to another are healthy, but the nature of such influences has to go beyond the level of mere repetition. Poetry lives on the transformation that takes place between the poet and the subject matters he chooses to deal with. Either the tension inherent in a subject matter or the transformational perspective imposed on the subject by the poet will ultimately create the intensity of a poem. Perhaps what is particularly prominent in the works of contemporary German poets is this dilemma: a lack of intense situations that bring a poem to
explosion and instead an endless sequence of recording the uninteresting, commonplace events of a person's daily life. The titles of many poems support this statement: "A sort of Love of One's Neighbor," "Poem about the Kitchen Front," "Poem for Cats," "Birthday," "Everyday Happening," "Familiar News," "The Orange Juice Machine," "Some Things." In many of these poems the poet speaks about ordinary daily occurrences; he enumerates them without transforming them; he is the poet who uses his eyes like a photographic camera without setting up a specific angle of approach to his subject matter. The poem "Some Things" begins with these lines: "on the table/ there is a gray cloth/ on it an open pack of cigarettes..."

Günter Herburger formulated this tendency in German poetry when he wrote in 1967: "When I write, I actually write only for myself. Everything that I introduce is the result of my projections. I am the main character." Such an aesthetic and conceptual attitude toward the creation of poetry clearly indicates that any event in the daily life of a person can be elevated to the level of poetry. This attitude often results in lines that really move outside of the realm of poetry. One of the poems begins with these two lines: "At night I was too tired/ to put on my pajamas." If, line after line, a poem consists of merely recording insignificant items, then the transfer of those perceptions or non-perceptions into another language is quite questionable. How can these poets, when translated into English, compete with the poetic language and intensity of poets like W. S. Merwin, Galway Kinnell, Margaret Atwood, Alejandra Pizarnick, Melo Neto and Adonis, to name only a few international poets.

1970, with the death of Paul Celan, can be considered a kind of symbolic year when intensity of imagination and language took a different turn in German poetry. What caused the shift in the general poetic attitude during the sixties and seventies is difficult to pinpoint. Perhaps the reader had become tired of a poetic intensity that required the concentrated participation of the mind. Poetry was to adjust to the general decrease in mental intensity which had become suspect to critics and readers who, because of a lack of cultural and literary orientation, did not know how to approach and understand these poems. A general flattening of the poetic experience accompanied this attitude and made it difficult for critics and scholars alike to engage in an evaluative form of criticism. Writing about poetry became as indiscriminate as writing poetry itself.

What the younger generation of German poets needs is a closer contact and interaction with the international poetry scene beyond the boundaries of Europe. All too often, internationalism in Germany and in other European countries is seen as a European internationalism rather than as a world-wide internationalism. Poets live in the context of their immediate environment, and they should take their roots for their own poetry from that environment. However, for that poetry to be transplanted into another culture, it must move beyond the restrictions of purely regional and perhaps even national considerations and concerns. Great care, therefore, should be taken with the selection of poetic works for translation into English.
The dilemma of a restricted international orientation seems to be general in many Western countries. Poets like Octavio Paz, Pablo Neruda, Jorge Luis Borges, and many others spent a considerable amount of their lives studying poets from other countries. They maintained a dialogue, whether in person or on paper, with poets from countries in the East and the West. Their own poetic sensitivity was sharpened and directed by these interactions.

Current generations of poets have retreated from that practice and find themselves encased by local and regional interests. This phenomenon is even more amazing in an age when geographical distances have been made insignificant by modern technology. Whether the variety of expression or the sheer volume of material to be covered frightens the contemporary poet is difficult to assess. It could also be that the different aesthetic expressions that can be found in different countries threaten the poet’s own development, since he has to make a choice with respect to his own direction. When the poet sees his own poetic creation in a larger context—a context beyond his own national boundaries—he will be forced to make decisions with respect to the intensity of his own poetry seen and evaluated against international poetic and aesthetic perspectives. That tuning in to a larger frame of reference requires a poetic and intellectual strength that a poet might choose not to develop and follow.

Many contemporary German poets of the younger generation seem to be caught in that dilemma. They write ferociously and the number of volumes produced probably surpasses all previous poetic efforts in Germany. This outpouring of poetry is in one sense a very healthy situation, since it opens many channels of experimentation. And that aspect of experimentation characterizes the majority of current poetic productions in the German language. Whether these poets should be translated into English is a totally different question. What finds a response in Germany is not necessarily of interest to an English-speaking reader. What a publisher considers to be an excellent book to be translated into English is not necessarily an important book to be presented to the American reader. In that sense, both writer and publisher should take another look at this problem. Publishers should become educated in tuning in to the aesthetic sensibility of a country like the United States in order to understand that certain books should not be translated. Publishers might be well advised to work with those people in the United States who are familiar with the literary scene, who have both a national and international point of view and can place German writers into a context that would make them accessible to the English-speaking reader. Especially now that the split—politically and aesthetically speaking—between the United States and Germany is widening, a rethinking and reevaluation of previous methods of interaction on the literary and poetic level would be quite appropriate and indeed very timely.
No one has had as great an influence on the development of art in Germany in the immediate post-World War II years as Willi Baumeister (1889-1955), be it as a person, teacher or painter. Until 1944 he had found refuge as a member of the staff of Dr. Herbert's institute for painting technique at Wuppertal, where Schlemmer also worked for a time. It was in this period that Baumeister wrote his still topical book, "Das Unbekannte in der Kunst" (The Unknown in Art). When he was appointed to the Stuttgart Academy of Arts in 1946 he had a substantial corpus of works behind him, a long series of journeys of discovery which he then, in restless experimentation, proceeded to enrich with the phases of "Metaphysical Landscape," the "Ages of the World" and the "Gilgamesch allegories" of 1947 and — a climax — the "Montaru," "Monturi" and "Aru" pictures of 1953.

Together with Beckmann, Max Ernst and perhaps also Feininger, Baumeister was one of the few great artists whose postwar work compared favourably with his work before the war. Like Beckmann, but with different methods and in consistent abstraction, Baumeister preferred mythical themes. But it was not these which captivated his pupils, no matter how many forms Mexican temple and African rock pictures, ancient Oriental and Chinese hieroglyphics inspired him to create. What fascinated young people, to whom sobriety was more important than any echoes of the realm of myth, even if these eschewed direct symbolic readability, was his constant seeking, researching, analysing of his ways of painting and teaching. As a teacher, too, Baumeister, like Josef Albers, stayed ever a learner. Up to the end he was open to many influences and stimulations, none of which appear as foreign bodies in his work. He never aimed at the isolated "beautiful picture" but always thought in groups of works; it was not the single find that mattered to him, but the discovery of "fruitful" ground; indeed: his central concern was creative method.

In comparison with the topicality of Baumeister’s endeavours, the work and aims of Die Brücke (The Bridge), Der Blaue Reiter (The Blue Rider), Expressionism and the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), in some of its tendencies even the Bauhaus, appeared out of date, were less lively depiction, little, in any event, that would match and help to articulate the mood of the hour, nothing to which — in the majority view — it was possible to connect directly. What had happened in
Germany before the advent of Hitler was of less interest than what was then going on abroad — in France, Britain, or America.

Free abstraction generally appealed to the young artists as the one universally valid language, as the form of expression transcending national frontiers, the only aim which justified total personal commitment. Kandinsky, Klee, to some extent also Mondrian, were more attractive at the time than the contemporaries Picasso, Léger, Matisse, Braque, Kokoschka or Chagall. The hour of Léger and Matisse was still to come.

Whereas World War I and its experiences led to art which accused and rejected contemporary reality, none of this appeared depictable any longer in the immediate post-World War II years. There was no postwar development of painting relevant in any formal way, comparable to the German “rubble poetry.” The dismay was evidently felt in ways which were not directly expressible. It led to silence, to avoidance, to a world design abstracted from everything contemporary, actuality.

It was only loners such as Gilles, Grieshaber, Oelze, Ende and Purrmann whose work developed outside of all topical international trends, who out of an inner need clung to a partly real, partly dreamlike objectivity.

Only one of them, Werner Heldt (1904-1954), attempted to give direct expression to a world destroyed. Heldt began with Berlin milieu scenes: streets at night, lit up pubs, dark figures, a “Berlin from below.” At first sight it is only an ocean of rubble and ruins breaking upon the shore, destroyed destinies, expelled and washed up on the beach by the tides of human existence. But behind it is a Shakespearian dimension, in which location by the sea means being removed from earthly geography.

Werner Gilles (1894-1961) was also concerned with removing the world from earthly geography. Where to? Into a realm between reality and dreams. Ischia to him was a mythical landscape, the home of Orpheus, with the chasm of Hades and ghosts wandering the shore, and the rocky caverns to him were entrances to the Underworld. Gilles saw the interior of these mountains, painted them like glass, their secret arterial and nervous systems. His landscapes seem composed of many fragments, of found mosaic pieces joined together.

While the dreamy reality of Heldt and Gilles is a uniquely German phenomenon, the art of Hans Purrmann (1880-1966), who emerged from the Café du Dôme circle and supervised studies at the Académie Matisse, was decisively fructified by the mainstreams of European art, especially Fauvism. While many of his contemporaries still sought in later years to link up with a mostly misunderstood abstractionism but failed to progress beyond decoration and sentiment, he stuck consistently to painting his Ticino, Florentine and Ischian landscapes, his Roman gardens and florid still-lifes, as perhaps the last of a generation with an unbroken belief in reality. In contrast to Gilles, Ischia to him was not a myth, but nature, an inexhaustible object and theme.

There are only isolated flashes of surrealism: in Berlin (Trökes, Zimmermann), Munich (Ende, Schlichter) and, most pronounced, Lower Saxony (Oelze,
Radziwill). Surrealism was to come into its own in the late 1950's and early 60's, and even then only hesitantly. There long remained the uneasy feeling that one was sneaking a gaze into taboo gardens, was partaking of forbidden fruits. Even the reacquaintance with the works of Dada, the reception of Kurt Schwitters (and then Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann) which had immediately preceded it, came off comparatively more simply.

A belated Expressionism — which surprisingly even attracted figures like Otto Dix — dominated the immediate postwar years. Orientation to Klee and Kandinsky — predominantly to their Bauhaus period output — may have internalised and poetically inspired the mode of expression of many who by disposition might have tended towards Expressionism; leading figures such as Baumeister, soon followed by Nay and Winter, made the step to abstraction appear like a liberation from many constraints, showing exemplarily how chiffres readable in many ways could clarify into the large form.

But the more radical step forward was taken in France by two painters of German origin, Wols and Hans Hartung, the step to an "informal" art following only psychic impeti, directly and spontaneously expressing moving forces. Its revolutionary élan was eagerly and broadly absorbed, first by the Frankfurt "Quadriga" and in the Rhineland, where the "Group 53" became one of its strongholds. Often misunderstood or watered down, this art was ultimately to penetrate to the remotest provincial corners. Very soon everyone disposing of expressive talent — and that was quite a number — appeared to be swept along by the movement and won over by abstract Expressionism.

The self-assertion of a few had become the pioneering deed lauded by many, to which any artist wanting to be contemporaneous had to aspire. The progressive impetus of poetically 'expressive' abstraction waned as quickly as it bid to become an established "style." The revolutionising zest rigidified into decorative arabesques. The postwar regeneration of art had turned into reaction. What had gone wrong? Had a chance been wasted?

A group of artists too young to have experienced more than the closing stages of the war launched out on a new start. To them the war's horrors had not become the central experience. They turned against all melancholy aestheticism, against the "lust to perish," which marked the pessimism of part of contemporary popular cultural criticism, and postulated a new optimism.

The ideas which had led to Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism and those which had emanated from them, resurged. In their train there developed Nouveau Réalisme, Pop art and Op art, Hard-edge, Primary Structures and Minimal Art, there triumphed happenings, kinetics and ultimately a new photographic realism. Pluralism threw painting wide open. The most contrasting movements were now received in Germany without delay (albeit not of course in all their facets), many of them gaining special accentuations here; indeed, German artists decisively helped to shape and support them. The German art scene has enjoyed international recognition since the mid-1960's.

But no sooner was world recognition achieved than a deep crisis set in.
Fundamental doubts about the function and meaning of art eroded the newly confirmed self-confidence of the artists. Time and time again art struggled to escape its commercialisation, its rapid acceptance and eager consumption. In movement after movement it tried to extricate itself from the embrace of a society marked by affluence, thoughtlessness, prestige and profit-striving, to flee beyond the reach of the establishment—all the while becoming more and more isolated. To no avail: even in its isolation, society caught up with and claimed it, putting a market price on even the most radical gesture of refusal. Struggle as it might, art failed to break through to the new public it yearned to reach, to cut loose from the firmly established mechanics of distribution, interpretation and absorption, the tightly-knit world of galleries, art societies, critics and collectors.

Where do we stand now? With fewer illusions and greater sobriety, more and more artists appear ready to accept the market and museum facts of life, the narrow scope of artistic activity and its results and effects. The new sobriety, this recognition of societal compulsions and conditions, appears to have restored to them the inner freedom to realise themselves or to express their doubt that any self-realisation is possible at all, to seek an objective language of open communication or to articulate its failure, to work at the sensitising of perception, or grope for its limits.

Nothing remains of the enthusiasm of the first setting-out for the horizons of abstract Expressionism, and the optimism of the second fresh start, borne by the light euphoria of the Group Zero and the gaiety of the consumer world as conveyed to us by Pop art, appears more questionable to us than ever before.

But work goes on, art is produced, pictures are painted again. A school committed to realism — registering objectively or composing coolly — seems interested in formal insights. And there is a school of “calculated” abstraction, beyond geometrics, charged with new sensibility, which has integrated the experiences of concept art, yet insists that first and foremost it is painting. It would be a long list of names now, with others joining it in a few years, and ultimately few remaining. Here we pause, reflecting not without wonder upon the multiplicity and diversity of the personalities and strivings, the designs and the results.

Post-1945 German painting cannot be described from the point of view of a uniform development. The changes in modern art can only inadequately be dealt with in such terms today. That does not, of course, relate to the work of the individual artist, which can evolve slowly and consistently (as did Heldt’s, Nay’s, Bissier’s, Oelze’s or Geiger’s, to name but these few so contrasting painters) or just as readily in sudden “leaps.” Several such “leaps” occurred in the development of Goetz, Schultze, Sonderborg, Pfahler, Quinte or Gerhard Richter, to name but these. There is no “development” in Josef Albers’ conception of “Huldigung an das Quadrat” (Homage to the Square) nor in Schröder-Sonnenstern’s “lunar-moralischer Kosmos” (lunar-moral cosmos). But development of the individual artist’s work is not the issue here. The issue is whether any continuous line of development can be drawn from 1945 to the mid-1970’s, and that question has to be answered in the negative. This calls for a distinction. Although one
cannot speak of any chronological succession of isms or styles, certain lines of
development can be traced. Sometimes they meet and knot, "intertwine," as it
were, then break apart again and proceed separately. Many such strands of
development run "underground" for a long time, suddenly to resurface and
continue visibly. Liberation of the artist’s personal style from conventional bonds,
as expressed in Tachism and Action painting, derives from the unconditional
striving for expression of Expressionism; but also part of its specific character is
continuation of some surrealist aspects, such as the idea of an "écriture auto­
maticque"; to this must be added acutely felt problems such as the formulation of a
spatial continuum, which seems to do away with left and right, top and bottom.
Hans Hartung went beyond his early abstract-expressionist colour moods to limit
himself to expression of the gesture — the "psychogram"; Nay, on the other
hand, overcame the expressive distortions of the Lofoten pictures to concentrate
on realising harmonious colour tones; Wols directed his fascination through
surrealism into introspective dreamworld areas where intimacy and freedom
strangely fused; Schultz moved from tortured pictures of a fantastic reality to the
freedom of a fantastic Tachism and, returning to his surrealist beginnings, formed
something of his own from it in a "leap forward," a fanciful variant of Pop art.

Varied as the results arrived at by Hartung, Nay, Wols and Schultze may
appear to be, their paths ran parallel for shorter or longer periods as they responded
to similar impeti or strove for related goals before they ultimately parted completely.
Mack and Piene overlaid their originally informal pictures with strict structura­
tions to free them from the weight of matter and make them instruments of move­
ment — a surprising development, turning many Tachist tendencies into their
opposites; but it is not merely the private, isolated development of one artist’s
work, but typical of the time.

Another line of development could be drawn from the "Neue Sachlichkeit"
(New Objectivity) pictures of the 1920’s, e.g. by Carl Grossberg, to Konrad
Klapheck. This line also absorbed Dadaist influences (the machine pictures of
Picabia), surrealism (the spaces of Tanguy) and a constructivistic objectivity
(Léger). What painting is like which stays exclusively within the range of Neue
Sachlichkeit, absorbing no other "influxes," may be exemplified by Fritz Köthe.

Richard Oelze’s path ran in another direction. He began with Neue Sach­
lichkeit pictures in 1928 and progressed through a surrealist ultra-objectivity to a
minutely determined surrealist abstraction. This, too, was a development
running counter to others while remaining internally consistent. Bissier or Radzi­
will, on the other hand, who also started in Neue Sachlichkeit, each arrived at
completely different results.

These few examples may help to illuminate why we hesitated to put this
outline under the aspect of one development or to categorise by set lines of
development: not because we meant to ignore the "red thread" of various
developments which does indeed exist, but because there are too many of them,
too varied and divergent for their complex evolution to have lent itself to a useful
schematisation.
Günter Kunert

IDEOGRAMM

Der alltägliche Besuch von Bakterien:
viel zu bescheiden, vorm Eintreten anzuklopfen.
Gewaltige Briefmarken, an denen man
sich totlecken kann.
Riesige Nadeln mit engen Ohren,
durch die es uns treibt.
Und das unzerreissbare Kabel Marke Ariadne,
an dem wir uns vorantasten
in den Rachen, der prompt uns verschlingt:
Oh, der letzte Zahnschmerz unseres Lebens,
wie einmalig doch ist er
für die ihn empfinden dürfen:

mächtig ist alles Nichtige,
das Mosaikgestein,
aus dem das Bild unseres Daseins besteht:
für Kunstausstellungen ungeeignet.

Günter Kunert

EISENBAHNNEN

Was fährt da in den Waggons
kreuz und quer über die Karte Europas
ausser künftigen Leichen, baldigem Abfall,
werdendem Schrott?

Was fährt da in den Waggons
und denkt sich nichts Böses, sondern Schlimmeres,
nämlich gar nichts dabei?
Günter Kunert

IDEOGRAM

The daily visit of bacteria
too modest to knock
before entering.
Giant postage stamps
on which one can lick
himself to death.
Gigantic needles with tiny eyes
through which we are driven.
And the tearproof cable brand name Ariadne
by which we feel our way
into the gullet that promptly devours us:
O the last toothache of our life
how very unique it is
for those who may endure it:

mighty is nothingness
the mosaic
composing the image of our existence:
for art exhibits
unsuitable.

Günter Kunert

RAILWAYS

What travels in trains
crisscrossing the map of Europe
besides corpses to be, future garbage,
scrap metal soon?

What travels in trains
with no bad thoughts, but worse
with no thoughts at all?
Was ist unterwegs von hier nach da
und hat doch kein Ziel?

Was hat kein Ziel
und sieht doch eines vor sich?

Und was ist an der Endstation
enttäuscht von der Endstation?

Kolben verschlissen, der Kessel zerrostet,
letzter Pfiff und letzter Dampf,
aber die Einfahrt ins Mausoleum
wird nur einem Exemplar freigegeben.

Alle andern erwartet Gevatter Schneidbrenner
im Bezirk der Hochofen, aus denen
wieder hervorgeht,
was fraglos über die alten Gleise rollt:
erneuert, nicht gewandelt.

**Günter Kunert**

**ANZEIGE**

Sie befliegeln nicht die Fantasie
wie ihre Vorgänger
die abgerissenen Häuser: abends
in ihrer düster verschleierten Schäbigkeit
traten sie auf die städtische Bühne
mit Fenstern
leuchtender Dotter auf schwarzlichem Grund
jedes ein jeden Abend wiederholtes Versprechen
strahlender Einmaligkeit: Du dahinter
einzigartiger Inhalt
du heimlicher Schrecken heimliche Lust
hinter grauer Gardine verstaubt
mein Leben und du mein fremdes Leben
denn das eine zehrt vom Schein und Anschein
des andern: meine Bettgenossin
war ein zerfließender Schatten
What is always moving
without destination?

What has no destination
and sees one anyway?

And what at the last stop
is disappointed by the last stop?

Pistons worn out, boiler rusted
last whistle and last breath of steam,
but only one engine
may pull in
to the mausoleum.

Brother fire expects all the others
in the realm of furnaces
from which reemerges
what unquestionably rolls
down the old tracks:
refurbished, not changed.

Günter Kunert

AD

They do not animate fantasy
like their predecessors
the torn down houses: in the evening
they come on the municipal stage
in their darkly veiled shabbiness
with windows
bright yolks on blackish background
each one each evening a repeated promise
of shining uniqueness:
you prominent content
you secretive horror of secret pleasures
dusty behind gray curtains
my life and you my strange life
since the one seemingly lives off
the resemblance to the other:
my bed partner was a merging shadow
eine gläserne Birne meine Qual
ein leerer Käfig meine Hoffnung
ein plötzliches Lampendunkel mein Ende:
abgeblätterte herbstliche Tapeten
verrieten mir die Geschichte der Stadt
Prellsteine vor Torbogen erteilten
philosophischen Ratschlag
und die Muster des Regens

Auf erloschenen Fassaden lehrten mich
die Kunst und die Kunst des Erkennens:
zwischen den Strassen von Nagasaki und Detroit,
Warschau und Rotterdam, ausgestreckt
bis zum Alexanderplatz in Berlin, in der
fleissig erstellten Ödnis ein verirrter Vogel
flugunfähig.

Günter Kunert

DENKMAL

Ob Nebel oder Dunst der Abfallhalden,
ob Schnee, ob Regen oder Sonnenschein,
hier stürzt der Mensch als Denkmal seiner
selbst einfach in sich selber ein.

Gras wächst, vergilbt und wächst aufs Neue,
und überzieht die Massengräber ungestört,
ein Kopf aus Marmor und ein Herz aus Kalkstein,
das über gar nichts sich empört.

An Strassenecken oder auch an trüben Teichen,
auf einem Sockel, einem meist gemiednen Platz,
beschneit, umwolkt, verregnet und vergessen,
und im Granit ein knapper Satz.

So fordern die Geschlechter voneinander
Gedenken und Gefolgschaft durch die Zeit,
as gäbe es nicht Schnee, nicht Regen,
recht Sonne, nicht Vergänglichkeit.
my torment a glass bulb
my hope an empty cage
my finale suddenly doused lights
wall paper crumbling in the fall
told me the story of the city
arch-protecting stones
give philosophical counsel
and the patterns of rain

on extinguished façades taught me
art and the art of understanding.
Between the streets of Nagasaki and Detroit
Warsaw and Rotterdam extended
to Alexanderplatz in Berlin
in the eagerly contrived emptiness:
a stray bird
with broken
wings.

Günter Kunert

STATUE

Whether fog or mist of garbage dumps
whether sunshine, rain or snow
man—a statue of himself
crumbling in a single blow.

Grass grows, withers, grows anew
and covers mass graves undisturbed
heads of marbles, limestone hearts
untroubled—cannot be hurt.

On streetcorners or in murky ponds
an empty pedestal in a deserted place
forgotten in snow and clouds and rain
chiseled in granite one brief phrase.

Thus one generation asks of the other
to follow in its course through time
as if there were no snow no rain
no sun—no dying.
Sarah Kirsch

ZWISCHENLANDUNG

Wenn es auf Weihnachten geht
kehren die Dichter
zu ihren tüchtigen Frauen zurück
Ach was sind sie das ganze Jahr
über die Erde gelaufen
was haben sie alles gehört was
nachgedacht, ihre Zeitung geschrieben
durch Fabriken gestiegen, den Kartoffeln
brachten sie menschliche Umgangsformen bei, sahn
dem Rauch nach der kriecht und steigt
sie haben alles geschluckt manchmal Manhattan-
Cocktails wegen des Namens, sie verschärften
den Klassenkampf meditierten
über das Abstrakte bei Fischen, bis eines Tags
durch ihre dünnen Mäntel die Kälte kommt
Sehnsucht
nach einem wirklichen Fisch in der Schlüssel
sie jäh überfällt und Erinnerung
an die Frau die sich am Feuer gewärmt hat
da bleibt
der Zorn in den grossen Städten zurück, sie kommen
mit seltsamen Hüten für ihre Kinder
spülen sogar Wäsche spielen Klavier, bis
sie es satt haben nach Neujahr, da
brechen sie Streit vom Zaun, gehen erleichtert
weg in den Handschuh von unterm Weihnachtsbaum

Sarah Kirsch

ANZIEHUNG

Nebel zieht auf, das Wetter schlägt um. Der Mond versammelt
Wolken im Kreis. Das Eis auf dem See hat Risse und reibt sich.
Komm über den See.
Sarah Kirsch

STOP-OVER

When Christmas comes
the poets return
to their efficient wives
Oh how they’ve spent the year
scuttling all over the globe
the things they’ve heard and
thought about, they’ve written reports
crawled through factories, instructed
potatoes in human behavior, observed
the upward motion of smoke
they’ve swallowed everything sometimes Manhattans
because of the name, intensified
the struggle of the classes, meditated
upon the abstraction of fish, until one day
the cold comes through their flimsy coats
and suddenly
they’re overcome by longing
for a real fish in the bowl and remember
the woman who’d warmed herself by the fire
and then
they leave their rage behind in the big cities, they come
with outlandish hats for the children
even do the laundry, play the piano until
they’re fed up again after New Year’s so
they pick a fight and, relieved, they go
away again in the gloves from under the tree

Sarah Kirsch

ATTRACTION

Fog rises, the weather is changing. The moon gathers clouds in a circle. The ice on the lake has cracks which rub against each other. Come over the lake.
Sarah Kirsch

DAS FENSTER

Die vielen Himmel über
Sehr flachem Land! Im ersten
Fliegen die Elstern, im zweiten

Hochfahrende Wolken. Der dritte
Für Lerchen. Im vierten
Sah ich ein Flugzeug stehn.

Aus dem fünften funkelt der Stern.
Die toten Schmetterlinge auf den Dielen.
Bevor es zerfällt, verkauft man ein Haus.

Sarah Kirsch

SCHWARZE BOHNEN

Nachmittags nehme ich ein Buch in die Hand
Nachmittags lege ich ein Buch aus der Hand
Nachmittags fällt mir ein es gibt Krieg
Nachmittags vergesse ich jedweden Krieg
Nachmittags mahle ich Kaffee
Nachmittags setze ich den zermahlenen Kaffee
Rückwärts zusammen schöne
Schwarze Bohnen
Nachmittags ziehe ich mich aus mich an
Erst schminke dann wasche ich mich
Singe bin stumm
Sarah Kirsch

THE WINDOW

So many skies over
Such a flat landscape! The first
Is full of magpies, in the second

High-flying clouds. The third
For the larks. In the fourth
I saw an airplane framed.

A star winks from the fifth.
Dead butterflies on the floorboards.
One sells a house before it falls apart.

Sarah Kirsch

BLACK BEANS

In the afternoon I pick up a book
In the afternoon I put down a book
In the afternoon I remember war
In the afternoon I forget any war
In the afternoon I grind coffee
In the afternoon I put the ground coffee
Back together beautiful
Black Beans
In the afternoon I get undressed get dressed
First I put on make-up then wash myself
Sing am silent
Sarah Kirsch

BEI DEN WEISSEN STIEFMÜTTERCHEN

Bei den weissen Stiefmütterchen
im Park wie ets mir auftrug
stehe ich unter der Weide
ungekämmt Alte blattlos
siehst du sagt sie er kommt nicht

Ach sag ich er hat sich den Fuss gebrochen
eine Gräte verschluckt, eine Strasse
wurde plötzlich verlegt oder
er kann seiner Frau nicht entkommen
viele Dinge hindern uns Menschen

Die Weide wiegt sich und knarrt
kann auch sein er ist schon tot
sah blass aus als er dich untem Mantel küssst
cann sein Weide kann sein
so wollen wir hoffen er liebt mich nicht mehr

Sarah Kirsch

ICH IN DER SONNE DEINES STERBEMONATS

Ich in der Sonne deines Sterbemonsats
ich im geöffneten Fenster
ich betreibe Gewohntes: trockne
gewaschenes Haar

Schaukeln fliegen
am Augenwinkel vorbei, Wespen
stelzen auf faulenden Birnen
angesichts weisser Laken
schreit der Wäschereihund: er ist noch klein

Flieg Haar von meinem Kamm
flieg zwischen Spinnenfäden
schwarzes Haar totes Haar
eben noch bei mir
Sarah Kirsch

BESIDE THE WHITE PANSIES

Beside the bed of white pansies
in the park as he told me to do
I stand under the willow
unkempt old woman leaf-bare
see she says he isn’t coming

Oh I say he broke his foot
choked on a fish bone, a street
was suddenly re-routed or
he can’t get away from his wife
many things thwart us humans

The willow sways and creaks
could also be he’s already dead
looked pale when he kissed you under your coat
could be willow could be
let’s hope then he doesn’t love me anymore

Sarah Kirsch

I IN THE SUN OF THE MONTH OF YOUR DYING

I in the sun of the month of your dying
I in the opened window
I do what I usually do: dry
washed hair

Swings fly
past the corner of my eye, wasps
stalk over rotting pears
at the sight of white sheets
the laundry dog yelps: he’s still small

Fly hair from my comb
fly among spider threads
black hair dead hair
a moment ago still mine
Sarah Kirsch

MEINE WORTE GEHORCHEN MIR NICHT

Meine Worte gehorchen mir nicht
Kaum hör ich sie wieder mein Himmel
Dehnt sich will deinen erreichen
Bald wird er zerspringen ich atme
Schon kleine Züge mein Herzzschlag
Ist siebenfach geworden schickt unaufhörlich
Und kaum verschlüsselte Botschaften aus

Sarah Kirsch

RAUBVOGEL

Raubvogel süß ist die Luft
So kreiste ich nie über Menschen und Bäumen
So stürz ich nicht noch einmal durch die Sonne
Und zieh was ich raubte ins Licht
Und flieg davon durch den Sommer!
Sarah Kirsch

MY WORDS WON’T OBEY ME

My words won’t obey me
Their echo too faint to hear my sky
Reaches out to touch yours
Soon it will burst already
I gasp for breath my heart
Beats seven times too fast and sends out
Signals unceasingly and barely coded

Sarah Kirsch

BIRD OF PREY

Bird of prey the air is sweet
Never did I soar above men and trees like this
Never again will I swoop like this through the sun
And lift what I robbed into the light
And fly away through the summer!
Die Zeichen sprechen
eine andere Sprache:

das ist ihr gutes Recht.
Wir haben uns zu fest
auf ihre Zweideutigkeit
verlassen,

jetzt sind wir beleidigt
und schweigsam. Schon wieder

sitzen wir fest
auf fremden Stühlen und wühlen
ergeben in Papierbergen. Vieles
reimt sich wieder,

was uns vor ein paar Jahren
wie ein Versprecher vorkam.
ADDITIONAL POEM

The signs speak
a different speech;

it's their right to.
We've depended too
firmly on their
ambiguities,

now we are hurt
and silent. Once again

we sit firmly
on unfamiliar chairs and burrow
monkishly into mountains of paper. A lot
is riming again

which a few years ago we
took for a slip of the tongue.
Michael Krüger

GEDICHT ÜBER EINEN
SPAZIERGANG AM STAUSEE UND ÜBER GEDICHTE

Ein Auftragsgedicht


Michael Krüger

POEM ABOUT A WALK BY THE RESERVOIR AND ABOUT POEMS

A Commissioned Poem

It got unbelievably cold in the evening. I buried my nose in the fur of your collar. A long embrace was unavoidable. We stood there like horses, nestled and nickering, and trembled with the cold. I said: When the night sinks, my heart rises up / netted with dew like the pumpkin flowers / and had to laugh out loud, a sudden impulse to laugh in this horrible cold.

You’ll see, it’ll go on like this forever, you said just as suddenly. The theory of opting out will be well paid, self- alienation is not to be thought of. Revolutions happen somewhere else. But I haven’t seen them, not a tremor, nothing. With up- turned collar, a discussion of complex structures. That can be expressed in words: the unbearableleness steadily increases, visibly increases. Look out, we’re in the middle of a poem. That was your idea. To talk about speech and speak about silence, that is a pretty pitiful idea, too. And we keep in mind where these ideas come from. We have a lot in mind. We know the long, thunderous applause of the connoisseurs.


And if all of this were no more, what then? A hole? a jagged crack, a ditch? A strange occurrence, that at the least, and purely improvised. But with our long range interests, we cover everything up. Hastily, I formulate a New Theory of the Old Suffering, but the coldness increases, the tiredness, as well. We've got to invent a new culture immediately, I say, in an ill temper. But what do we do with the old one? Simply throwing away the entire world, that won't do. Out in nature, you become childish was your answer. It was the right answer.

Two double-Jägermeisters, bread and boulettes with mustard. As the proprietress came nearer, I spoke more loudly and made a grand sweep with my arm. That you noticed immediately. One finger is as good as the whole hand, a single sentence spoils the company in the head. I invent a biography of the lady for you. In winter, there is almost no one here. I closed with a flourish: a lovely, simple life. You found that fitting. In the juke-box exclusively German hits.

In the car, on the drive back, half drunk, a theory of communication. The head billowed smoke, so it goes in life. Through the light on red, that was only natural. You are reactionary when you mull things over, that's true. As for progress, nothing comes to mind. On the edge of town I had to vomit, a steaming spot in the snow. So much for my style, I promised, that was about 4 in the morning.

The night was nearly over then. So many words and admittedly a little luck. Out of it comes a longer poem, as promised. A lucky man can live from something like this. A lucky man stops at that.
**Helga Novak**

**EIN HEMD**

der Wacholder duckt sich
kraucht über die Steine
vor der Reife erfrieren die Beeren
kein Becher fasst sie ein

meine Liebe lachte viel
deshalb schlug ich sie
ein Hemd rief sie ein Hemd
wozu braucht sie ein Hemd
die Pfeile sind gebrochen
ein Hemd rief sie ein Hemd
sie liebte mich tatsächlich
wozu überhaupt ein Hemd
wenn ich mich auf sie lege

in meinem Land erfrieren
die Wacholderbeeren grün
niemand braut aus ihnen
meine Liebe lachte viel

**Helga Novak**

**RESPEKT**

ich zerreisse dein Bild von mir
der Fotograf hat es für ein Lächeln gemacht
keine Ecke meines Stuhles sei dir angeboten
das bewahrt dich vor dem Sturz
mein Morgenmund bleibt verschlossen
und erspart dir den Nachgeschmack
mein Hemd
das ich in deine windigen Klagen hänge
ist taub und ungerührt
**Helga Novak**

**A SHIRT**

the juniper bends low  
creeps across stones  
the berries freeze before they ripen  
no calyx encloses them

my love laughed a lot  
that's why I beat her  
a shirt she cried a shirt  
why does she need a shirt  
the arrows are broken  
a shirt she cried a shirt  
she really loved me  
why does she need a shirt  
when I lie over her

in my country the juniper berries  
freeze green  
no one cooks them  
my love laughed a lot

---

**Helga Novak**

**RESPECT**

I'm tearing up your picture of me  
the photographer made it for a smile  
no part of my chair will be offered to you  
you'll be protected from falling  
my morning mouth will stay closed  
and spare you its aftertaste  
my shirt  
which I hang in your thoughtless complaints  
is deaf and untouched
als Zeuge gegen dich nicht unter Eid zu stellen  
ich schicke dich nach Hause  
kann ich mehr für dich tun  
lenke mein Pferd unfahrbare Wege  
um dir nicht in die Quere zu kommen  
um dir die Süsse nicht zu verleiden  
pflücke ich meine Trauben von einem anderen Stock  

Helga Novak  
NEU GEBOREN  
heute am dritten verschneiten Dienstag im Oktober  
bin ich neu geboren  
ich gehe mit keinem mehr mit  
wozu noch in fremden Küchen herumkrauchen  
ich suche eine Mahlzeit dann verschwinde ich  
ich gehe mit keinem mehr mit  
ich habe genug  
von meinen eignen Versprechungen  

heute am dritten verschneiten Dienstag im Oktober  
bin ich neu geboren  
ich gehe mit keinem mehr mit  
ich stehle mir ein Feiertagsschiff gross und weiss  
und hundert gebratene Kälber dazu  
und eine Südlandsonne die nie verlischt aber nie  
damit fahre ich ab  
ich gehe mit keinem mehr mit  

du komm du  
komm wir tanzen  
ich liebe dich doch
to prevent you from bearing witness against yourself
I send you home
can I do more for you
I guide my horse on impassable roads
so I won't cross your path
so I won't spoil the sweetness
I pluck my grapes from another vine

Helga Novak

REBORN

today on the third snowed-in Tuesday of October
I'm reborn
I won't go with anyone anymore
why creep around in strange kitchens
I'll catch a meal and disappear
I won't go with anyone anymore
I've had enough
of my own promises

today on the third snowed-in Tuesday of October
I'm reborn
I won't go with anyone anymore
I'll steal a holiday ship big and white
and a hundred roast calves
and a southern sun that never goes out but I'll
never leave
I won't go with anyone anymore

you come you
come let's dance
I love you I do
ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE: 
YOUNG GERMAN CINEMA IN THE 1970s

PAUL MONACO

Since the First World War, film-making in Europe has produced five distinct, innovative, and relatively unified epochs of movie art. Expressionism in the German cinema was the first of these, inaugurated in 1919 with the production of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. The most recent had been the French “New Wave” that began at the end of the 1950s. In between appeared expressive realism in the Soviet cinema of the late 1920s, naturalism in French films in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, and neorealism in Italian motion pictures right after the war. For all the triumphs in cinematic art of individual movies or clusters of them, elsewhere and at other times, these bursts of creative activity remain high points in the history of cinema.

On the surface these five periods of innovative film-making appear to have little in common with one another. Across national boundaries and across time they are unified neither by common patterns of film industry organization and financing, nor by common ideological intentions, nor by agreement on how best to conceptualize and to enact film art. A thorough-going structuralist interpretation of the connecting links between these five epochs remains elusive and highly problematic.

At the beginning of the 1970s a spate of movies produced in the German Federal Republic began attracting international attention and critical acclaim akin to that which had greeted each of the five great epochs in European cinema previously. The phenomenon was quickly given a name or, more specifically, two interchangeable labels: “New” German Cinema or “Young” German Cinema. The former suggested the influence of the French “New Wave” on German production, and alluded to the postponed revival of the cinema on German soil after the Second World War. That revival, held in abeyance through the culturally bleak and emotionally conservative 1950s, came to be courted consciously in the early 1960s. Only at the very end of the 1960s, however, did the courting start to pay off. It focused on the youthfulness of the film-makers who led the revival (most of them born after 1940), as well as the apparent generational characteristics of their productions. That meant something more than a mere pandering to youthful tastes which is a commonplace of nearly all contemporary cinema, given that, in the western world, roughly three-quarters of the audience for movies presented in theaters is under twenty-five years of age. Rather, the young Germans were bent on developing a film art that seemed appropriate to the expression of ideological positions that might be described as “New Left.”
The cinema, everywhere and always, confronts particularly complicated economic and social problems with regard to motion picture production, distribution, and presentation. In some places and at some times the debates over these issues are invested with remarkable emotional energy and ideological zeal. This has been the case in the German Federal Republic since the early 1960s. To discuss the emergence of the many film-making collectives, committees, initiative groups, and front organizations in the "Young" German Cinema would require an entire volume. To fill in the history of these entities with a survey of the positions taken in pursuit of ideological and creative breathing space would likely take a second one.

The external problems the "Young German Cinema" has confronted are simple to list: 1. the issue of government subsidies for film production; 2. the relationship of film production to the state-coordinated West German television networks; 3. problems of distribution of films and private ownership of movie theaters; 4. the glut of foreign films in the German Federal Republic, especially those produced in the United States; 5. the financing of production in a medium in which unit costs are high and economic risk is great.

These issues have a long prehistory, and an especially salient one in Germany, dating back to the 1920s. Some German municipalities opened communally-owned movie theaters in 1919, and the Social Democrat Party supported the principle of them as part of its official platform until 1922. Government subsidies for film production were a perennial issue in the twenties, usually answered deviously and through the back door. The debate over how to protect German productions from foreign competition, especially movies from Hollywood, sizzled on and off until 1925 when a quota law on imported films went into effect in Germany. (It failed, and was abandoned in 1928.) Strictly speaking, the question of the relationship of state-run television to film production is a new wrinkle, but in essence it is merely an extension of time-worn themes related to production, distribution, and presentation. The politics, economics, and sociology of the cinema have changed surprisingly little since the First World War, contrary to what we might otherwise think.

The ins-and-outs and ups-and-downs of movie-making and film distribution/exhibition in the German Federal Republic, however, are topics I leave to others gladly. So, for that matter, is the passion for considering Young German films in light of the expressed intentions of those who make them. The Young German Cinema is, undoubtedly, a highly self-conscious phenomenon, both ideologically—in terms of its politics—and artistically—in light of its auteurism with a vengeance. Perhaps I tend to be a bit too rough on the devotees of auteur theory in the cinema. As Dudley Andrew has pointed out in his survey of film theory, the notion of the director "authoring" a film the way a writer "authors" a manuscript is not a theory in the first place. What rubs me the wrong way about auteurism, however, is not that it masquerades in the false clothing of a theory, but that it misleads us with regard to what movies are and what they do.
Whenever any work of art is considered with tunnel vision on the intentions and virtuosity of its creator, an error is made. In the case of a motion picture, which is a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, unavoidably dependent on directors, technicians, cinematographers, editors, screenwriters, actors, actresses, etc. for its enactment, the error is magnified. Expropriating the traditional western aesthetic of virtuosity, genius, and beauty to the cinema is a mistake. Exploiting the traditional myth of literature by way of its emphasis on the uniqueness of the author’s originality and type, and carrying this over to the medium of motion pictures, is a distortion.

From another direction entirely, an alternative distortion occurs in regarding a movie as simply the result of the particular conditions of its production and the economic, social, and institutional surroundings in which it was made. Movies, like other works of art, are not simply symbolic reflections of the material conditions in which they are made. Nor is the personality of any single figure, no matter how dominant he or she may be over the production, so significant as the being and presence of the movie itself. A motion picture is an enactment of a dimension of experience that can be understood only associatively, not deterministically. If ever there was an art form that enacts the cutting back and forth across cultural and generational tensions it is the Young German Cinema of the 1970s.

That shared experience out of which the Young German Cinema emerges is the “Hour Zero” of 1945, the years of genuine deprivation and imitation coffee that followed, and the economic miracle of the 1950s that followed that, complete with triple dips of whipped cream for nearly all the good “Burghers” who demanded them. It is the collective witnessing in the 1960s of Konrad Adenauer’s “long good-bye,” Willy Brandt’s “Bonn springtime,” and the urban-guerrilla exploits of Baader-Meinhof—a sort of anarcho-leftist “Bonnie and Clyde.” Effectively, this compares to much of the common western European experience since 1945. In psycho-cultural terms, it bears its own special Germanic qualities, which are no longer attributes of a unified national culture. This is an experience of a particular kind of cultural dislocation with a special sensitivity to the Americanization of its imaginative and cultural sensibilities, and evidence of an instance when a society’s affluence underwrites a particular dilemma of self-consciousness.

In the 1970s, feature-length film production in the German Federal Republic accounted for roughly three hundred titles. Since I intend to discuss only three movies, my sample amounts to a mere 1% of the total production. Were this a survey of the decade, this would hardly suffice. Be it then noted that it is not. It is, however, an attempt to point out some elements in the enactment of a dimension of collective experience that are illustrative of what lies beyond—both in other films and in the cultural/ideological life of the German Federal Republic.

*The Lost Honor of Katherina Blum* (1975) is an adaptation from a Heinrich Böll novella. It did the best box-office business of any West German film in the Federal Republic during the 1970s. It portrays a constrained time-frame of four days, at Carnival (Mardi Gras) time in Cologne, with temporal precision from
to prevent you from bearing witness against yourself
I send you home
can I do more for you
I guide my horse on impassable roads
so I won't cross your path
so I won’t spoil the sweetness
I pluck my grapes from another vine

Helga Novak

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PAUL MONACO

Since the First World War, film-making in Europe has produced five distinct, innovative, and relatively unified epochs of movie art. Expressionism in the German cinema was the first of these, inaugurated in 1919 with the production of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari. The most recent had been the French “New Wave” that began at the end of the 1950s. In between appeared expressive realism in the Soviet cinema of the late 1920s, naturalism in French films in the years immediately preceding the Second World War, and neorealism in Italian motion pictures right after the war. For all the triumphs in cinematic art of individual movies or clusters of them, elsewhere and at other times, these bursts of creative activity remain high points in the history of cinema.

On the surface these five periods of innovative film-making appear to have little in common with one another. Across national boundaries and across time they are unified neither by common patterns of film industry organization and financing, nor by common ideological intentions, nor by agreement on how best to conceptualize and to enact film art. A thorough-going structuralist interpretation of the connecting links between these five epochs remains elusive and highly problematic.

At the beginning of the 1970s a spate of movies produced in the German Federal Republic began attracting international attention and critical acclaim akin to that which had greeted each of the five great epochs in European cinema previously. The phenomenon was quickly given a name or, more specifically, two interchangeable labels: “New” German Cinema or “Young” German Cinema. The former suggested the influence of the French “New Wave” on German production, and alluded to the postponed revival of the cinema on German soil after the Second World War. That revival, held in abeyance through the culturally bleak and emotionally conservative 1950s, came to be courted consciously in the early 1960s. Only at the very end of the 1960s, however, did the courting start to pay off. It focused on the youthfulness of the film-makers who led the revival (most of them born after 1940), as well as the apparent generational characteristics of their productions. That meant something more than a mere pandering to youthful tastes which is a commonplace of nearly all contemporary cinema, given that, in the western world, roughly three-quarters of the audience for movies presented in theaters is under twenty-five years of age. Rather, the young Germans were bent on developing a film art that seemed appropriate to the expression of ideological positions that might be described as “New Left.”

42
The cinema, everywhere and always, confronts particularly complicated economic and social problems with regard to motion picture production, distribution, and presentation. In some places and at some times the debates over these issues are invested with remarkable emotional energy and ideological zeal. This has been the case in the German Federal Republic since the early 1960s. To discuss the emergence of the many film-making collectives, committees, initiative groups, and front organizations in the "Young" German Cinema would require an entire volume. To fill in the history of these entities with a survey of the positions taken in pursuit of ideological and creative breathing space would likely take a second one.

The external problems the "Young German Cinema" has confronted are simple to list: 1. the issue of government subsidies for film production; 2. the relationship of film production to the state-coordinated West German television networks; 3. problems of distribution of films and private ownership of movie theaters; 4. the glut of foreign films in the German Federal Republic, especially those produced in the United States; 5. the financing of production in a medium in which unit costs are high and economic risk is great.

These issues have a long prehistory, and an especially salient one in Germany, dating back to the 1920s. Some German municipalities opened communally-owned movie theaters in 1919, and the Social Democrat Party supported the principle of them as part of its official platform until 1922. Government subsidies for film production were a perennial issue in the twenties, usually answered deviously and through the back door. The debate over how to protect German productions from foreign competition, especially movies from Hollywood, sizzled on and off until 1925 when a quota law on imported films went into effect in Germany. (It failed, and was abandoned in 1928.) Strictly speaking, the question of the relationship of state-run television to film production is a new wrinkle, but in essence it is merely an extension of time-worn themes related to production, distribution, and presentation. The politics, economics, and sociology of the cinema have changed surprisingly little since the First World War, contrary to what we might otherwise think.

The ins-and-outs and ups-and-downs of movie-making and film distribution/exhibition in the German Federal Republic, however, are topics I leave to others gladly. So, for that matter, is the passion for considering Young German films in light of the expressed intentions of those who make them. The Young German Cinema is, undoubtedly, a highly self-conscious phenomenon, both ideologically—in terms of its politics—and artistically—in light of its auteurism with a vengeance. Perhaps I tend to be a bit too rough on the devotees of auteur theory in the cinema. As Dudley Andrew has pointed out in his survey of film theory, the notion of the director "authoring" a film the way a writer "authors" a manuscript is not a theory in the first place. What rubs me the wrong way about auteurism, however, is not that it masquerades in the false clothing of a theory, but that it misleads us with regard to what movies are and what they do.
Whenever any work of art is considered with tunnel vision on the intentions and virtuosity of its creator, an error is made. In the case of a motion picture, which is a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk, unavoidably dependent on directors, technicians, cinematographers, editors, screenwriters, actors, actresses, etc. for its enactment, the error is magnified. Expropriating the traditional western aesthetic of virtuosity, genius, and beauty to the cinema is a mistake. Exploiting the traditional myth of literature by way of its emphasis on the uniqueness of the author’s originality and type, and carrying this over to the medium of motion pictures, is a distortion.

From another direction entirely, an alternative distortion occurs in regarding a movie as simply the result of the particular conditions of its production and the economic, social, and institutional surroundings in which it was made. Movies, like other works of art, are not simply symbolic reflections of the material conditions in which they are made. Nor is the personality of any single figure, no matter how dominant he or she may be over the production, so significant as the being and presence of the movie itself. A motion picture is an enactment of a dimension of experience that can be understood only associatively, not deterministically. If ever there was an art form that enacts the cutting back and forth across cultural and generational tensions it is the Young German Cinema of the 1970s.

That shared experience out of which the Young German Cinema emerges is the "Hour Zero" of 1945, the years of genuine deprivation and imitation coffee that followed, and the economic miracle of the 1950s that followed that, complete with triple dips of whipped cream for nearly all the good "Burghers" who demanded them. It is the collective witnessing in the 1960s of Konrad Adenauer’s "long good-bye," Willy Brandt’s "Bonn springtime," and the urban-guerrilla exploits of Baader-Meinhof—a sort of anarcho-leftist "Bonnie and Clyde." Effectively, this compares to much of the common western European experience since 1945. In psycho-cultural terms, it bears its own special Germanic qualities, which are no longer attributes of a unified national culture. This is an experience of a particular kind of cultural dislocation with a special sensitivity to the Americanization of its imaginative and cultural sensibilities, and evidence of an instance when a society’s affluence underwrites a particular dilemma of self-consciousness.

In the 1970s, feature-length film production in the German Federal Republic accounted for roughly three hundred titles. Since I intend to discuss only three movies, my sample amounts to a mere 1% of the total production. Were this a survey of the decade, this would hardly suffice. Be it then noted that it is not. It is, however, an attempt to point out some elements in the enactment of a dimension of collective experience that are illustrative of what lies beyond—both in other films and in the cultural/ideological life of the German Federal Republic.

The Lost Honor of Katherina Blum (1975) is an adaptation from a Heinrich Böll novella. It did the best box-office business of any West German film in the Federal Republic during the 1970s. It portrays a constrained time-frame of four days, at Carnival (Mardi Gras) time in Cologne, with temporal precision from
February 5 through 9, 1975. Thematically, the movie presents social criticism with a quasi-naturalistic flavor to which is added a vaguely existential fillip. There is here the abrupt, violent intermeshing of the two otherwise separate worlds of private and public existence; the exploitative manipulativeness of the profit-minded popular press; the paranoia of officialdom and the police in particular; the disconnectedness of the traditional in West German life; the victimization of the innocent.

Katherina meets a young man at a disco during Carnival and he accompanies her home to her apartment. Impending disaster and suspense are indicated, first, by shots of an unidentified car pursuing the one in which Katherina and her friend are riding, and second, in close temporal relation, by the intercut of videotape footage—fuzzy, grainy, black and white—as she and he are first entering her apartment building. Only during a later briefing are they revealed as videotapes made by the police. They are reconstructing their own surveillance of the burglary/terrorist suspect whom they have been tailing, and whom Katherina has had the misfortune—as it turns out for her—of picking up in the disco at Carnival time.

*The Lost Honor* makes a visual point of emphasizing the reign of police terror, beginning with the unexpected shots of police commandos, many of them wearing ski-masks *à la mode terroriste*, surrounding her apartment house, proceeding in rows along inclined ramps, perching on the building’s rooftop. This sequence is built up well, playing off the visual counterpoint of the Carnival costumes of the night before, creating an interior feeling for the inherent overkill of police action played off against the innocence of Katherina who is behind her apartment door. The police invade the dwelling, surround her and quickly establish, to their chagrin, that the apartment itself contains only bric-a-brac and a few volumes of “outspokenly bourgeois literature.”

The phenomena of police videotape and newspaper photography are played on and off throughout the film. They are on when the viewer first encounters the journalist Totges in the village of Katherina’s birth where he is crossing the main street armed with flowers, followed by school children, as his photographer-sidekick snaps up the atmosphere at the rate of so many shots per second. As Totges begins his snooping in earnest, the scene shifts to a parallel sequence in an Alpine ski resort where the Austrian correspondent of the *News* has tracked down Katherina’s employer, the well-to-do liberal lawyer Blourna and his wife. This is one of the few sequences in the film that sparkles with winter’s light on snow, and that is open, both with regard to the setting itself and with reference to other figures in the background who have no role in the narrative development of *Lost Honor* itself. This counterpoints the darkling interiority, the closed space, and the closed narrative of the film as a whole.

Back in Cologne, on the evening after her first interrogation by the police, Katherina weaves her automobile through the streets full of carnival revelers, with their painted clown faces and many others in Arab garb. In the closed tightness of the car she is captured by the camera as apart and cut off from these bizarre goings-
on. The News has her photo, her face in a contorted grimace, blown up on the front page. Later the police will inquire about the 50,000 kilometers annually on her auto’s odometer, seeking to support their suspicions that she travels about on leftist business. She answers that she likes to drive while others sit at home in front of the television getting drunk.

Katherina’s mother, hounded by the reporter Totges right to her hospital bed, expires. In the hospital’s morgue, Katherina views her body on the slab, summing up her life as that of a woman whose husband returned from the war a wreck. Katherina’s closest and most supportive relationship is with an aunt. The News publishes the fact that the aunt’s father went to the Soviet Union in 1932, suggesting Communist links in the blood line, of course. The aunt’s constant companion allows later that he is the only one connected to Katherina who is spared by the police-News axis, opining that perhaps it is because he is just an old Nazi.

The overt political complication of The Lost Honor is revelation (for the viewers only) of Katherina’s extended sexual liaison with an older married functionary of the Christian Democratic Union. His political identity need not be spelled out, for in the West German context his association with the Catholic Church hierarchy is sufficient in itself to indicate which side of the political divide he is on. Drives to his country villa for trysts accounted for the extra kilometers on her VW. The young leftist/bank robber of Katherina’s one night Carnival stand is now established in said villa, hiding out courtesy of a key to it that Katherina has given him. When the politician who has been enjoying her favors realizes this, he blurs out to the attorney Blourna, in whose presence he is, “We do live in a free country,” followed by a horrified “An anarchist in my house!”

Katherina’s phone is tapped, revealed visually by an uninspired but carefully handled intercut of the tapping devices themselves during her single phone call to the fugitive. He is apprehended, in scenes capturing the extensiveness of the armed and motorized invasion of the property by the police.

Katherina invites Totges to her apartment the next day and shoots him. In a post-sequence to the film proper, Totges is eulogized by his publisher (a fictional stand-in for West German conservative press king Axel Springer).

The Lost Honor of Katherina Blum is, a first glance, a relatively unproblematic motion picture. The press is portrayed as exploitative, callous, and peddling ideology under the twin disguises of mere sensationalism and newsworthy objectivity. The state apparatus reflects a combination of bureaucratic insensitivity and paranoia. Katherina is one of contemporary society’s loners, more disassociated or detached than alienated. She is oddly loyal to her politician lover’s reputation and his desire to save face; or if not oddly so, at least her motivation is bereft of either explanation or clarification in the material of the film itself.

The background setting of Carnival is easily overlooked or blocked out and dismissed as a backdrop pure and simple. Yet with its own rich history, and numerous cultural and religious associations, the downplaying of Carnival is itself
significant. This downplaying, when it is reflected upon at all, is yet another instance of the emptying of the cultural and social environment. This is evident as well in the obvious narrative choice of omission of references to Katherina’s background, which is only alluded to—and then more often falsely than correctly—or to the small town of her birth which the viewer sees in one or two sequences but never gets to know. The Lost Honor is permeated with a sense of spatial dislocation—relationships between places, or between buildings, are ignored. Over against this is placed a seemingly precise temporal ordering from day to day, but it is gratuitous. The temporal sequencing plays no contingent function vis-à-vis the action. Were the action to take place over four weeks instead of in the course of four days, no consequent changes would be required in the narrative.

The chronological span in The Marriage of Maria Braun (1978) is different. The film covers more than three decades, from 1945 to the final sequence of portraits of German chancellors right up to Helmut Schmidt in the present. Yet the approach to chronology is imprecise and eventually flattened. The end of the war is temporally set, but the remainder of the film narrative that carries Maria through the economic miracle of the 1950s and into the affluent, but desolate, world of the Federal Republic in the 1960s is temporally blurred.

The narrative approach in Maria Braun is episodic, but the episodes are left deliberately unconnected. The connecting links between them are strictly associative, rather than deterministic. What underlies each of the episodes, and hence the entire film, is Maria’s marriage and eventual unfailing loyalty toward the idea of her marriage. This is a deeper kind of loyalty than mere sexual fidelity, that fidelity in any case having been transgressed with neither remorse nor bad conscience. The persistence of this loyalty and this sense of commitment is authentic in its own personal sense for Maria, yet the precise causal and connecting links that motivate it are not explored.

Maria married Hans Braun in the offices of the “Standesamt” in the midst of an air-raid in which the bombing sent Hitler’s ubiquitous public portrait crashing. She assumes her husband is dead at the end of the war, waits for him, then begins a liaison with a black American G.I. named Bill. Braun returns unexpectedly and unannounced, finds Maria with Bill, and while he struggles with him, Maria cracks Bill’s skull, causing his death. Braun accepts the crime as his own and goes to prison for it. She leaves—headed off into the darkness of Western Germany on the brink of recovery, having lost her baby in a miscarriage (her “little black angel,” as she says).

She meets an industrialist, with whom she begins a long, complex, and drawn-out relationship. She rises to partnership in the business, accepts much of his devotion to her, but only on her own independent terms. She refuses to divorce her husband, who is in prison throughout most of the movie’s narrative. She is a beneficiary of the German recovery, yet she is also unswervingly tied to the past through her own commitment of will that—though unexamined—is unchangeable.
There is another line of continuity that runs throughout the main section of the narrative, from episode to episode, doggedly and incessantly. It is the voice of Konrad Adenauer’s radio speeches in the background, penetrating one sequence, serving as distant background for another. (Yet notably in the prints of Maria Braun in circulation in the United States Adenauer’s lines are never translated in subtitles; they hardly could be. One suspects that many a viewer who doesn’t know German may dismiss them as simply someone talking on the radio.) Yet Adenauer’s statements and pronouncements are an integral part, not only of the milieu that the film creates, but also of the mentality toward which its ideology is directed.

In the final sequence of the narrative proper, when Hans Braun returns after his release from prison—unexpectedly again—to Maria in her modest villa, the viewer finds the announcer’s voice on a television broadcast of the World Cup soccer match substituted for Adenauer’s. Braun sits on the bed, wearing a bathrobe and his hat, with his back to the camera. The television, in the foreground of the shots of Braun, is situated with the screen toward him and the back of the set toward the viewer. The announcer describes the action in which the West German national team is playing. Maria and Hans converse, randomly, from in and out of the same room. A cut to a gas jet in the kitchen. Maria turns it on, pauses, then strikes a match. Hans shouts to her. An explosion!

The final sequence consists of still photographic portraits of Germany’s chancellors, starting with Hitler, through Adenauer and his CDU successors, right up to Helmut Schmidt—with the exception of Willy Brandt (chancellor from 1968 to 1974). The only plausible interpretation of this is that Brandt is the only break in the continuity from Hitler to Schmidt, a point that many viewers will take exception to politically, but which also alludes to a dimension of the felt reality of the German experience as enacted in many Young German films.

One of the elements of the Young German cinema, certainly not to be found in every instance, yet pervasive, is the exploration of continuity and discontinuity. That element is present in both The Lost Honor and Maria Braun; it is subject matter beyond all other subject of Our Hitler—A Film From Germany (1978), which consists of four episodes, each with a running time just under two hours. The entire Our Hitler film, then, runs a little over seven hours. As its framework it takes a panorama of German history from the late 19th century through the Nazi era, and then beyond it to a point in time that is contemporary, but unspecific. It is a work in which the sweep of time, a hundred years roughly, is embraced without any extension whatsoever of the camera’s point of view into space; its space is constrained, the darkened area of a relatively small studio stage. The documentary and newsreel footage of the Nazi era, sparingly intercut, never releases the movie as presence from its own spatio-temporal constraints, and that footage pales visually against the still photographs, the mannequins, the puppets that personify the various historical personages of the 1920s and 1930s.

Our Hitler thematically parallels the rise of the motion picture with the rise of fascism, but does so neither narratively nor ideologically, but simply as a
juxtaposing of the one against the other. From the beginning of the first episode, when the puppet of the 19th century Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria is holding forth in a monologue in Edison’s black maria, to the Peter Lorre monologue from *M* when he confronts his jury of peers in the basement of the abandoned brewery which follows, this parallel is elaborated. The appearance of Hitler at the Circus, as a painter, as Frankenstein, as Charlie Chaplin, as Nero suggests the Hitler in all of us: the murderer who, like the child-killer in the movie *M*, protests his inability to act differently. The narrator tells of the hell about us; documentary recordings of Nazis dedicating books to the flames are heard; scenes alluding to German filmmakers of the 20s and the 70s are cut in. Where will this end?—the endless exploitation of Hitler for profit: Hitler books, Hitler films, Hitler newspapers.

The temporality is fractured radically, and this radical fracturing is sustained throughout all four episodes. Only the reappearance of Hitler in disguises, Hitler as a ventriloquist’s dummy, Hitler in costume and out, provides unity that is thematic. Through each episode wanders a small girl, dressed in black, playing with dolls, or with Ludwig puppets. She hugs the small toy dog with the Hitler face, or stands with it in front of a projection of Caligari on the wall behind her.

At the beginning of the second episode, entitled “A German Dream,” we see the Black Maria within a glass ball in a snow storm. The little girl with the puppet; an actor playing Karl May, the author of hundreds of popular novels set in the American West, adored by Hitler and proclaimed by a generation (or really two) of Germans. Hitler describes himself in a monologue as the end product of western civilization; this is followed by a cut to three black GI’s dancing with a blond woman at Wagner’s grave. In a long tunnel, Hitler’s valet enters a long monologue on Hitler’s private affairs, enumerating his items of clothing, engaging with sublime patience in the accumulation of the triviality and banality of the Leader and his possessions.

Episode three, “A Winter’s Tale,” maintains more temporal unity than the others, being set in the last years of the war, but is loaded with references beyond the war itself. Himmler, at an SS banquet, expounds on mysticism, the occult, Buddhism, and the like. The valet, eating, between bites gossiping about Hitler; in the background the radio broadcasts voices from the Nazi past. Hitler the ventriloquist’s dummy explains that having failed at art he turned to politics, and boasts of how much he has changed things: Russians on the Elba; the Jews with their own State; the United States with a new colony; “Consider where the great new market of Hollywood lies?”

The final episode consists of a long monologue, shared by two different narrators, both male. Projections, sound documents are laid upon it, intercut; toward the end the little girl wanders back to walk down a row of gallows. The last war report from the German armed forces is broadcast in the background. A great victory celebration is described, and the Nazi families and hangers-on; the narrator accuses the Hitler dummy of the trivialization of old German values. The young girl holding the Hitler dog stands, eyes closed. The stars fly and amidst them appears the grail.
The temporal structuring is episodic from the outside, random and disjointed from the interior. When, shortly after I saw the entire film, someone asked me about it, I had to catch myself in responding to keep from referring to it as a non-fiction film. At one level this seemed utterly preposterous. At another remove, while non-fiction is incorrect as a descriptive phrase, it points to my experiencing of the film's presence as tempo and time-structure. The randomness, the disjointedness, the ruptured segments of image corresponding to historical time and all the parallelisms (which fail to reunite) define the film's ideological position vis-a-vis the reconstruction of the German past. To a great extent, this succeeds as an enactment of the interiority of the historical experience revisited cinematographically.

The allusions to figures and events in modern German history and culture are so numerous that one wonders if a non-German audience in particular should not be supplied at a screening of Our Hitler with a lexicon or a printed glossary. What the film enacts, however, is contingent less on its precision for detail and historical reference than on its surrealistic qualities. What is shaped in Our Hitler is a direct portrayal of the discontinuity, in history and in culture, that characterizes the German experience (which in itself is a microcosm of western European experience since 1945.)

Our Hitler depicts directly what so many “Young German” films reflect obliquely—namely, the break with the past that is felt to be historico-generational. That rupture is represented thematically often. It is, moreover, enacted in the temporal and spatial relationships common in Young German Cinema: the voice from outside that enters so many of these films’ soundtracks; the use of actors and actresses in nearly repertory fashion to impose from outside a continuity that is otherwise absent; the breakdown in verbal and visual communication between characters; the stylization, and the alienation effects courted so assiduously in this cinema of the 1970s. Self-consciously the Young German Cinema reaches back to the 1920s: for remakes of F.W. Murnau films, or for borrowings from his techniques; drawing on some of the codas of expressionism (showing, however, distortion and pathology in the objective world rather than as a projection of interior psychic states exclusively, and taking up—as the German expressionist film-makers of the twenties did not—the authentic revolutionary perspective of expressionism proper vis-a-vis society); elaborating on the dramatic ideas of Bertolt Brecht.

Many Young German films work on a love/hate basis with the United States and with American films and their particular “language.” This represents something more than a western European exploration of the “Coca-Colonization” of its culture by the peddlers of American consciousness since 1945. More deeply, it reflects a cultural crisis, not limited to Western Germany but most preeminent there, regarding what part of the culture prior to the Second World War is salvageable.

The Young German Cinema stretches in all directions back across time to the pre-Hitlerian Germany (and its cinema) of the 1920s. It looks as if it crosses the
French/West German border to retrace some of the French "New Wave's" steps and to pick up where French film-makers started to leave off the project they had begun a decade earlier at the end of the 1960s. Young German Cinema also traverses the Atlantic, touching thematically over and over again on the American connection. Moreover, the film-making itself acknowledges what few Americans do, namely that Hollywood deals more with the authentic inner tensions in American life, and is more a source of critique upon them, than is usually thought.

Given these tortured and strained connecting linkages, it is to be wondered whether the Young German Cinema can ever attain to the ideological purity that many of its proponents wish and claim for it. Certainly it cannot be a cinema whose meanings and values are understandable strictly in a national cultural context—that context itself being now an outmoded phantasm of historians. In its overt intentionality, however, the Young German Cinema strives to be both ideological and national. That is its dilemma. Whether it is to become, somewhere in someone's annals, the sixth great epoch of European film-making is an open question.
KATRIN

ANGELIKA MECHTEL

I’ve born his children. I accepted my place. I tried to see him the way my mother saw her husband. I learned to wash diapers, console children, and keep order. At one time I studied mathematics and Latin, physics and French. I was an average student. I let him caress me and hit me. I hit back; I learned that he is stronger than I am.

I watched my stomach grow. I survived the births; I told myself, this is why you are a woman. I persuaded myself that I wanted to be happy. I sent him to work and cooked dinner.

I saw his fear when I was in bed with a fever, and his impatience when the baby cried.

I allowed him to send my mother away because she dried the diapers at the stove in the one-room apartment and put the milk on the window sill. I learned that he could say whatever he thought: What would people think of us? I comprehended nothing. I got accustomed to my life.

I asked why he was angry. I listened to him; I welcomed his boss and entertained his colleagues.

I let his mother instruct me. I was friendly to her. I learned from her how he was used to living and what he liked to eat. I adapted to it. I listened to how she raised her children. I taught my children to say please and thank you, to curtsy or to bow, to shake hands and to sing Christmas songs. I got to know her son. I was afraid.

I tried to be understanding and to make allowances. I looked for the faults in myself. I always hoped that he could also be my big brother. I never told him about that.

I told him that I loved him. I learned to caress him. I protected the children when he was angry. I justified it to myself. I didn’t despair. I told myself, I am happy. I was happy when he buried me in his arms; when he was nice to me. I was able to console him, to encourage him. I had wanted a gentle husband. I cried in closed rooms. I knew that depressions are a form of sickness. I felt alone. I encouraged myself. I saw how my hands began to resemble my mother’s hands; I told myself that my daily defeats are nothing in comparison to my love for him. I didn’t ask any questions.
We weathered the beginnings. I learned to live with his fears. I awakened him when he screamed in his dreams at nights; I told him: It’s me. I let him tell me his dreams. I listened. I learned to be his sister also. I have been told that I radiate motherly feelings. I thought to myself, you must be warm and soft like a mother animal; you must be a refuge. I loved our children. Shelter, I thought. I wanted to prostitute myself, but I could not do it. I felt guilty.

I fancied it would pass, that we would become older and calmer. I learned that I could not change a man. But I tried it anyway. I learned to forget Latin and higher mathematics.

I encouraged him when he lost his job. I learned to organize moves, decorate apartments and make do with the money. I survived our children’s illnesses. I had dreams.

I swallowed pills for headaches, pills for insomnia; I took treatments for backaches and poor blood. I was a sleepwalker.

I learned to argue, I fought battles in the ditches. I rejected everything, I did not speak with him anymore. I got mad when he got mad. I wished that the children would grow up quickly. I surrendered, cut my veins open, but I didn’t want to die. I allowed him to apply a tourniquet to my arms, to invent an accident for the doctor. I hoped that someone would ask about it. I asked myself.

We survived it. I wanted him to be successful in his job. I fought to get both children admitted to kindergarten; I bribed the Sister Superior with presents. I took the pill. I told myself: you can’t afford to be afraid any longer. I fought off my own feelings; I drew the line. I didn’t allow myself to be hurt any more. I learned to type and take shorthand. I took a job. I wanted to gain self-confidence. I brought money home. At Christmas I survived a circulatory collapse.

I worked part-time because of the children.

We could afford to take a vacation and to buy things. We got ahead. I did not keep track of time. I said: The ninety-hour work week won’t kill me.

I did not abandon my hopes, I buried them.

We built a house and sent the children to a private school. We joined the parent-teacher association. We became involved in things that concerned us. We did not indulge in memories. I compromised myself; I learned to handle his temper. I did not succumb. I learned Latin and mathematics again when the children learned them.

I would not stop convincing myself of my happiness. I was stubborn. I kept it to myself. I raised our daughter to protest. I learned to be alone.

Yesterday I saw my daughter in the company of a young man. I told him about it. I said: She is more like you than me. I asked myself whether there is some hope in that.
BEFORE THE WEDDING

GABRIELE WOHMANN

Yeah. Really, when I think about it, I don’t want to leave any more. With half opened lips she looked from one to the other, and put into their widened eyes the astonishment she expected from her relatives.

- Come on, said Aunt Rosie; a disapproving laugh climbed slowly out of the chubby folds of her throat. Age had put layered rings into her soft flesh.

- Really, Fanny defended herself, it’s so comfortable here and all that, and every­thing’s familiar.

Next to her, Lisbeth sniggered, her scrawny shoulders jerking forward with tiny thrusts.

- Well, don’t tell him that, warned Uncle Big.

They didn’t call him by his name because he was so huge. Consequently they thought it original to call him ‘Uncle Big.’

- Aw. Fanny pouted, but she still turned red.

- Well, I don’t understand any of this. She must have a good reason when she says that she’d rather not marry him, called Aunt Rosie.

- And that she doesn’t, grumbled her uncle, and reached for his glass of beer. His irritated mouth sank into the wobbly foam.

- You still love him, don’t you, Aunt Rosie asked gently, inquisitively. She pushed her torso forward a little and lowered her knitting.

- Of course, said Fanny and blushed again.

Lisbeth tittered and blew a small transparent lump of mucus out of her right nostril. Bright, moist blemish; she scraped it off, smeared it into her handkerchief and tittered more slowly.

- Well then, triumphed Aunt Rosie. Then you can’t want to stay with us. That’s logical. Satisfied, she once again took up her knitting in her shifting fingers.

Fanny stared at the thick, brown strand of wool which cut into the flesh of the second finger-joint; a deep, dark groove in the soft, fat flesh.

- I didn’t mean it that way, she said sulkily. She took a cracker out of the can, pushed it thoughtfully into the narrow gap between the rows of her teeth, crunching the crumbling dough.
The strange apartment. When it gets dark outside. The evening’s worst. She didn’t know how she could explain it to them.
- It isn’t easy for a young girl at the beginning, Aunt Rosie said genially. I was scared of it too. Men are a different breed, that’s just the way it is.
Fanny and Lisbeth sat rigidly; their hearts contracted with tension. Uncle Big quietly rustled the tin pages of his newspaper.
His hands. And everything he says is so strange.
- I only mean to say that perhaps I don’t know him well enough after all, Fanny said half-heartedly.
- No, no, that’s not it, interrupted her aunt. Believe me, I was scared too at first. A few days before, I wanted to steal away just like you. She was knitting rapidly and smoothly.
- But it was different with you. Something was lodged in Fanny’s throat that made her voice heavy and sluggish.
- And why, called Aunt Rosie and laid her knitting on the baggy material between her thighs. Not a single man had seen me close-up either.
Lisbeth’s shoulders jerked; with a soundless titter she pushed fear and curiosity out of her quietly breathing nose.
- But Uncle Big was somebody like you or your father, he wasn’t different like that, said Fanny.
The strand of wool was pulled through the bright, pink flesh of her fingers.
A little hurt, the aunt picked up her handicraft again.
- When he used to say something you didn’t constantly feel like a silly school kid, said Fanny.
- Count your blessings you got such a neat guy! Lisbeth called and burst out laughing.
Two small wrinkles in the corners of Aunt Rosie’s mouth betrayed her affronted scorn.
- It’s totally different, murmured Fanny.
- Surely you must have noticed that earlier on, Aunt Rosie said sharply. In front of her eyes the dark brown picture of leaping people blurred: the noble blue-blooded lord of the manor whom she hadn’t managed to get.
Dreaming of that my whole life and what for? Sitting and knitting cuffs for that thirsty cretin who isn’t anything better than me and all my ancestors. An agreeable but somewhat touchy affection filled her soft flesh and warmed it. This silly, little person, instead of being glad. My god. Architect. Her sleepy heart woke up, beat faster. My god - an architect. What luck. Out of the corner the small iron stove pushed heat into the room. Fanny scratched her itchy shoulder.
A stove like this and a bit of beer, crackers. At his place I can’t swallow one bite. When it gets dark. What am I gonna say during all those hours. Again and again say something, know something.
- The beautiful furniture, gasped Lisbeth. Man oh man, what an apartment. You’ll become totally stuck up.
- Go on, said Fanny full of pride and fear.
- That’s only something external, declared Aunt Rosie, her down-cast eyelids
batting intentionally. It depends on the heart. If he has a good heart. Money doesn’t make you happy.
- You can give me that in writing, growled the uncle behind his paper. I’ll put it in front of your nose in case of need.
The girls laughed, Fanny also. She stretched a little and experienced a prickly feeling of well-being in her limbs; her aunt shook her head, flattered and on the defensive.
- I’m not saying that money is evil. She drawled the vowel, showing her pale, fat tongue.

Lisbeth wheezed:
- Of course not!
- But I don’t like some one just because they’ve got money, no way, or else I sure as shooting wouldn’t have ended up with you. The aunt threw up her chin: a flush of self-satisfaction flamed over her small, full face.
Lisbeth cowered in the arm chair, a restless, dissatisfied laugh remained lodged in her throat.
- When you get bored with him you can come get me and have a cosy chat again. She stopped talking and waited warily, and when her cousin didn’t react, she spoke again, she talked as if to herself, words breaking from her unsteady lips: I love to go to his beautiful apartment, love to walk on the thick carpets. You can’t even hear yourself. And the crazy pictures, I like to look at them. Really. The fine suits, I like it when someone’s got money, I like it.

Fanny didn’t hear her any more. She saw the man. I’d rather be with him as his maid. If someone’s got money, he smells good and laughs and talks funny, that’s probably because of education. I’m gonna marry him. Don’t even know him, the others do it too and call it being lucky. Ernie, she trapped her boss. She was able to act as if she were like him.
She was a bit cold in the bright, strange apartment in which she had seen herself. She returned to the hot, small room with the penetrating smell of four perspiring bodies and beer.
- No, she shouldn’t marry him for money and all that, said Aunt Rosie. Don’t let anybody think we want to get her married off to him because he’s got money. Where we have the responsibility. Money hasn’t yet bought salvation for anybody.

Staying here. Staying here and never being scared in the evenings. Sweating and growing sleepy without fear, ending the stifling day in bed beside Lisbeth. His hands, his stretched out legs when he’s lying on the couch. The ties. His closet smells of perfume. The socks, what is it they’re made of, he likes wearing black ones best of all.
- Oh my god, I’ve got to go, Fanny called out hastily, got up and tugged on her skirt.
- Now what? What’s going on, Aunt Rosie called; Uncle Big’s leathery face stared over the edge of the paper; Lisbeth turned around, a hissing snicker deformed her mouth.
- Oh, I have to bring him something yet, said Fanny. Why's my voice rattling like that. When he'll, my god, and then the black socks on his feet.
- Now? In the night? said Aunt Rosie. Her lips, lowered fractionally, didn’t consent, not at all.
- Stay where you are, Uncle Big said leisurely; he bent the fold of the paper inside out, and pinched the pages.
- He is waiting for it, said Fanny, and besides, it isn’t even ten yet.

The carpet and the pretty wallpaper, in the evenings it’s worst, so much space on the couch, he had said.
- Well, all right, said Aunt Rosie, go on then, but don’t stay long. And think about what I’ve told you. If you’d rather stay with us, you can let him know now. We’re not forcing you because it might be a good match and so on. Don’t let anybody think that.

Fanny stood by the door. From there she saw the dark line, the burning groove in her aunt’s fat finger; she saw the brown strand of wool gliding, slowly and steadily.
- Yes, yes, she said and turned away. The door handle was cool and forgetful.
REMARKS ON LITERARY DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

HEINZ LUDWIG ARNOLD

To understand the major focal points of the novel as it developed during the 60's, I consider it helpful to present a short survey of how the literary scene of that period relates to the overall picture of literary developments. The specific literary development that prompted the appearance in the Federal Republic of a new German literature that reached some kind of climax in the 60's began at a time when the German Reich had experienced a total loss of its military power, when the Fascist regime had been destroyed and the German people found themselves politically and morally bankrupt. German literature, at least its richest and most progressive tradition, had already been chased out of Germany twelve years earlier by the Nazis; those writers who remained in Germany were brought into line.

The writers who created the new West German literature in the 50's and 60's had no serious interaction with the literature that had remained in Germany, nor with the literary works written in exile by German authors who were scattered all over the world. Even later on only a partial relationship could be established with the exile literature. The situation was totally different in the German Democratic Republic: the socialist writers who lived in exile were received as the founders of a new socialist national literature, and even bourgeois authors like Heinrich and Thomas Mann or Alfred Döblin were accepted (although the avant-garde of bourgeois literature, e.g. Hermann Broch and Robert Musil, remained unnoticed).

The potential young German writers, most of whom, according to Günter Grass, had been killed in the war, had to confront a literary tabula rasa, somewhat like a huge clearing, to use the words of Wolfgang Weyrauch. The word “clearing” as well as the words “literature of ruins” did characterize for a long time the moral and formal structure of the German literature whose writers were trying to find and formulate a new understanding of the self. Obviously these writers did not find a point of orientation in past literary tradition. They had to cope with the terrible consequences of German megalomania and a murderous rage of destruction.
The first literary figures to appear from under the impact of fascism and war were Wolfgang Borchert and Heinrich Böll. Brochert’s radio play Outside the Door, first performed in 1947, and Heinrich Böll’s short story “The Train was on Time”, published in 1949, depicted quite well the feeling of a generation that was shaped by the reaction to existing and experienced history. Borchert’s character Beckmann holds those accountable who sent him into the war and made him a cripple; the soldier Andreas in Böll’s story sees his survival after the war as an accident. Both writers considered the war a merciless and senseless destruction of mankind, and characters in these two works are typical representatives of a helpless, beaten, and lost generation. In poetry, Günter Eich joins these writers with his dispassionate poems that are inventories of what remained after the war. Man seems to be thrown back to a naked, suffering, and accidental existence in this phase of post-war German literature; here we encounter the vacuum that opened the doors to the French existentialism of Sartre and Camus. Existentialism turned out to be one of the most important signposts for German literature in the 50’s. Concepts of an existential world view offer to the writers of the Federal Republic, founded in 1949, the formula for a moral and political engagement that helped shape the development of the nonconformist attitude toward rational and moral principles of the young German literature. A concept of democracy that was different from the Weimar Republic took quite some time to evolve under the not always tolerant pressure of western “reeducation” politics in West Germany. Now a confrontation with the immediate past took place on predominantly moral considerations that could easily fill the moral vacuum of the post-war years. At the same time, the political system of the new democracy was stabilized by massive western, e.g. American, assistance. The official political attitude was rigidly anti-communist, which in turn also promoted a freeze of non-official east-west contacts. Thus, the emerging concept of democracy was primarily defensive—first of all in view of its own past and secondly with its view toward the east—and therefore only the literary fields of moral judgment and criticism could be explored. Even the “reeducation,” mainly nourished by anti-communist thinking, fostered a mode of thinking among the new democrats that was anchored primarily in moral and not political attitudes. In this environment, Camus’ concept of the absurd and Sartre’s definition of existentialism defined the literary poles between which young German writers could find a common denominator in their critical confrontation with fascism and war: existentialism supplied the vocabulary for this confrontation. And just as, through the concept of the absurd, political actions were replaced by the aesthetics of a historic and social conflict toward a human and fateful antagonism, the theme of “engaged literature” served only to foster a merely moral orientation of literature toward political reality, an orientation that was separated from political action. A perfect example for this process is the founding of the Group 47 which accompanied and strengthened this development. In 1946, Hans Werner Richter and Alfred Andersch founded the journal Der Ruf, which was supposed to become a forum for those intellectuals...
who hoped to attain a political reorientation by way of a left-wing liberal
democracy. In 1947 the Americans stopped publication of this journal because
they felt that the democratic determination with which political arguments were
presented was going too far. Those writers who had seen the journal as a political
platform formed the eminently important literary Group 47, which, on the basis of
its occasional excursions into actual politics, strongly supported the emancipation
efforts of contemporary young literature in the German Federal Republic. Until the
late 60's the cultural scene was marked decisively by the literature of the Group 47
and its authors who had developed a moral identity by refraining extensively from
political involvement.

German history after 1945 took a different direction from that dreamed of by
those writers who were looking for a new beginning. With the two different
currency reforms in the three western zones and the Soviet-occupied zone, the
groundwork for the division of Germany had been laid in 1948, which led to the
founding of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and the German
Democratic Republic (East Germany) in 1949. The Federal Republic became
strong through its alliance with the west and was rebuilt within a short time. The
Christian Democrats, who for many years to come were in charge of the govern­
ment, initiated a new restoration that was based on a strong anti-communist
sentiment. The rebuilding of West Germany, its economy, its prosperity, and
eventually also its military force gradually became a self-serving goal; political
concepts that attempted to overcome the cliches of restoration were quickly attri­
buted to Communist influences. In 1961 Chancellor Adenauer brought this con­
servatism to its climax in an election speech in which he accused the candidate of
the German Socialist party, Willy Brandt, of treason because Brandt had fled from
the Nazis; with that, Adenauer’s ruling party issued the revealing election motto
"no experiments."

The new German literature developed in this climate and under these social
and political conditions. The concepts of the absurd and of "engaged literature"
imported from France are now being considered ideological constructs that can
provide a clear conceptual orientation for the writers of this young West German
literature: the political development into the restoration after the disappearance of
the Third Reich was something incomprehensible for many writers, and was
furthermore another indication of the absurdity of political action. The writers
continued to react on a moral and existential basis rather than on a political one;
and since one could not counteract this development from a political point of view,
a new kind of literature, derived from Sartre’s definition of "engaged literature,"
was created that took into account the ever-increasing nonconformist tendencies of
its environment. The literary nonconformism of the 50’s and 60’s became the
West German variation of existentialism. Born out of a sense of absurdity in a
destroyed world, the young German literature moved away from a growing
political restoration into a nonconformist attitude of individual moralizing. Thus
the young German writers interpreted in their own way the insights that Sartre had
reached in his essay on existentialism. According to Sartre, the individual act
binds the human being together and it has to be understood as an exemplary realization of that which is human. Furthermore, they linked these interpretations to Sartre’s claim that literature must always have a thesis. Thus, they were able to step outside of political action and instead become involved in writing a literature of a moral and nonconformist nature.

However, we cannot blame writers for having taken recourse into pure literature in order to avoid an undesirable reality. It also can be assumed that the time for political demonstrations of the young generation was not quite ripe during the 50’s; however, the emergence of nonconformist literature initiated the political actions of the following generation during the second half of the 60’s. The purpose of this essay is to explain the development of this nonconformist literature within the context of historical realities, and the tools of the writer are after all language and sensibility, critical and anticipatory imagination, and it really does not matter which political action an author chooses to endorse but rather what kind of impact the creative energies of his works will have on history and to what extent he becomes the protagonist of his times. And I consider a protagonist to be a progressive innovator of words who enriches the forms and contents of literature in order to make them more relevant in a social and political realm and ultimately to make them available to the public.

If one could consider the works of Wolfgang Borchert and the early Heinrich Boll direct reactions to the war and fascism, the literary characteristics of the 50’s must be considered a reaction to the growing restoration of the Federal Republic, criticism of a ruthless materialism, and anger about the reappearance of old Nazis in industry and government. The writers who presented these themes and ideas in their works have always stayed away from the anti-Communism of the cold war. None of their works deal with the socialistic structure of society in the German Democratic Republic as a negative image in comparison to the social structures of the German Federal Republic. Furthermore, no work can be found that shows the German Democratic Republic as a positive counterpart to the Federal Republic. The writers were concerned with their own problems; it was the concern of the nonconformist writers to analyze critically the developments in their own country.

Next to Heinrich Boll, the most important West German novelist of this period was Wolfgang Koeppen. Between 1951 and 1954, three of his novels were published: Tauben im Gras (Pigeons in the Grass), Das Treibhaus (The Greenhouse), and Der Tod in Rom (Death in Rome). Koeppen was influenced by Faulkner, Dos Passos, and Joyce. He developed his own technique of montage and interior monologue and was therefore able to imprint certain modern stylistic features on the young German literature. In all three novels, he describes the situation of the contemporary Federal Republic and the infiltration of National-Socialist elements into the private and public daily life of contemporary society. Koeppen is particularly aware of the consequences of facism in most areas of the new government and more than anyone else, he detected very early the mutual interactions that existed between economic progress and the dehumanization of human life. His first novel, Tauben im Gras, presents in very precise scenes the
image of the post-war society in Munich, a society that comes to life through its parabolic figures. They appear like figures on a chess board, unaware of their own significance. Koeppen analyzes their undirected actions during the course of one day.

His second novel, *Das Treibhaus*, portrays a similar situation. It takes place in Bonn. As in his first novel, Koeppen uses the technique of collage and analyzes in a more expansive way the nature of political power at a time when the rearmament of the Federal Republic is being decided. The main character of the novel is the emigrant Keetenheuwe, who is now the representative of the big opposition party. His sensibility and his radical political thinking are out of place and somewhat meaningless in a corrupt and opportunist political world that lies between the government and its opposition. Paralysis of his private life corresponds to a political paralysis. Rather than letting himself be bribed into a very promising political post, he commits suicide in a sensational manner.

In his third novel, *Der Tod in Rom*, Koeppen portrays the reappearance of old Nazis. His main figures are Judejahn, a former SS general obsessed with revenge, and his brother-in-law Pfaffrath, a former high-ranking party member who has now found a new place as a member of the Christian Conservative party. Koeppen’s writing technique has become more radical than in the first novel. No German writer since Koeppen has provided such an excellent analytical picture of the West German society of the 50’s and its lasting contradictions.

However, Koeppen soon ran into some difficulties. He experienced the limitations of using the novel form to change political reality. Naturally, the literary critics in the Federal Republic immediately jumped on him and constructed the “Koeppen case”: the case of a fiction writer who, because the political situations didn’t change, abandoned the writing of political novels and began to write travel literature.

Obviously this “case” belongs in the realm of legend: first, because Koeppen, as he said himself, was not in the least interested in the impact of his own writing. Second, the fact that Koeppen’s novels were not particularly well received in the 50’s can be blamed to a great extent on the literary critics. Most of them misunderstood Koeppen’s analysis and his complaints about the contemporary German situation.

Heinrich Böll’s stories and novels, published during the same period, deal with similar themes and characters. In his novel *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* (And No One Said a Word), published in 1953, he criticizes the sterile materialism of our civilization and tries to illuminate the alienation that the lack of living space can cause between a man and his family. Böll is keen on portraying the suffering of an individual in the context of an environment where people think only of their own well-being. The novel that was published one year later, *Haus ohne Hüter* (House without Guardians), describes the fate of two war widows whose sons have to grow up without a father; both women die: the one, a rich widow of a writer, dies of self-pity; the other, poor and forced to live with a man whom she does not love, is extinguished by that relationship and the prejudices of her environment. The novel is presented from various points of view. The confrontation of the social
inequality is reflected through the characters of the two sons. Böll might have written his short story "Das Brot der frühen Jahre" (The Bread of Early Years, 1955) as a positive counterpart to this novel. For the hero of the story, Walter Fendrich, the bread becomes a symbol of love and unselfishness as well as of greed and selfishness. Fendrich, who is persecuted by a society that does not care for the fate of the individual, suddenly encounters a girl who makes him fall in love with her. The impenetrable reality will be conquered by the personal love relationship and, almost as in a fairy tale, personal happiness asserts itself.

Even a short description of these two writers lets us see how different they are in their reactions to reality. Koeppen depicts social reality in a comprehensive as well as analytical way and he always places personal and individual relationships in the context of overall social structures. Böll, on the other hand, always focuses in on the individual, easily accessible fragment of a social situation. Koeppen aims at a totality; Böll is satisfied with the small detail, and he sees this detail as a typical part of the whole. Furthermore, Böll wants to get his reader involved in the suffering of his characters so that they can experience some kind of catharsis by sympathizing with the weak and underprivileged of this society. Böll wants to effect change, whereas Koeppen only analyzed the situation from his perspective, because his outlook is not as optimistic as Böll's. Perhaps one could consider Böll's novel Billard um halb zehn (Billiards at Half Past Nine), published in 1959, as the only exception to this rule. In this novel Böll tries to approach his subject matter somewhat in the direction of Koeppen's fictional intentions.

The novelist who, next to Koeppen and Böll, became the most important German-language writer comes from Switzerland. The two novels by Max Frisch, Stiller (1954) and homo faber (1957), display a virtuosity of language and a thematic structure that was unknown to the young literature of Germany. For various reasons Frisch was able to transfer concepts of existentialism to the problems of the individual. Early on, his novels were well received in the Federal Republic of Germany. His works were read in high school because his novels and plays were not immediately geared toward political subject matters. His plays had to be seen as parables, not as concrete incidents. Frisch’s main concern—decline of personality and the search for identity—was easily taken up by the German writers who were searching for self-understanding. However, his novels were too idiosyncratic to impart a certain revitalizing energy to a literature that was concerned mainly with the phenomena of national guilt. Thus it is understandable that it wasn’t until the 60’s that Max Frisch’s works were incorporated into the mainstream of German literature, which by then had reached some kind of international recognition and also had incorporated some of the individual and structural problems that Frisch had treated in his own works.

The development of the Group 47 is closely related to the history of this literature. Although the members of the Group 47 never did see themselves as a politically or socially unified organization, they were treated by the public as such. Generally, literary and public attacks and criticism were directed at the group as a close entity. Most of the important representatives of the young German
literature belong to the Group 47 between 1955 and 1965. Heinrich Böll was joined by several other writers of his own generation. Among them are Alfred Andersch, Johannes Bobrowski, Paul Celan, Günter Eich, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Walter Kolbenhoff and Wolfgang Weyrauch. However, between 1955 and 1965 a new generation of writers came of age. They only partially picked up the themes of the 50’s and when they did, they acquired a new stylistic and critical self-confidence and displayed a new literary self-assurance. It was a generation that represented a social and literary nonconformism and was represented by writers like Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Peter Weiss, Martin Walser, Günter Grass and Uwe Johnson. Even Ingrid Bachmann, who published her poems in 1953, was to a certain degree part of that group although her poetry and her stories were never evaluated by the same political standard as the literary works of the other writers mentioned above.

The Group 47 had come together as a literary discussion circle of friends, after some of their later members were forced to stop the publication of a political journal. And although they functioned mainly as a literary group, they continued to adhere to an unwritten political and moral principle: No one who had any military, fascist, or even strong conservative attitudes could be invited to their meetings. This decision of the group was often considered psychological terrorism. And it becomes quite clear that these rather limiting boundaries that the group imposed on itself during the restoration period of the early 50's placed them outside the political and literary mainstream. It was only toward the end of the 50's that literary critics paid serious attention to this group. At that time it became impossible for the critics to ignore the production of these writers without ignoring at the same time the progress of German literature in general.

With its growing importance, the nonconformist literature separated itself increasingly from the development of social and political conditions in the country, e.g. the writers found themselves in noticeable opposition to the political system and this opposition became more and more a subject of public debate. Members of the Group 47 achieved goals as a group that might not have been achieved by individual authors: They attracted attention and made political statements; they attacked, in verbal rather than in physical form, practical political actions, but they nevertheless remained untouchable as a group. Thus, the group assumed a moral and critical function which at that time certainly was perceived as basically protagonistic. It was during that time that Günter Eich, somewhat removed from this reality, published his dry, sober nature poetry; Karl Krolow published his poetry that was mainly concerned with the nature and the isolation of man; Gottfried Benn was celebrated and imitated; and Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Ionesco had through their own plays prepared the scene for the theater of the absurd. Even Günter Grass contributed a few minor plays to the theater of the absurd. It was also during that time that the first stories by Martin Walser were published, which were still very much under the influence of Kafka. Also, Walser’s first novel Ehen in Philippsburg (Marriages in Philippsburg) was published, which already foreshadowed the theme of his biggest work, the Kristlein Trilogy. Walser was mainly concerned with the position of the indivi-
dual and how he could interact with the competitive society of Germany. Günter Grass also published stories which, however, related less to West German reality than to problems of his own artistic self-assurance. Uwe Johnson lived in the German Democratic Republic until 1959.

Where German literature had already separated itself from political reality, thereby reassuring its literary position, it was now mostly concerned with questions of self-understanding. It devoted itself to artistic problems and the identity of the individual, or with the resurgence of the poetic tradition, mystical irrationalism and sensitive explorations of nature. That a writer like Gerd Gaiser could have been successful during those years with his mystifications of the past and the present indicates very clearly what kind of recognition literature had reached in the context of public life.

Heinrich Böll had become the leading critical protagonist of the new fiction during these and the following years. But by 1957, another lyrical protagonist joined him on the literary scene who to this day remains a pace-setter in German literature: Hans Magnus Enzensberger’s first volume of poetry appeared in 1957 under the title of Verteidigung der Wölfe (Defense of the Wolves).

With its radical form and contents and its strong base of poetic topography, the poetry of Enzensberger displays significant thematic resemblance to the novels of Walter Koeppen. Its theme is a radical critique of the restoration of social values and of the introduction of an economically guided consumer society. At the level of form, the poetry shows the influence of Benn’s linguistic intensity, but the magic effects of Gottfried Benn’s poems have been turned into alienation effects that both clarify and illuminate. The poem “Birth Announcement” is a particularly good example of Enzensberger’s characteristic style.

Enzensberger’s aesthetic orientation also brought about a change for the genre of poetry. Mystical ecstasy was replaced by the sober precision of critical and informative intent. However, traditional poems about nature continued to be written in addition to this new type of poetry. Karl Krolow recently wrote that the tradition of poetry about nature was the only one that was not disrupted by national socialism. At any rate, it was Enzensberger who introduced the political poem into the literature of West Germany. (It is interesting to note that during the 60’s at the height of the protest movement, Enzensberger would occasionally turn away from poetry—and even today he is still of the opinion that writing poetry is a private affair. This has not stopped him from writing and publishing new poems).

While the restoration established rather fixed and inflexible positions in the society of West Germany, the writers searched for self-understanding in formal and thematic coherence. The members of the Group 47 did not hold political discussions at their meetings. Instead, they sought to find the appropriate expression for certain subjects and themes. As Martin Walser once described it, everyone was engaged in analyzing and critiquing style. Even though the Group, from the beginning, had pursued a rather simple yet very powerful form of realism, as evidenced in the stories and novels of Heinrich Böll, new refined forms of expression were slowly developed. This can be seen in Martin Walser’s early stories that were influenced by Kafka, in Ilse Aichinger’s subtle prose, in Ingeborg
Bachmann’s poetry and in a chapter of Günter Grass’ *The Tin Drum*. All of these works received the Group 47 prize during the 1950’s. All this reflects the process by which modern German literature found itself, because the characteristic traits that were attributed to a few main figures and groups in this context must be understood as representative reflections of the entire literary scene.

It is not only unfeasible but perhaps unjust to describe the beginning and the development of a complex literary revolution using a few outstanding authors because one is a contemporary. As a consequence, many other writers remain unnamed who have contributed to the diversity of styles and subject matters that have given a certain vitality to contemporary literature. In addition to the writers of the 50s, like Koeppen, Böll and Enzensberger, who initiated the beginning of contemporary West German literature, other writers who pursued different paths also must be considered.

The novels of Hans Erich Nossack represented his confrontation with the experience of war and the affluent society—both of which seem to be an extension of Camus’ existentialism—so that his literature became increasingly more critical of society. Characters often are motivated to find salvation through religion; but the greater this hope to escape society’s pressures through the characters’ determined individuality, the farther his characters are removed from society.

Wolf-Dietrich Schnurre made the short story the forum of his philosophical intention. He focuses on the experience of war and post-war times with satirical and often macabre intensity. The form of the short story offered the best method of portraying the new beginning, the *tabula-rasa* situation after Germany’s collapse. It was impossible to write about significant relationships and, therefore, he saw his new beginning in the description of the smallest detail in order to recapture new literary means of expressing the ordinary, which had been totally distorted by the Nazis. To reconstruct language little by little, almost as in a mosaic, was Schnurre’s major aesthetic goal.

In contrast, however, Alfred Andersch’s novels and stories deal with man’s flight from inhuman bonds. His autobiography *Die Kirschen der Freiheit* (The Cherries of Freedom, 1952) offers a fictional justification for his desertion in 1944 and thus foreshadows the themes of his later works. This theme finds its most convincing representation in *Sansibar oder der letzte Grund* (1957), in which the conflict between the practice of humanity on the one hand and the inhuman conditions on the other hand are placed within the context of the most recent German history. While Andersch experimented successfully in this novel with new writing styles, the novels *Die Rote* (The Redhead, 1960) and *Efraim* (1967) represent a return to the conventional, immediate narrative form. They never attained the power of expression of *Sansibar*.

Early in his life, Arno Schmidt pursued a literary direction that has placed him in the dominant position of an outsider within the context of West German literature. His short stories “Leviathan” (1949), “Brand’s Haide” (1951), “Schwarze Spiegel” (“Black Mirror,” 1951) and the novels *Aus dem Leben eines Fauns* (1953), *Das steinerne Herz* (1956), and *Die Gelehrtenrepublik* (1957)
derive their meaning mainly from the formal writing style in which linguistic exactness becomes identical with phonetic expression. Like the other writers, Schmidt also incorporated Germany’s historical past and present into his subject matters and themes, but his idiosyncratic style prevented him from being broadly accepted in the 50’s. To this day, Schmidt remains the most prominent literary outsider. While no one yet imitates his style, he has found readers and some scholars who use the *Bargfelder Boten* (1972) as a vehicle to decipher the ambiguity in his work. It remains debatable whether Schmidt is in fact a significant writer of outstanding qualities; it may also be that his personal attitude of isolation and his isolated style magnify his literary greatness when projected against the background of a consumer-oriented literary establishment. He must be regarded as one of the unique writers of the post-war period.

Although these authors did not have the same kind of impact on German literature as did Böll, Koeppen, Enzensberger and Frisch, they nevertheless belong to the broad circle of writers who helped shape modern literature in the Federal Republic. Until the early 60’s, Günter Eich and Ingeborg Bachmann presented new and vital prototypes in their radio plays, which constituted the only major dramatic form at this time.

A major breakthrough occurred in German literature after 1959, almost twelve years after the literary regeneration. Between 1959 and 1964 the literature of the German Federal Republic reached its prime. Within five years, significant works were published in all literary genres. These works expressed the new-found self-confidence of West German literature which became the yardstick by which literature and criticism would be evaluated in years to come. In poetry, names like Paul Celan, Karl Krolow, Marie-Luise Kaschnitz, as well as Johannes Bobrowski and Peter Huchel from East Germany, became known. Hans Magnus Enzensberger continued to be popular. Plays such as Max Frisch’s *Andorra*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *The Physicists*, Rolf Hochhuth’s *The Deputy*, Peter Weiss’ *Marat/Sade*, and Heinar Kipphardt’s documentary *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer* constituted prototypical works that continued to influence modern German drama. The documentary theater, however, developed as a contrast in contradiction to the theater of the absurd of Dürrenmatt and Ionesco, and as such, developed into the allegorical dramatic style of Max Frisch. However, the novel flourished between 1959 and 1963. During that time Günter Grass published *The Tin Drum, Dog Years*, and the novella *Cat and Mouse*; Martin Walser published the first part of his Kristlein-trilogy, *Halftime*; Heinrich Böll tried to experiment with new forms in his novels *Billiards at Half Past Nine* and in 1963 he created in *The Clown* an ambivalent character who illustrates the hypocrisy of Christian conservative attitudes on the one hand and on the other the paralysis of the individual who finds himself boxed into the ideology of a particular society. Uwe Johnson, who had just moved from East to West Germany, was the first German writer to write about the division of Germany in his novels *Mutmassungen über Jakob* (Speculations about Jacob) and in *Das Dritte Buch über Achim* (The Third Book of Achim); Ingeborg Bachmann demonstrated in the seven short stories of *Das
The Thirtieth Year (The Thirtieth Year) how the individual began to revolt against his newly acquired self-assurance; and in his novel Mein Name sei Gantenbein, Max Frisch continued to focus on the individual’s problems in search of identity, a theme which also became the focus of Ingeborg Bachmann’s later works.

The most important works of prose writing had already been published by 1960. More so than poetry and drama, these works helped to shape the international opinion that fifteen years after the war German literature had once again reached a new climax. International critics pretty much ignored the literature of East Germany; although Bertolt Brecht’s name became known rather rapidly, the novels of Anna Seghers, who is to this day the most important fiction writer of East Germany, remain rather inconspicuous. And we are not even talking of the novels that were published in East Germany by Dieter Nolls, Erwin Strittmatter, Günter de Bruyn, Hermann Kant, Erik Neutsch and the important stories by Franz Fühmann. Only the short story Der geteilte Himmel, written by Christa Wolf in 1962, found some kind of resonance in West Germany because for the first time the theme of the division of Germany was dealt with in East Germany, a theme that three years before that had been presented by Uwe Johnson in West Germany.

Certain historical developments brought Christa Wolf’s story to the forefront. On August 13, 1961, a few weeks before the Christian Democratic Party lost its majority in the Senate, a wall was built in Berlin and, with that, the last open traffic post between East and West Germany was closed. The Berlin crisis of this year was the most violent confrontation of the two states in the course of history. Obviously the writers also were affected by this crisis; it was responsible for the fact that East German literature was ignored for many years in West Germany and the rest of the Western world. Any official discussions between authors from East and West Germany had come to an abrupt end. West German writers were even opposed to the publication of Anna Seghers and Erich Strittmatter by West German publishers. And most of the West German theaters refused to perform Bertolt Brecht’s plays. Only a few writers kept their senses and tried to stay in contact with their East German colleagues. In this context, the book that Christa Wolf had published had to attract attention and many West German critics interpreted her story to be an expression of opposition to the official regime of East Germany.

The novelists Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser and Uwe Johnson, as well as the playwright Rolf Hochhuth and the poets Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Paul Celan, were more concerned with the understanding of past and present German history than most of the other West German writers. The latter thought that individual problems, even when attached to historical phenomena, were more important than the search for social representation in literature. However, Max von der Grün can be considered an exception. In his two novels dealing with the working classes, Manner in zweifacher Nacht (1961) and Irrlicht und Feuer (1963), he presented a subject matter that confronted the contemporary West German situation with radically different stylistic devices; for the first time the world of the industrial laborer was seen as an acceptable theme in literature.
Whereas Enzensberger maintained his position as a violent critic of ideologies and consumer affluence, Celan relived in his best poems the terrible fate of the Jews under the Nazi regime. His poem "Death Fugue," published in 1948, is the most famous poem dealing with this subject matter. However, the closer Celan came to the present, the more hermetic and obscure became his poetry.

The publication of Rolf Hochhuth's *The Deputy* caused an international scandal in 1963. He combined authentic documentation with a playful fictional transformation and thus presented a long play that criticized the attitude and behavior of the Catholic Church during the persecution of the Jews under the Nazi regime. He saw his play as documentary and he has continued to relate his writing to topical problems of present situations in his later plays. His plays, which were received rather negatively by the critics, are now featured among the most often performed plays in German theaters.

In contrast to poetry and drama, the novel adopted a different approach to coming to terms with recent German history; Grass unmasked the Third Reich as a result of bourgeois narrowness and cowardice. All three novels of his Danzig trilogy continue this theme; only years later does Grass in his novels *Örtlich betaubt* (Local Anaesthetics) and his *Tagebuch einer Schnecke* (Dairy of a Snail) turn to current historical events in West Germany. As many critics have pointed out, these works seem to be less intense in their structural forms and effects.

Uwe Johnson's prose writing is the most intellectual among the other writers and, therefore, at times not immediately accessible to the reader. However, Johnson tries to transfer his intellectual doubt about the reality that he perceives to the reader; he does not want to talk the reader into something, but rather he tries to convince him that rationality and intellectuality are the necessary foundations of a meaningful existence. These considerations led to the creation of his four-volume novel entitled *Jahrestage*, in which he tries to present a picture of reality through the character of Gesine Cresspahl.

Martin Walser created a similar character in Anselm Kristlein, who reflected the fragmentation of man that Walser himself had experienced as a member of West German society. Walser, who finished his Kristlein trilogy only in 1973 with the novel *Der Sturz*, has in the meantime distanced himself from the Social Democratic Party, which he had supported in 1961, and has come closer to the German Communist Party, as indicated in his novel *Die Gallistl'sche Krankheit*. The main character in this novel, Gallistl, is looking for a new political affiliation. Walser had written his first two novels of the Kristlein trilogy, *Halbzeit* and *Das Einhorn*, under the influence of Proust, and, therefore, he tried to describe the actual reality in West Germany with an absolutely fanatic joy in details. However, the novels he wrote later in his life present the reality of that society only symbolically. His prose has become more internalized and at the same time more transparent and associative.

The treatment of contemporary themes, the stylistic brilliance and certainty with which these themes are presented, and the ease with which the taboos of past and present history are brought to the forum of discussion indicate very clearly
how much the young modern German literature defended its self-understanding.

The change of power in Bonn did not occur until several years later; however, the change in public opinion had already been expressed long before by the young modern literature of West Germany. One should not overestimate the impact of literature on the real world if one intends to draw immediate political results from literary works. Those people who later on proclaimed the death of bourgeois literature, that is to say also the death of modern German literature, maintained such foolish hopes. Naturally, both these hopes and declarations of death were erroneous, because the bourgeois literature continues to thrive. And should one not consider crises in literature as the first and best indication of upcoming changes? Could one not consider the desire for change and the continuous evaluation of present positions absolute prerequisites for a literature that wants to stay alive? Does not the same apply to the political scene? Indeed, there was a period in the mid-60's when the blossoming of German literature seemed to be in a state of stagnation: in 1964 the Group 47 traveled to Sigtuna in Sweden for its meeting; in 1966 the group met in Princeton, New Jersey, at a time when the U.S. was pursuing its murderous war in Vietnam. Thus, this nonconformist literature that had been promoted by the Group 47 was placed in the position of representing certain attitudes that were opposed to their own views. Martin Walser, who already had distanced himself from the group by that time, mockingly called this behavior "Literary World Championship." He and several other critics recognized, and rightly so, that this kind of self-representation of a significant portion of West German literature would result either in the unwarranted support of those writers who were not members of the group, or it would ignore them altogether and that this conduct would not permit any self-critical evaluation.

These events of stagnation—more related to the business of publication than to literature—added as much to the contempt directed toward the bourgeois literature of West Germany as did the democratic demonstration of the younger generation whose action seemed to affect politics more immediately than the entire nonconformist literature of the past twenty years. The critics of this new generation together with many dissatisfied intellectuals turned against this nonconformist literature. Like those critics who in the 50's and 60's had directed their criticism toward the stagnation of political restoration, the young generation, burdened with outdated political changes, now turned against this typically inbred stagnation of literature. It was a development of a rather fascinating dimension. The young writers attacked the old ones who threatened to become classics of stature. Handke accused the Group 47 in Princeton of being impotent in their descriptions; Peter Hamm and Günter Herburger launched massive attack against Günter Grass, who was not particularly kind in his dealings with the members of the new Left; Wolf Wondratschek accused the entire literary scene of being incompetent; Walter Boehlich announced in the Kursbuch in rather strong language that bourgeois literature and criticism was going under. Under those circumstances, the Group 47 decided to give up. The gray-haired literary masses met once more in 1971 in order to bury their old aunt amicably. However, this fact
should not detract from the group’s significance in the development of German literature after 1945. It has to be understood that in the course of time not only do the styles, the contents, and the themes of literature change, but also the arguments about literature. Some consider it a haven of refuge to express their own individuality and to find themselves. They conceive of internalization as a principle that ignores all attempts at communication and declines to become the “nursemaid of society” (Vintila Ivanceanu). Peter Handke and Thomas Bernhard, as well as the Concrete Poets, with their playful structures, distance themselves from the main problems of society by relying more and more on a pure subjectivity or the possibilities of linguistic processes. Others see literature only as a means for political and social changes, an opinion that is often supported and often, also, negated. However, taking a political stand or using social conflict as themes is possible not only through literature; at times one has the impression that expressions through literature obscure the issue. Günter Wallraff has shown how documentaries as a means toward literature can be much more effective.

After this phase of intolerance in literature, it seems that we have now entered into a period, which might, however, prove to be disruptive in the further process of literary development; calmness can also represent lethargy. This also results in certain developments in the consumer market which I will not discuss now. However, the fact that literary exposure in West Germany is decreasing constantly also blocks its access to certain publishers and, hence, to the market. Neither can afford to stay alive under the circumstances—as a result, for financial reasons, fewer writers find publishers to sponsor them. Certainly, neither Kafka nor Joyce nor Brecht let their writing be impeded by market considerations; greatness that lasts grows in solitude. However, the wide river of contemporary literature, of which 95 percent will have been forgotten after 100 years, this river that includes writers, critics, scholars and commentators will grow smaller; and whatever the river carries with it will not be measured against eternal values but rather against its marketability and its political and social relevance. These are obviously totally different criteria from the ones that people who are aesthetically oriented have in mind; however, these are still criteria that can be measured against reality, that are therefore quite modest and are undergoing a daily evaluation. All this, naturally, requires a new concept of criticism. The very fact that the marketability of a book based on all kinds of market research done by publishers will be a much more convincing prerequisite for the publication of a book indicates that the literary quality of a book is less important than its possible distribution. This situation might indeed put literature in danger of losing its diversity and its future projecting power, which even though it is rooted in the moment, is present in the smallest literary intention.
Christine Busta

GEDICHTE

Leben,
in Bernstein geborgen,
begraben.

Narben,
beruhbar,
unverletzlich.

Aufgezeichnete
Zeit im Werden.
Kreide oder Achat.

Ernst David

STUFEN

schreibend schreibe ich nicht

schreibend zeichne ich still
ein bild vom schweigen nach
ein bild in dem ich sitze
ein bild in das ich falle

schreibend falle ich nicht
und keiner schreibt

nur das bild redet
insofern es ein bild vom schweigen ist
Christine Busta

POEMS

Life
contained in amber,
buried.

Scars,
tangible,
inviolable.

Sketched
time in being.
Chalk or agate.

Ernst David

STEPS

writing I don’t write

writing I quietly draw
an image of silence
an image in which I sit
an image into which I fall

writing I don’t fall
and no one writes

only the image speaks
inasmuch as it is an image of silence
Ernst Nowak

OHNE GEDANKEN

tief in mir den Tod
dieses federleichte ungeborene Kind

so lebe ich fort
von Erzählung zu Erzählung

und mein Sprechen
ändert nichts
an meiner eingefleischten
Lautlosigkeit

Heidi Pataki

DAS TIER
unter meiner Rippe
hat scharfe Zähne
Nie schläft es.
Böse fällt es die Wand an,
lauert auf Beute,
verbundet sich
mit dem Blut.
In die gespannte Haut
trommelt es
seine Botschaft:
Die Nacht
ist zu dürr
für den Hunger.
Sonne
Ikone des Heiligen Georg
aus Licht,
mit deiner Lanze
stich die Blasen auf.
Sonne
Drachentöterin
verwunde das einsame Tier.
In der Fallgrube
meiner Rippen
stirbt es.
Ernst Nowak

WITHOUT THINKING

death deep in me
this feather-light unborn child

that's how I live
from story to story

and my words
do not change
my deeply-ingrained
silence

Heidi Pataki

THE ANIMAL

under my rib
has sharp teeth.
It angrily springs at the wall,
waits for prey
and allies itself
with the blood.
It drums
its message
on the tight skin:
Night is too arid
for hunger.
Sun,
light icon
of St. George,
pierce the blisters
with your lance.
Sun,
dragon-killer,
wound this solitary animal.
It is dying
in the pitfall
of my ribs.
Ernst Schenwiese

ALLES IST NUR

ein Bild in einem Spiegel
Spiegelung hinter Spiegelung
   bis ins Unendliche.

Alles ist nur ein Traum
   in einem Traum,
in dem dir träumt
   dass du träumst.

Bis der Tod den Spiegel zerschlägt
   und den Träumenden weckt.

Helmut H. Stradal

WORTE ZWISCHEN DIR UND MIR

Höre sie
damit sie nicht im Raum zerfließen
meine Worte
von der Symmetrie der Logik befreit
und der Projektionsfunktion entkleidet
damit sie mein wurden
um so dein sein zu können.
Worte zwischen dir und mir —
beschriftete Töne...
Empfinde sie
um ihren Abdruck zu bewahren.
**Ernst Schenwiese**

EVERYTHING IS ONLY

a reflection in a mirror
    that reflects another mirror.
Reflection behind reflection
    into infinity.

Everything is only a dream
    in a dream
in which you dream
    that you're dreaming.

Until death breaks the mirror
    and wakes the dreamer.

**Helmut H. Stradal**

WORDS BETWEEN YOU AND ME

Listen to them
so that they don’t disintegrate in space
my words
freed from the symmetry of logic
and stripped of their projectile function
so that they become mine
in order to be yours.
Words between you and me—
inscribed tones...
Feel them
in order to preserve their imprint.
**Helmut Zenker**

**NOTIZ**

ich pflege meinen garten  
(ich habe keinen)  
und  
pflücke blumen  
(die mir versprochen wurden)

ich züchte bienen  
(in meinem garten)  
und  
verkaufe honig  
(an längst verstorbene)

**Erich Fried**

**SPRACHLOS**

Warum schreibst du  
noch immer  
Gedichte  
obwohl du  
mit dieser Methode  
immer nur  
Minderheiten erreicht

fragen mich Freunde  
ungeduldig darüber  
dass sie mit ihren Methoden  
immer nur  
Minderheiten erreichen

und ich weiss  
keine Antwort  
für sie
Helmut Zenker  Translator: Herbert Kuhner

NOTE

I tend my garden
(I don’t have one)
and
pick flowers
(that were promised to me)

I keep bees
(in my garden)
and sell honey
(to those long-dead)

Erich Fried  Translator: Herbert Kuhner

SPEECHLESS

Why
do you still
write poems
although you know
that you can only
reach minorities
with this method

my friends ask me
impatient that
they can only
reach minorities
with their methods

and I can’t
give them
an answer
Gertrud Fussenegger

DAS WORT—DEN KAHN

Das Wort, dieser schmale
Kahn
schwankend wenn ich ihn besteige
die Ankerkette rasselt
die Ruder knarren das Steuer
unhandsam verweigert den Dienst

Nicht an die Lande
führt er mich
dem Schluck des Fisches
wirft er mich aus
dem stummen

Wenn er gesunken ist später
zeichnet sich seine Spur
spiegelbildlich
dem Himmelsbogen
vom Zug der Vögel
eingeritzt

Hermann Jandl

KÖNNEN NICHTS DAFÜR

die steine
über die du stolperst
können nichts dafür

die steine
die dir den weg versperren
können nichts dafür

die steine
die dich erschlagen
können nichts dafür
Gertrud Fussenegger

THE WORD—THIS BOAT

The word, this narrow
boat
rocks when I get on board
the anchor chain rattles
the rudders creak
the steering wheel refuses to turn

It doesn’t take me
to shore
but throws me
to the silence
of fishes

Later when it has sunk
the reflection of its traces
are drawn
on the horizon
carved into it
by the flight of birds

Hermann Jandl

AREN’T TO BLAME

the stones
that trip you
aren’t to blame

the stones
that block your path
aren’t to blame

the stones
that strike you dead
aren’t to blame
Albert Janetschek

ENDPHASE

Die Martyrer
sind gestorben
das Blut
ist versiegt,
die Revolutionen
haben stattgefunden,
die Zukunft
gehört dem Fortschritt—

wovor zittern wir noch?
Albert Janetschek

END PHASE

The martyrs
have died,
blood
has dried,
the revolutions
have taken place,
the way of the future
is progress—

why are we still trembling?

Translator: Herbert Kuhner
STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF
GERMAN DRAMA SINCE 1945

THEO BUCK

The history of literature, particularly of drama, becomes meaningful only when considered in relationship to the respective social settings. If an attempt is made here to trace the dominant developing trends of German drama after Brecht in West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, it is undertaken with the assumption that there exists a dialectic interaction between the dramatists, the stages that perform them, and their reception by the audiences—in the relationship of each to reality. It scarcely needs to be stressed that this concept of a comprehensive interaction between aesthetic formulation and social behavior, in spite of the implication of complex mediating processes, does no damage to the irrefutable principle of the subjective creativity of the artist. Therefore, such premises would not allow the inclusion of the drama of East Germany. Obviously its aesthetic program rests on social assumptions and realities fundamentally different from those in the other three countries. This thesis is valid even for those East German authors whose works are published or performed primarily or exclusively in the west because their plays do not suit the party’s cultural functionaries. Indeed, even those dramatists who have lived for a long time in West Germany—such as Hartmut Lange or Thomas Brasch—can’t deny their strong indebtedness to the influence of the German Democratic Republic. The aim here, however, will not be a complete inventory of drama in the last three and one-half decades, but rather an outline of theater since the Second World War.

I. A Renewal, Not a New Beginning

That the literary ventures following the collapse of the Third Reich should not be interpreted as beginning at “ground zero” has been repeatedly stated and well supported, and is easily confirmed by a random sampling. It makes no difference whether one takes Wiechert’s The Jeromin Children or Borchert’s stories, the poetry of Lehmann or Eich, to say nothing of the belles-lettres of the “Ruf” Circle, out of which grew the Group 47—in no way can one speak of a tabula rasa. The same applies for drama. Apart from the special Swiss development evident in the literary beginnings of Frisch and Dürrenmatt, the two outstanding premieres of
the first years after 1945 confirm the fact that it was not a matter of a new begin­ning: Both Wolfgang Borchert’s *The Man Outside* (1947) and Carl Zuckmayer’s *The Devil’s General* (1947) continue the literary tradition of the years preceding Hitler’s takeover. They have nothing to do with innovation. They represent, rather, a renewal.

To be sure, during the war itself, the National Socialists did away with the conservative, classical repertoire as well as the “blood and soil” dramas of their own bards because in short order they closed down the entire theater industry. It is understandable that after the war, writers tried to fill the cultural vacuum by resorting to proven formulas. Different orientations would scarcely have been possible. Germany suffered from a loss of tradition and a general lack of contact with the international literary scene. Thus, in one headlong assault, as it were, Germans tried to level the mountainous literary deficit. Besides Anouilh, Camus, Eliot, Fry, Sartre, and Wilder, Claudel, Giraudoux, Jarry, Lorca, Pirandello, and O’Neill dominated the repertory. This produced a rather strange, adventurous sense of tension that could lead to the erroneous assumption that a certain simultaneous link could be established between two different historical phenomena.

During that time it remained virtually unnoticed that Bertolt Brecht used his stay in Switzerland to try a new form of drama and a new method of performance which, together with the Berlin experiments in stage design, began to set international standards. For his part, Brecht, the playwright, reacted allergically to the German way of stage design. Concerning a Heinz Hilpert production of Max Frisch’s *Santa Cruz* in Konstanz, he commented laconically: “Here you have to start again right from the beginning!” He viewed the condition of the theater in much the same way when he returned to Berlin. For good reason, he composed his “Berlin Ensemble” predominantly of young, untrained actors and stage people. At this time, the impact his work would have was still unforeseeable. Only Frisch and Dürrenmatt permitted themselves to get involved in discussions with him—mostly to their own advantage. The renewal in Austria evolved in a similarly discordant manner. Naturally the Austrians clung to their own traditions, and much attention was given to the remarkable achievements of Horváth. Of course, the inconspicuous pieces of his last five years were chosen rather than the serious folk plays that aimed at portraying layers of “consciousness.” Horváth’s time was still a long way off; his reception at that time proved to be a major misconception since he was placed on a level with Zuckmayer and Molner.

The difficulties of initiating a new German drama and the related consequences are easily illustrated by a few examples. The extent to which access to creative past traditions had been distorted was already evident in the somewhat negligible evaluations of Brecht’s and Horváth’s works. Even throughout the 50’s, Erwin Piscator had to struggle as a “guest worker,” and it was not until 1962 that the “Free National Theater” was entrusted to him. Not to mention the unheralded, bypassed Fleisser premiere in Munich in 1950, *Der Starke Stamm*; Brecht had been behind the production, but it did not receive even local attention. Instead, producers had recourse to assured successes which resulted in a long-last-
ing intimidation by foreign authors or in Expressionist museum pieces. Wolfgang Borchert’s desperate attitude toward the outmoded expressionistic methods are symptomatic of this. His writings reflect the consequences of fascist regression on the development of a young author. Yet, Borchert was still a remarkable exception. Therefore, the legend that writers had their desk drawers full of unpublished works soon disappeared. German drama suffered a similar fate after Germany’s decisive affair with Hitler. Tyranny had eaten too deeply into the public life. A voice like that of Borchert, marked by the hand of death, made the difference. Under such conditions traditions could not be created.

II. "It has to do with parable."—(Max Frisch)

We have already alluded to the special case of neutral Switzerland. It took almost half a decade after the war until parallel literary developments became once again a collaborative effort (it took the literature of East and West Germany a similar length of time to develop separately from one another). The two representative figures of modern Swiss literature—Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt—played a significant role in the revival of mutual influence. For them there had been no break in tradition or isolation. From the beginning the wealth of world literature was at their disposal. Moreover, although they were witnesses of the Nazi crimes, they were not participants. This explains their distance from the collective guilt feeling of the Germans. Both their access to tradition and their freedom from guilt provided them with the necessary thematic and structural freedom. Consequently German drama lived in the west for a good fifteen years principally on the basis of their creative impulses.

They freely drew their orientation from Giraudoux, Anouilh, Wilder, and Brecht and thus they discovered the dramatic parable. Certainly they saw in it, in contrast to Brecht, only a very limited vehicle for a socially-transforming enlightenment. Whoever, like Frisch in the subtitle of his play A Man of Honor, explicitly aims at a "morality play without a moral" reduces the impact for the sake of an enduring, abstract morality. In this respect a considerable difference exists between Brecht’s "in the concrete abstraction" model of reality with its analytical power and the much sturdier, independently determined model of the Swiss. The "China-Chicago" (Frisch brought to this denominator the universality of Brecht’s parable) is always closer to reality than Andorra and Güllen.

It is no wonder that the theater-goers of the 50’s enjoyed plays such as The Visit (1956), The Philistine and the Arsonist (1958), Andorra (1961), and The Physicists (1962). However much the playwright Frisch might insist that the "Andorrians sit in the audience," most of the spectators believed that he meant everybody else. These parables did not reveal any causalities; they were ultimately satisfied to stay within the realm of morality.

Consequently, both writers stopped using the parable form. Certainly their themes also became more concerned with public matters as manifested in the Biography (1968) or Dürrenmatt’s "Everyman" perspective since his Meteor (1966). Just as correct was Frisch’s observation in his Diary II—"it is a thing with
the parable”—the attempts mutually undertaken by him and Dürrenmatt in the meantime are dubious. There is the indication, therefore, that both dramatists will be recognized not as conquerors of the Brechtian parable play, but rather as its followers using methods which are unproductive in the history of theater. Of course, one must add on the positive side that without the contributions of Frisch and Dürrenmatt the regeneration of German drama in the period following the war would have suffered. Only upon the groundwork created by them could meaningful work begin again.

Heinz Ludwig Arnold adheres to a fundamentally different interpretation of Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s drama. He sees the Swiss author not as an “author of parables,” but rather as one who produces “images in the Kafkaesque sense”: “his plays are subjective portrayals of the world, captured images and vividly made extractions from a pitchdark labyrinth in which the author lights the way with a lamp creating images which illuminate a part of reality—images which are neither ‘objective’ nor, like the parable, desire to instruct.” As a consequence, the “most painful of possible changes” can be seen as clearly different from Frisch’s method.

The most interesting attempt of the period to abandon the parable form was undertaken by Martin Walser with the plays in which he, the first to do so, showed concretely the survival of the old Nazis in the society of the German Federal Republic. He practiced in them a technique which sought to be both allegorical and realistic. However, in the final analysis, such mixed forms are already fundamentally contradictory in their very premises because universally symbolic figures and authenticity of details are difficult to reconcile with one another. If one looks at it carefully, one must notice that in so doing the parable neutralizes the psychologically motivated slice of reality. It makes no difference whether the dramatic demonstration becomes more humorously parodistic (as in Oaks and Angora, 1962) or more bitterly accusatory against the background of a tragic individual case (as in The Black Swan, 1964). In both cases the realistic portrayal fades into the background. In this way it also becomes evident why the same author, almost simultaneously, produces plays of the pure parable type (The Detour, Larger than Life, Herr Krott). Without a doubt, Walser’s way leads to a new position. Whether this position was able to completely grasp the social antitheses is more than questionable.

A fairly independent branch of the parable plays, the theater of the absurd, can be left completely out of consideration because, much in contrast to the developments on the other side of the Rhein and Oder, those dramatists who practiced that kind of theater in the Federal Republic clearly have not overcome those stylistic exercises. In comparison with the results of the Czech and Polish representatives of the absurd drama—not to mention the contributions of Beckett and Ionesco—it is difficult to see more than undistinguished works in the plays of Günter Grass (Uncle, Uncle and The Angry Cooks) or Wolfgang Hildesheimer (The Delay and Night Play). The theater would certainly be no poorer without them.
III. **Renaissance of the Political Theater through Documentary Plays**

The aforementioned trends describe the theatrical developments until the beginning of the 60’s. They must be seen in close connection with the social and political situation in which the Federal Republic consolidated itself economically. So long as the writers could give the impression that their democratic consciences operate as a fruitful, critical potential within the public, the coexistence of society and culture functioned fairly smoothly. Yet, as soon as they recognized ever more clearly how little attention their republican morality actually received, a gradual shifting of position evolved. Increasingly the authors began to worry over the relationship between their intentions and the actual results. That the unimportance of their works should become clear to them was inevitable. Namely, what the writers thought of as mastering reality was not really perceived by the lethargic consciousness of their contemporaries. As escape from the apparent superfluity, it lay at hand to undertake a new functional *modus vivendi* of art and, thus, to bind it more strongly to society. The commitment should no longer remain in the realm of morality alone: even more it should be carried directly into the artistic experience itself. Literature politicized itself. That this change in other respects also corresponded to a societal movement is attested to by the numerous and very diverse events and actions which are obvious expressions of a mounting uncertainty and which have determined public life since the 60’s.

Without a doubt, the first and most vital expression of politicized literature in the area of drama was the documentary play. The growing reception of Brecht’s epic theater also came to play a dominant role. The “political theater” of Erwin Piscator provides an example of this strong model of political theater. Furthermore, the old master of the revolutionary theater in Germany was able to initiate, through his work at the West Berlin People’s Theater, a rejection of the formalized and aestheticized parable style dominant in the 50’s. The stage should present concrete social solutions in order to remedy the impotence of fiction through authenticity. “Faktographie” soon became the catchword. Amazingly enough the traditionally oriented theater of Hochhuth could coexist with the plays of the consistently experimental Peter Weiss. In any case, the spectrum of successful plays such as *The Deputy* (1963), *Soldiers* (1967), *Guerrillas* (1970) by Rolf Hochhuth, *The Investigation* (1965), *The Song of the Roman Scarecrow* (1966), *Vietnam Discourse* (1968), *Trotsky in Exile* (1970) by Peter Weiss, *In the Case of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (1964), *Joel Brand* (1965) by Hemar Kipphardt as well as *Toller* (1968) by Tankred Dorst and *The Trial of Havana* (1971) by Hans Magnus Enzensberger proves this. The list alone makes it clear that the documentary plays unquestionably constitute the most significant contribution of German drama after the war. This phenomenon together with Brecht’s international influence prompted many foreign directors to pay attention to the German theater.

“Faktographie” points to the use of authentic materials that had to be treated in the light of both political and aesthetic considerations. The author is not a mere researcher but above all an artist who consciously constructs a montage and therefore becomes a politically engaged member of contemporary society. All this
must happen before the successful documentary play described by Peter Weiss can be materialized. Only then can "fragments of reality" be elevated to "models of actual events." Thus, many of his plays actualize this long-drawn-out rhythm which is absent in Hochhuth's tragedies especially since the author of The Deputy consciously aims at the scandalous potential of his themes.

If one sees in documentary plays a "model of actual events," it becomes clear how these events can increase an audience motivation. On the other hand "Faktographie" is also likely to create the dangerous illusion that the shaping of aesthetic forms is actually superfluous, that these forms can be learned and reproduced by anyone. This attitude prompted many dramatists to produce works of political sensation. Minutes, documentation, reports, and commentary became ends in themselves, and almost in every case to the detriment of artistic creativity and quality.

However, it would be wrong to judge the documentary genre on the basis of its weaknesses. After all, through this form the playwright acquires the possibility of enacting a theater of discussion in front of his audience. However, a negative implication cannot be ignored. We are talking about a dramatic form that rapidly arouses the disgust of those audiences who come to the temple of the Muses primarily for "refined entertainment" and/or social "visibility." As one could read in the Spiegel, the spectators found support in a recent statement by the President of the Federal Republic who admonished the directors to produce plays that "make people happy" and not to produce plays that constantly "change, instruct, and reform" their audiences. This point of view is certainly not new. For that very reason, it is to be hoped that the innovative playwrights will ignore this point of view as they have done in the past. The future of drama in this country will depend upon whether one remembers to hold to Brecht's maxim of "pleasurable learning" or to the expectations of the highest official of state and of his fellow-citizens.

IV. The Exception: Peter Weiss

Following previous traditions one cannot consider this dramatist, who has been living in Sweden, simply as a representative of the documentary theater. More than all other playwrights of the after-war period, Peter Weiss has enriched the repertoire of the theater with a broad and productive list of plays. Due to the extremely unique treatment of historical events, the plays Marat/Sade (1964) and Hölderlin (1971) became major successes. Even though Weiss had temporarily turned exclusively to the documentary theater, he always maintained that one could not neglect "artistic creation." Authentic and fictitious material was to be incorporated into his new dramatic experiments about the problem of his own identity as "author of a divided world."

Obviously, it is Weiss's concern to discover his own identity in its relationship to objective reality through a free association of historical facts and fictionally transformed images of consciousness. Playfully ignoring chronological connections, he creates constellations of a subjectively or collectively oriented
revolutionary emancipation and relates them secretly to his personal disappointments, crises, expectations, and desires. In one way or another it will be demonstrated how the attempts at emancipation are crushed by a generally lacking willingness to initiate change. If one can assume that up to *Vietnam Discourse* (1968), the author was exclusively concerned with societal freedom, it would seem that recently he had turned more intensely toward subjective emancipation. Indeed, it no longer works to “try out antitheses” in the manner of the *Marat/Sade* play; however, the prospective frankness publicized by him in the same drama remains as valid as before. Clearly, Weiss is not the man who could be interested in the future as a fixed goal, rather he sees the future as a possibility of perspectives. Seen in this light, his plays are utopias measured against reality.

Continuously, Peter Weiss undertakes the task—to use Volker Braun’s words—“to arrive at the open ends” of the revolution. At the same time he knows: “to a revolution of social order also belongs a revolutionary art” (*10 Procedures of an Author in a Divided World*). What becomes, in one case, a dialectically productive challenge (as the formulation of *Marat/Sade* in which, at the end, Marat does not immediately triumph over Sade, the same is the case in *The Investigation*), can fail in other cases, as in *Vietnam Discourse*, in *Trotsky in Exile*. This can cause nothing but difficulties; the crisis of the last few years supports that notion. In spite of such risks, the dramatic reflection of Peter Weiss’s own experience represents the most compelling and complex contribution of postwar German drama.

V. **Superstructures: On the State of Drama between Peter Handke and Franz Xaver Kroetz**

Contrary to all beliefs and in spite of all politicizing, the theater as institution remains ultimately a place of communication. The attempts of those who fought for a street theater and for “happenings” to integrate dramatic events into the realm of reality never really succeeded on a broad scale. Because of their restricted and insignificant linguistic organization, the noisy proclamatory actions such as the Hornberger shooting came to an end. The writers realized that immediately. Without worrying greatly about the proposed expectations, even those writers who proclaimed to be particularly engaged writers held fast to the “theater theater” (Peter Handke). Likewise for Weiss, Forte, Walser, Henkel, Muhl and Kroetz it is, as always, the theatrical scene that turned into a tribunal.

With these names alone a considerable range has already been delineated for the dramatic productions of the last decade. If one adds Handke, Bernhard, Strauss, Sperr, Deichsel, Bauer, and Gerlind Reinschagen, the image of an exceptional diversity appears. As at the turn of the century and in the twenties, various repudiations and appropriations of tradition are to be noted. Friedrich Dürrenmatt continues to write without hesitation. Almost simultaneously studies of behaviour and character roles are created by Max Frisch (*Biography*, 1968) Martin Walser (*The Chamber Battle*, 1967; *A Child’s Game*, 1971) and Wolfgang Bauer (*Magic Afternoon*, 1968; *Change*, 1969), humourously condensed patterns
of daily life by Wolfgang Deichsel (*Frankenstein*, 1967-1972), the historical parables by Dieter Forte (*Martin Luther and Thomas Munzer or the Establishment of Bookkeeping*, 1970) and again by Martin Walser (*The Pig Game*, 1975) as well as the linguistically obscure excerpts from the working world by Heinrich Henkel (*Iron Trap*, 1970) and Gerhard Kelling (*The Employer*, 1969; *The Confrontation*, 1970). A whole row of different names would have to be added if one wanted to provide even an adequate picture of the situation. Nevertheless, one cannot necessarily speak of a golden age of drama. Too great are the qualitative differences, too limited are the innovations of most of the examples mentioned.

Yet, several convincing alternatives can be cited. New trends are recognizable in the contributions of Peter Handke, Martin Sperr, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Thomas Bernhard, and Botho Strauss. Their dramatic approaches and specific dramatic resolutions determine the direction of contemporary German theater.

Without a doubt the most significant change of the dramatic scene was undertaken by Peter Handke. With his "speech plays," which sought to be understood as renunciation both of the world of the parable and of historical or contemporary reality, he led the dramatic enterprise back again to its original foundations. He replaced theatrical proposals for resolution with the free artificiality of play situations. Instead of presenting material figures from our surrounding world, he demonstrates in his plays how figures spring from language. Sperr contributed the "sociograms" to the theater which are frequently identified as a "new realism."

In the wake of the "new realism" came the overdue reception of the work of Marieluise Fleisser and Odon von Horvath. The concept introduced by Horvath of the "unmasking of consciousness" became the center of interest. The modish attempt to play off the literary views associated with it against the critical reflection of society of the Brecht theater (since not only Brecht but also Horvath was presented on stage after stage) might be considered finished in the meantime. How little suitable that kind of comparison is with respect to content can be seen in the plays of the "new realism." With good reason, Sperr and Kroetz rely upon both the tradition of folk plays and the influences of Brecht and his theatrical methods.

The development of the dramatist Franz Xaver Kroetz is especially marked by this twofold influence. Certainly in his case, the well-balanced reception is divided between the two phases of his previous work. At first there are remarkably precise and intense, almost naturally graceful images of social deformities. Depraved characters compensate desperately for their helplessness and their passions by hasty, violent actions against others or against themselves especially in the plays written in close succession between 1971 and 1973: *Heimarbeit, Hartnäckig, Wildwechsel, Stallerhof, Wunschkonzert*). Kroetz objectively portrayed social and linguistic realities in adequate dramatic form, but at the same time he ran the risk of being misinterpreted as a commiserating painter of morals, and, consequently, of endorsing unintentionally the prejudices of the bourgeois audience. Thus, the communist author dropped his analytical reflec-
tions as soon as he wanted to influence the audience directly along the lines of his political convictions. He changed his dramatic methods and adapted the stylizing and condensing techniques of alienation that Brecht had used. That he still did not arrive at any aesthetically convincing solution is shown by examples like Munich Child, or The Nest; in comparison with the earlier plays, the linguistic formalism and the simultaneous loss of dramatic precision surprise us. Yet, the difficulties are probably transitional for, without question, Kroetz inspires in us great hopes.

A basic change of perspective characterizes the plays of Thomas Bernhard and Botho Strauss. Both writers represent the new subjectivity in drama and fall within the overall contemporary literary orientation that emphasizes the subjective element by trying to convey and evoke personal experiences. When writers begin to focus again with such intensity on the individual "I", on his daily existence and his abysses, then certain conclusions can be drawn about the nature of public life. Actually, faced with the political immobility of the last years, a certain distrust and skepticism of the government grew rapidly with respect to possible practical changes in society. Many people have abandoned the belief of exercising any kind of influence through their own participation. Apparently, similar ideas have motivated the diametrically opposed playwrights Bernhard and Strauss.

Shaped by the theater of the absurd, Thomas Bernhard began his career as a dramatist (A Celebration for Boris, 1970). Meanwhile with an immense, rapidly swelling series of plays he produced the evidence that he could overcome this epigonal start. The subjectivity practiced by him reduces the complexity of reality to basic constellations of parable which provide him with insights into the misery of life through manifold images of anxiety, disgust, despair, and death, but also of arrogance, egoism, and depravity depicted with painful mockery. The danger of manic excess and repetition along with that kind of beginning is self-evident. What Bernhard portrays as the cold distance between human beings in his always newly formulated paraphrases of injured life are basically the eternally unchanging monologues of the "makers." Their cascades of words are quite dangerous: the writer confronts us with the authoritarian forms of thinking of these inhuman artificial and perfect robots.

Meanwhile, the verbal-theatrical ritual suffers under the all too clearly universal demands. The danger of involuntary imitation is in this instance by far more evident than with the genre of the parable. The plays of Bernhard have little to do with the exploration of reality. What dominates is the effort to find the essence. The pessimism turned into comic-grotesque reveals itself ultimately as an intelligent, and equally artificial and self-serving form of the street theater.

On the other hand, the subjectivity of Botho Strauss is of a completely different nature. He presents personal stories epically drawn out, so to speak — stories about strange, injured interpersonal relationships and stories about unhappy human insights. He explores "internal, panoramic views of social groupings" (Henning Rischbieter). External views do not interest Strauss. In his new prose work, Paare Passanten, we find the revealing sentence: "What foolish, shiftless, and impudent intercourse with 'reality' impoverishes stages of
theaters!’ His specific dramatic approach is aimed at the exploration of ‘‘human isolation,’’ in which ‘‘greed, jealousy, apathy, covetousness, and blind passion’’ rule. It is the sad world of ‘‘TV-delirium.’’ It is in this world that Strauss finds the basic theme of the ‘‘absence of forms.’’ Yet, he has always been successful in confronting ‘‘realistic,’’ disoriented, miserable, shrunken existence, with another possible image of man, the ‘‘man who finds it possible to go on living in full recognition of that other reality.’’ Strauss is an author who relies upon the potential of renewal and individual creativity which he juxtaposes to all these separations, and powers of oblivion and disappearance.

Quite a few other names could be mentioned. Yet, even those noteworthy contributions by authors such as Peter Greiner, Horst Laube, Gerhard Roth, or Urs Widmer generally reveal very few distinctive features. Thus, evaluations are difficult. In conclusion, however, one comment can be made: measured against present-day, international standards, the German drama demonstrates that it is intensely alive.
The water reached to her neck. The ends of her hair were already wet, she was standing on her toes: one single rock—washed smooth—making it possible for her to see above the water from this depth. A strange feeling, this coldness up to the neck that made her teeth chatter while her face was hot from the bright sun. Even with no breeze, without the slightest ripple on the water surface, merely because it was autumn and the sun had lost its strength, the lake had cooled off, in spite of the brilliant noonday sun.

She attempted to turn her head, as if it were in a vise, timidly; it was really as if she were squeezed in, her bones already too stiff to move around. At any rate, if she left the rock she would have to swim, whether out into the lake or back to the cabana, she would have to swim.

The colors rose from the water up to the tree line where they ran out in paler shades along the rock walls. And above, everything was such a deep blue that it was difficult to distinguish the birds from the sky. She felt like throwing up, that is, she would have liked to, not so much because she felt sick but just to get rid of that too, as if then she could swim without effort, as if the relief would be so great that even her bones would become lighter. At the top, just under the surface, the water was still warm. To simply float, to let the sun shine on her back and then on her front, to become warm from the inside too from the exercise, and, in between, to really dive under, open her eyes under water, look at the bottom and then, climbing out, to shake her head so that the drops of water fell from her hair. And to let herself fall onto the boards that were bent from the heat and to peek through the slits into the shallow water, to spit into it and observe the minnows as they swarmed from all directions, expecting bread instead of mucus.
She had not gotten wet above the tip of her chin; two, three strokes were enough to get her feet back on solid ground. She could see her goose pimples under the water. Yet, she did not move faster because of them; only, she took her arms also out of the water and with each step she moved them parallel to her legs as though the arms in the air needed to help the forward movement in the water.

And the water ran off her in streaks, off her white, already bluish skin; she had not been to the shore this summer. But now the cold began to hurt, with the sudden temperature change, and if the stones hadn’t hurt so much to walk on as they became increasingly smaller and sharper toward the beach, she would have tried to run after all in order to get out of the water quickly.

Obeying the long-unfamiliar jabbing of the pebbles, she tip-toed to the ledge of the cabana, and, still standing in the water, reached for a towel, wrapped herself in it and felt her way up the wooden steps slippery with moss and algae; there she stood for a moment, skinny and shivering in the sun, then she ran into the cabin and tore the wet clothes off her body.

The dry bathing suit, the robe that still smelled like new, and her towel-dried hair, all that felt very pleasant now. She rubbed on a self-tanning lotion to speed up the process, so it wouldn’t be noticeable at first glance. Compared to the white of the bathrobe, her arms had a little color already, and if the weather held, she would come back here tomorrow. Today and tomorrow, alone, although it did not have to be that way. She could always go home, sit in the garden, smoke, and have a cup of coffee with Mother or Aunt Fanny. She had not called her ‘Aunt’ for a long time, only when she thought of her, then it was Aunt Fanny.

She had to look up. An airplane flew across the round sky, from peak to peak. There never used to be any airplanes around here. It was only a small plane, but still a plane!

No one disturbed her when she walked alone to the beach cabin. At least she was finally here. And everyone knew that she enjoyed going to the lake alone. After all, she could come home anytime if she didn’t want to be alone anymore. In the evening when the children were in bed, they all sat around the terrace and played cards, Mother, Robert, and Milena, her sister-in-law. Later on Aunt Fanny came over too. Mother and Aunt Fanny had not been on good terms for years. No one knew why. But whenever she was there, Aunt Fanny came over in the evenings and Mother acted as though nothing had ever happened.

Slowly her body began to get warm. She took off the robe; she lay there propped on her elbows, leafing through the newspapers and magazines she had brought with her. Her arms fell asleep and the sun burned. Strange, to perspire at this time of the year. She wiped her upper lip with her hand and left a spot on the paper as she turned the page.

Although not many summer guests were still here, you could hear the clatter of plates from the hotel garden. It could only be heard on days that were as calm and clear as today. She was not hungry. They would not be offended after her generous breakfast with Mother. At home she almost never ate lunch. Then, in the evening, they would all eat a little earlier. They knew she had never wanted to gain
weight.

She used to come here around noon just so she wouldn’t see anyone eating and wouldn’t be tempted.

The thought of food left her completely cold. But a cigarette, one more or less didn’t really matter anymore. She sat up to look for the lighter. When she could not find it, she emptied her purse. A lipstick rolled out and fell between two boards into the water. She did not even look for it, but searched frantically for the lighter. Suddenly, she found a box of matches. She could hear herself breathe a sigh of relief; she didn’t remember anymore where she had gotten them. One single match was left in it; handling it as carefully as possible, she attempted to light the cigarette, shielding it from the wind with her trembling hand. Just as the outer rim of the cigarette began to light up, the match went out and she had to draw vigorously several times. Almost exhausted, she let herself fall on her back and smoked against the sun.

On high, people were walking. She thought she recognized the voices although she had not seen the people for ages. If only she won’t have to greet them now! She had closed her eyes and let her hand with the cigarette hang from the deck above the water so that she could not be seen from the path. She wanted it to look as though she were asleep. There were also trees between them and her. She wanted to smoke so badly that she could barely wait for the voices to pass.

She had always been anxious to learn everything that had happened here since she left. Aunt Fanny had to give her an exact account of who had gotten married, who had children, and who had died. She wanted to hear the stories of their life, sometimes even of people whom she had not seen since she had been in school. And whenever she met someone on the street, she found it difficult to hide her astonishment over how they had changed. Even in her letters to Mother she would ask about people whom Mother knew only by sight. She had never been satisfied to let this place become a mere childhood memory. She wanted to be informed about anyone with whom she had had contact at one time or another without feeling any desire ever to get in touch with them again. She did not want to feel so distant that she would not know anything about their lives anymore. It satisfied her to be informed, at least in broad outlines.

Sometimes Mother sent her clippings from the local paper if she thought it would interest her to read what the paper had to say about the building of a new branch of the bank. But that wasn’t really what she wanted to know, and George was wrong when he ridiculed those articles that fell out of Mother’s letters and which she threw away after barely reading them. Why didn’t George come with you? Robert had asked.

Why hadn’t George come with her? Because he would not comprehend that his false hopes, his euphemisms only increased her hatred for him. Because they could not stand each other any longer, and because she knew that he would hold out, nevertheless, without reproach, without even taking a girlfriend. By God, no one would be able to say anything about him. He would continue to follow the guidelines he had made for himself, perhaps back in Elementary School, but which
would not prevent him from describing to her in detail how long it took him to visit her during his lunch break, that he spent practically his entire lunch time looking for her, bringing her the usual little things and cheering her up a little. He wouldn’t fail to bore her with his optimism which wasn’t really optimism at all but merely the expression he had learned, perhaps as a child, to say on such occasions. But George was George, and precisely because all this was so obvious with him, so transparent, yet nevertheless touching, her hatred for him would reverse itself, and she knew that if she sent him away, she would be even more discouraged.

As she turned over, a splinter pierced her wrist. She was grateful for this specific pain in a specific place. The splinter was lodged so deep in her skin that extracting it would have required a pin to break the skin and get it out. The sun was still strong enough that she could lie there uncovered, but she was afraid she would soon start shivering again.

We are not prepared, none of us is prepared. Not for that. If it happens quickly, we suffer from shock, and by the time the shock has passed, the other part will be over also, and there will be no more time to play with hope. It is simply over and done with. No one has ever returned, they say.

It used to be different. The thought almost made her laugh. What did she know about those days, except from stories she had heard and read. You lay down and you died, sometimes for weeks, sometimes months. In most families there was always someone dying. There must have been something like a code of behavior toward dying itself and toward the dying. She had never seen anyone die. Only the diseases themselves interested her, the symptoms, the phenomena, the diagnoses. She had always pictured the act of dying as a sudden event, something that ended with unconsciousness, something that one is not aware of anymore, until that one moment that was known to her through literature by a certain name.

Suddenly tears started welling up in her. She remembered how, many years ago, she had awakened one night and seen death sitting at the table in her room. She remained motionless, looking at him and expecting him to come to her. After a while she realized it was merely a glass vase with roses standing on her table, that was all, and from then on it sometimes actually felt good to think of death as though she wished to die for something she had done.

Still far away, but becoming clearer by the minute, she could hear the children’s voices breaking with excitement. Then she saw her nephews, stumbling over the tree roots on the path that led from the walk down the slope to the beach; behind them came Milena holding on to the tree branches for fear of slipping. Why had they let the path become run down like that? Surely they came here every day during the summer, and she wondered how her mother could still manage it without breaking her leg.

“Anna, Anna,” the children called, and they tried to tickle her as they rolled all over her. She was already on her feet by the time Milena arrived, laughing and cleaning her hands on her skirt because she had gotten resin on them and now they were sticky.
George called, he’ll be here tomorrow. I wanted to tell you right away, we are all looking forward to seeing him.

George? Shivering she wrapped herself in her beach robe again, the sun had lost its strength and she could smell the leaves. I must call him back immediately. He shouldn’t come. I want him to stay where he is, where he belongs.

The tears she had been holding back before were now running down her face and she wiped them with the sleeve of her robe. Milena stared at her. Screaming and splashing, the children had taken their shoes off and were wading in water up to their knees.

Is something wrong? Milena put her arms around her shoulders and her first reaction was to push away this arm that smelled so strangely of milk. But she did the exact opposite; she hugged Milena with an embarrassing urgency.

I just need to get dressed, then I’ll go with you.

Milena screamed at the children to get out of the water and kindly put on their shoes, it was too cold now to splash around in the water, she was sick and tired of their constant bladder infections.

For one moment she stood naked in the dressing room, but it was too dark for her to see much of her body. And then she repeated the daily routine of slipping into her underwear, her skirt, her sweater. She would call George and tell him please, please, not to come. After this, as far as she was concerned, he could control the rest of her life. She would beg him from the bottom of her heart to let her have these two days, to make them his gift to her just like giving her theater tickets.

The children had run ahead with their shoes in their hands and Milena took her hand as they climbed up the path: So you won’t get full of resin too.

You’ve changed, she said, as they reached the upper path which led around the whole lake.

So have you, she said, and when Milena looked at her questioningly: for the better, of course, for the better. And then they continued in silence back to the house.

Mother had set the table on the terrace for tea. On her seat on the corner bench was the pillow on which she used to sit as a child, and in the center of the table cinnamon rolls and poppyseed cakes were stacked up on a glass plate. Even the coffee set was still the same, at least as far back as she could remember, but it was the kind for which you could always buy additional parts, even the lids by themselves if one of them broke and the pot was still all right.

I must make a quick phone call, she said, and on the way to Robert’s office she could hear Milena whisper to Mother. She closed the door behind her and sat down on the worn leather armchair. She had never liked this office. It was too dark for her and it had a stale odor no matter how often it was aired out.

Through the office window you could see into Aunt Fanny’s garden. As a child she had often slept at Aunt Fanny’s house, especially when Robert was born and Mother was ill for a long time. She lifted the receiver and dialed but she kept
getting the busy tone. She could see Aunt Fanny taking a few pieces of laundry
down from the line that was strung between the two apple trees. It’s enough to
drive one mad, even the laundry line is still the same. Once more she tried the
telephone, without success. She absolutely had to reach George. She heard
Mother call that the coffee was ready. I must contact George immediately, she
called back.

And then she had a sudden inspiration, such a marvellous idea that she
suddenly felt warm around her neck. My God, why hadn’t she thought of this
earlier? She would go over there tonight before they started to play cards and Aunt
Fanny came over. She would simply go over there, to Aunt Fanny in her kitchen,
she always sat in the kitchen when she was alone, and without knocking she would
go to her and say: Fanny, I want to die in your house. Don’t let them take me away
from you. I’ll be no bother, but I want them to leave me alone. I will just lie there
and read, finally read Chekhov, and we will drink wine together, and when the
time comes, when the pain begins, then you give me some of your pills....

Milena had come in. Let me try, perhaps I have a luckier hand, and she
started to dial.

If you think so. She had broken out in a sweat and she felt herself gradually
going sick. A cigarette...pointing to them as Milena handed her the receiver. It
was George. Milena put a lighted cigarette between her fingers and she smoked
silently as she listened to George. The report was very promising. He would come
tomorrow to pick her up, she had to be in the clinic by evening, and they would
operate the following day. He had spoken with the head physician, her chances
were excellent, but she had to follow instructions and not worry unnecessarily.
Well then, until tomorrow.

Till tomorrow, she said and hung up. Milena was still standing there. Is
anything wrong? she asked.

Nothing special. She put out the cigarette because she was afraid she might
throw up any minute. I have to go to the hospital for a few days, but you mustn’t
tell Mother.
CHECKING THE TRAPS

WOLFDIETRICH SCHNURRE

The ground was muddy and yielded when he put his foot down. Moss, sedge, and rushes grew around; the willow bushes were higher than a man’s head.

He wanted to take the boat out and secretly check a couple of fish traps—just a look, nothing more. He couldn’t take any fishing gear home, that wouldn’t work; it would be evident he had played hookey.

Actually he should go back now. The way back to town was long and it was surely already past one. But there was the pheasant house where he had lain in wait until they came clucking, the long-tailed one with the diamond ruff around its neck trailed by dull brown, busily pecking hens. And there were the empty snail shells he had had to pick up and last year’s blackbird nests in the weeds or the shiny crow turds with the fiery red rubber bands in them the crows had taken for meat and eaten, the greedy brutes.

But the best came last: taking the boat out on the water. Right around the growth of reeds, where the creek pushed itself through the dead alder trees to the forest lay the boat, chained to a tree-stump. The lock couldn’t be opened but the U-bolt that held the chain to the boat was loose; maybe it could be pulled out.

The snail shells in his pocket tapped lightly as he ran. He breathed with his mouth open.

As he turned at the edge of the reeds, he saw the man. He was kneeling among the rushes, fumbling with a large bundle.

Willi ducked and propped his hands in the moss. And then he saw that the bundle was human, a woman whose legs were moving. But not much longer; only for a moment, then she was still.

The man stood up and brushed off his knees. Then he pushed the woman with his foot—but she didn’t move.

Willi’s hands were clenched in the moss; greenish water oozed out from between his fingers. He was still staring at the woman even though the man had noticed him and was slowly coming toward him.

“Well?” he asked.

Willi looked up. “Is she dead?”

“Yeah,” said the man.

“Why did you kill her?”

The man bent down and squinted into the willow bushes around them. “Are you by yourself?”

100
"Yes," said Willi.
The man came closer.
Willi looked past him at the woman. " Didn't you like her?"
"No," said the man.
"What are you going to do now?"
"What are you doing here?" asked the man.
"What?" asked Willi.
"What are you doing here?"
The woman was blond. She had on a light-colored overcoat and wore shoes with flat heels that had mud and withered oak leaves stuck to them.
"I wanted to take out the boat," said Willi.
"What boat?" The man shoved his hands into his pockets.
"That one over there."
"It's tied up," said the man.
"But the U-bolt's loose."
"No kidding?"
"Yeah. If you hit it with a rock, it'd come off."
"Whose boat is it?"
"The fisherman's."
"Does he come around often? Like today?"
"Not today."
The man turned around and walked back to the woman.
"Come here a minute."
Willi walked over.
"You take the legs," said the man. He grabbed the woman under the arms.
"Come on. Help me with her."
Willi grabbed hold and they dragged the dead woman to the boat.
"Get her purse," said the man.
Willi ran back and picked up the purse.
The man jiggled the U-bolt until it came out, then he pulled the woman into the boat. Her legs hung in the water. "Where is the paddle?"
"I'll get it," said Willi.
"Where is it?"
"Hidden. There in that dead oak tree."
The man was panting as he ran back; the paddle danced back and forth on his shoulder. "Did you hear that?"
"What?" asked Willi.
They listened for a moment.
"There," said the man. His index finger trembled in the air.
"Oh that — it's just a buzzard."
"A what?"
"A buzzard," said Willi. "They scream like that."
"Do you know your way around here?"
"Pretty good."
They held close to the reeds. The man paddled and Willi steered with the
tackle box cover. Where the creek emptied into the lake, they slipped the dead
woman into the water. Her coat ballooned out but the man pushed the air out with
his paddle. "That's it," he said.
"Wait," said Willi, "here's the purse."
"Give it to me."
Willi stood up and handed it to him. The man got up too. He glanced around
for a moment, then made a quick step toward Willi.
The boat rocke; Willi stumbled and the man grabbed him and held him still.
"It's OK," said Willi.
The man let him go and threw the purse into the reeds. "Let's go."
As they were paddling back, they came by a weir float.
Willi knelt at the bow. "There's a trap."
The man stopped his whistling. "Where?"
"There."
"You want to check it out?"
"I'd like to."
"Let's get it."
They paddled over.
"To the left," said Willi, "a little more. OK. Now to the right. Stop." He
stood up and leaned over the side of the boat.
"Well?" the man stretched his neck to see better.
"Perch," said Willi. He dropped the trap back into the water and pushed the
boat off an alder stump. "Perch are boring."
The man paddled on; he started whistling again.
"I know where there's some more traps."
"Huh?"
"I know where there's some more."
"Where?"
"Over there." Willi pointed across the water.
"OK." said the man.
"The other day a coot was in one."
"Really?"
"Strange, huh? It's because they dive. A muskrat was in one once too.""Do you live around here?" the man asked.
"Stop," said Willi. He squinted and leaned over the side of the boat.
"Well?"
"Empty. Usually there's something in this one."
"Maybe it's broken."
"No, but it's sitting wrong. It's tipped on its side."
"Could they see that?"
"They who? Shoot yeah, they could."
The man paddled on. "So you live around here."
"No, in town. More to the right; a little more. OK, good. Oh, boy, it's
moving. Look out. There's something in that one, I bet."
The man had raised himself up and was watching Willi.
"Bass. Look at ’em: a whole trap full of bass."
"They’re pretty."
"Aren’t they?" Willi dropped the trap back into the water.
"Aren’t you going to take one home?"
"I’m not stupid. What if they saw it at home?"
The man paddled on. "So what?"
"Promise you won’t tell?"
"Of course not."
"I’m playing hookey."
"... And the fish would give you away."
They paddled to the shore and tied the boat back up. A kingfisher cried hoarsely in the tall reeds.
"Come on, let’s go," said the man.
"I have to fix the bolt. Just a minute." Willi pushed the U-bolt back into the side of the boat. Then he took the paddle back.
"Hurry up."
"I’m coming."
They hurried along a path through the woods to the road. Just as they came out into the street, two bicyclers went by.
"I’ve been meaning to ask you," the man said loudly, "do you like guinea pigs?"
"Sure," said Willi. "I’ve got three of them at home." They went a short way along the road. The sunshine glittered in the birch leaves on the banks; once a magpie flew by chattering. They passed one pedestrian.
The man stopped and looked at his watch. "Oh, Jesus!"
"Late?"
"It’s already four."
"Oh, man! I’m gonna get it!" Willi gave the man his hand. "Or do you want to run with me some more?"
"Go ahead."
"Take it easy."
"You too." At the curve, Willi turned around.
The man was still standing, watching him. "What’s the matter?"
"You really won’t tell?"
"What?"
"You know, that I skipped school?"
"Never."
"Great. Bye!"
The man waved.
ELK TRACKS
H.C. ARTMANN

Why don't I clean my rifle, why is its bore covered with fields of reddish rust, why do I keep repeating the phrase: yes, it's good to lie here thus and wait?

The garden has only six trees, it does not have seven, not even seven, but then it's not a large garden I'm looking at, covered thus by snow.

This winter, I imagine the droning song of the sirens and the menacing hiss of the medusae, before long I really do hear these sounds, but do not see their creators.

A conversation with myself, before daylight, whose cause and substance was the elk; no northern atmospheric phenomenon, but rather the walking, striding elk, now and then running through the diffuse light of polka and hambo.

Distant objects are mistaken for the mouse, the ox, the leopardess, the rabbit, or for the little fish in the crocodile's belly; distance diminishes the eye's powers, plants the tiny seed of error into our perception; who was that man who turned out to be a woman after all, who the girl that proved to be a real doll?

This morning, I observe the elk that is no full-grown lion, whose length comes to eight feet; on the other hand, I've forgotten the beating of the flamingoes' wings, which occurs to me only now, but I'm thinking of the flight of a single wild goose above the outskirts of a smallish city.

At this time of the day, I believe in the wooden house in the forest of oblivion; quite a bit of the abstract and the concrete mingle in me like the concurrence of two melodies.

The tradition of a magic potion which reanimates what is petrified; the story of meat a man cuts into four pieces; he gives one to his wife, one to his horse, one to his bitch, but the last he buries under a cherry tree in the cabbage patch....

This elk wanders inside me and drinks from a small crater that has erupted in me and which contains a small lake; the frozen eavestrough has thawed, it's a fact that the melted snow can flow through again.

A previous image on whose trail I am again; four new images that haven't come into being yet, to be sure, but that hover in the air like coming seasons; perhaps also the garden in front of this window like an unfinished piece in the loom of fresh expectation....
TESSA, THE GIRL IN THE GAS-LIGHT OF NIGHTFALL

H.C. ARTMANN

How Tessa materializes at the beginning of dusk.

How Tessa is described in the papers.

What Tessa is moved by, what special preferences she has, which places she generally chooses for her incarnations.

How Tessa actually came to London.

How Tessa looks in the moonlight.

How Tessa looks in the moonlight.

Tessa's seven major offences.

How Tessa sets out on her affairs.

How Tessa, disguised as a man, forces her way into Lady Waverleigh's room.

How Tessa vanishes into a lightning-rod and strikes a nymphomaniac doctor dead as a result.

How Tessa appears at the Covent Garden Opera and sets fire to the royal gallery.

How Tessa perpetrates the breach of water pipes to impede the efforts of the London fire-brigade, and sleeps in the flooded gutter with a streetwalker.

How Tessa ingratiates herself to a woman condemned to death by promising to set her free.

How Tessa selects Nelson's column as a target for her spitting and thus almost destroys it.

How Tessa stirs lust in a class of schoolgirls in the camelia house of Cheswick and almost scares a Irish park attendant to death.

What Tessa does in the convent of the carmelite nuns.

How Tessa forgets her tongue in the womb of Urraca Montero, the dancer, and remains mute for the time being.
Tessa and Zambra, the cruel sorceress of Angola: a significant encounter in Mayfair.

How Tessa forces a new tongue from Zambra, with which she must first painstakingly learn English, however.

How Zambra takes revenge on Tessa for the loss of her tongue.

How Tessa and Zambra get Tessa’s tongue from the womb of Urraca Montero.

How Montero dances her swan-dance.

How Tessa and Zambra lose their supernatural powers because of this artistic performance.

How Tessa and Zambra sell a part of their jewels to raise the money for a ticket to Australia.

THE WRECKER OF A RENOWNED BORDELLO

H.C. ARTMANN

A nail will hardly suffice, but a hand-made machine infernale might, whereby it must be remembered that there are more elegant methods, including:

Please be good enough to think out at leisure those that strike you as reasonable and perfectly reliable.

Sir, you with the slouch-hat, you have won! Cremation, ashes to ashes in a great variety of shadings, ashes of various objects, ashes scattered by wind and storm, ashes for bright plants and tart herbs in the nourishing rain of Atlantic clouds.

That gallant in black, his hair parted in the middle, leans nonchalantly against the balustrade; he yawns like a small-mouthed oven, holds three fingers to his lips.

A lady’s soprano and a gentleman’s bass: the clamour might be coming from a subterranean chamber.

The closets in which the dried moss is kept; the quilts on beds in which the dandelion hay is slumbering; the severed curtains fluttering in the draught created; the shoe-polish box from which a pale green match hops.
The subtle perfume smells like wet ferns at hidden railway tracks, dark lacquer disperses the low-lying fog, a heart strikes up a duet with a pocket watch.

Who is he? His name is kept secret—we know what we know...

A cautchouc dildo rises against the shadow of the hat on the coiffure of the mistress of the house, it sweeps the headdress away!

A dream of room number seven in the previous year: The sweet rose of Salem in the dark hair, the heart covered with pins, the little whale-bones in the corset, the waist narrow, a spring in the dale, ferns on the mountains...

In its palimpsestical fantasy, bear’s-ear sprouts pale green from the wisps of smoke curling low over the salon’s carpets: vegetable of the undernourished cross-country runners and the Iroquois.

In the shaving mirror, he examines the source of the blaze: Mon Dieu quel bon feu!

What detectives dream of is the solution of crimes and subsequent arrest of the culprit!

A grape of the finest delict from which one presses crime’s beaded wine.

A good thing takes well-considered haste, he thinks; the fire spreads at a frantic speed, the carpet runners bum quickly right to the attic, the potted palm dissolves, the gilded mirror shatters, a silk slipper chars in the foyer, there’s a crackling in the lady’s soprano, there’s a crashing convulsion in the gentleman’s bass.

The fire-ladders hum indecent songs, the cautchouc dildo cools its sweat in cold milk, the mistress of the house grasps her glowing coiffure in amazement.

Romans, friends, brothers, ignatians, rejoice, let the violas da gamba sound, strike the cymbals, dance the round dance of inflamed spirits, laud the sparks in the firmament, praise the mixture of bluish-black and redness, yes, you pyrogenitoi, you who have yourselves slipped from the fire’s vulva, how do you feel now, what does your lava-blood murmur to your hearts and minds?

A purple Nineveh exchanges a hot swarm of girls in chiffon, embellished by trouserless sofa-gallants, for ember-spurred leaps from windows... Oh beautiful, wild sound of fire-engines racing from the east, north, south and west!

Who is he, that man in the slouch-hat? Does he leave his calling card? We know what we know, and the ashes are silent come morning like a grey bird born without voice.
My head full, my poor head full to the brim, to the brim with nothing but lewd thoughts. I have tried everything to rid myself of it, of this pressure, this excess pressure in my head. Breathing exercises, hot and cold baths, consecutive knee bends up to a hundred. They did not help at all. Finally resigned, I have put my hands on the table top and, eyes closed, imagined the most horrible death as a punishment for myself. I went out of the house to the street barefoot and spent an entire starless night on a park bench till daybreak. It did not help at all. I stood on high bridges with the strong intention of leaping. But in the end my courage failed. Then, I prescribed alternating regimens of fasting and skim milk in the hope that physical exhaustion would cure me of my thoughts. That did not help either. So I tried courses in shorthand, visits to concerts, and readings. But it became worse. The worst were the books. Especially novels and short stories. Therefore, I changed texts and read only biographies of famous natural scientists, mountain climbers, and balloonists. Finally, I tape recorded my own short life as a scientific researcher. It did not help at all. Nothing helps at all. My head remains full to the brim with nothing but lewd thoughts.

What should I do, how to redeem myself? O Santissima, it is madness, despair, insanity, beyond endurance, rampant disease, complete anarchy. What I have, what I am, what I think, what I want, what occupies me every moment of the day, what reenacts itself over and over again in my brain, what crushes me, what exhausts me, what drains me, what I fear, what I struggle with, what I cannot get rid of, what constricts my throat, what makes the sweat pour over my forehead, what paralyzes me, what feeds on me, what grinds me down, what undermines, tortures and torments me, I must stop, end, escape from it. But how and by what means, through what?

Every morning when I awake, I resolve: today! Today, for sure. I must not put up with it any longer—otherwise, it will be too late. Yet, by breakfast, I have my first doubts about whether I can succeed. By noon, all good intentions are forgotten. Precisely at twelve, I become restless—I can’t wait any longer for her arrival.* I look out the window, listen to every noise. When she finally does arrive

*In Germany, children come home from school at 12 or 1 p.m.
I feel it: it won’t work. It will all come to nothing. I won’t ever make it.

After lunch, I become deeply discouraged. Then, I give up and tell myself: you are lost. None of it makes any sense.

Around evening, I renew the hope that something will come of it. Tomorrow, I think. Tomorrow, absolutely for sure.

And with the reassuring feeling that the next day I will succeed, before going to sleep I permit myself to surrender one last time, in all innocence, to my lewd thoughts.

Then, in the morning, I make the most firm resolution. Today, I will make it. From today on, I will neither wait impatiently for her return, nor let her into my room.

Yet, at noon, when I hear her steps in the corridor, when to get my attention she slams the doors and turns the record player on full blast, of course: I become weak again. I am simply incapable of rebuffing her. It’s a disgrace.

At night, however, when everything is over, my hope returns, and I say softly: something will come of it. One day I must stop it, one day it must end. Unfortunately, I have told myself that for months now. But I don’t see how it will change.

If only I knew how it all started! Maybe then I could turn it around. But how did it? With a movie or some popular song? It could also have been a certain smell in the stairwell, a certain sound, the creak of a chair or the pattering of naked feet. Or did it begin with a dream, an especially exciting one? If so, I ask what could have caused such an exciting dream? But every one knows that sometimes something apparently trivial can produce the most exciting dream. There is always something that produces a dream: a crushed toothpaste tube on the breakfast plate, a wet spot on the wall in a story, a dripping faucet, an oil can bent out of shape in front of the underground garage, a hole in the ceiling.

At any rate, I turned to medicines at once. I began with mild tranquilizers and gradually went to stronger stuff. Without success! Alcohol was no help either. I thought: perhaps it is the blood. My blood is poisoned. I wanted to have a transfusion, but the doctor misunderstood me and inoculated me, I believe, against malaria. As a result, the frenzy became more rampant. Then, assuming I had too much, I gave blood. Gratis. That was also in vain. Finally, I was besieged by a feverish grippe. It weakened me for three weeks to such an extent that I was convinced I was now cured forever. Delusion! I am not. As soon as I recovered, it proved even worse. I have listened to sermons on atonement and prayed to St. Catherine, to all the saints, to all virgins, and to the martyrs. Yet even during prayers, I was with her in my thoughts, and so it was precisely the wrong thing.

Then I pored over the maps and ran to the travel agencies. I wanted to go far away, to the Bahamas or a South Sea island. I would have flown to the moon. Yet I had hardly set foot in the agency, when I saw clearly: senseless! Everything! Nothing will help. No hot and cold baths, no exercises, no prayers, not even air travel.
O Madonna! Half a day, an entire half day, this skinny thing frolics, this creature storms through my apartment—half a day with long awkward legs, an entire half day. As soon as I open the door a crack, this little beast, in a tiny short skirt or dress springs into my hallway, a doll in her arm, or a hula-hoop in her hand. The only thing she wanted was for me to see her.

Why is this giant mirror hanging in the hallway, this brutally giant mirror? What impure spirit whispered to me to hang this bastard mirror in the hallway, of all places. Now I see Judith twice, with her doll or hula-hoop, once in full reality, and once framed in gold on the wall. Was it the impure spirit of Walpurga or of our spinster Sophie? It’s also possible that it was their spirits united who whispered to me, and Judith knows that, of course. She understands me completely. For her, this bastard mirror is a welcome playmate, a touchstone, a sly ally, a pretext to jump into my hallway, apparently without guile, as soon as I open the door a crack, in order to be seen two-fold, sometimes dressed only in tiny black shorts.

How slyly everything was put into motion, with what malice they wanted to trick me, with what finesse they tried to lure me into a trap. Noose around my neck—a pull, and over. One by herself can’t be that crafty, one by herself can’t be that cunning. There must have been at least two, if not three or four, perhaps a whole conspiracy in league against me. One helps the other, one plays into the hands of the other. Walpurga helps the spinster Sophie, the spinster Sophie a third one, the third one a fourth, and in the end, it is the whole house or the whole street. But the idea comes from Sophie. I’m convinced of that. Sophie is a telephone operator. She works eight hours a day in the telegraph office. Sophie set it all up. This woman without a man, who tried to get me at the beginning, who never even thought of Walpurga until she needed an ally, and who now has joined with her against me.

Sophie and Walpurga, Walpurga and Sophie! You can’t pretend. I won’t let you pull the wool over my eyes. I have seen through your plan. You laugh till your sides ache when I lie in wait for this impudent creature, but then you would be the first ones to attack me if you caught me red-handed. Thank you very much.

I really go crazy when Judith fidgets with her enormously long comb in front of my eyes, when with this pink comb she goes through the wisps of her blond hair, which only appears so abundant because it reaches down to her nipples, really crazy when Judith looks at me from the side and apparently in complete childish innocence demands that I permit her to comb my hair.

What should I do? Just so I won’t give myself away by an overly-affected resistance, I give in; although I find it ridiculous, incredibly ridiculous, to be combed by a little girl, even though, I must admit, it is comforting, soothing, somehow relaxing.

By the way, Judith’s endurance is amazing. Once she has started, she can’t stop, and she creates new hairdos for the sole purpose of being allowed to continue to comb; part on the right, part on the left, part in the middle, no part at all. I let her do as she likes. Why shouldn’t she have this little pleasure?

When she finally has combed enough, she drags out an assortment of hard
and soft brushes and begins to groom my hair. But it becomes even worse! If my hair does not lie or fall according to her wish, she assists it with clips and bobby pins. Imagine it: bobby pins and clips. An adult man so affected by a school girl... I mean: I must sit on a stool, with a kitchen towel around my neck, and every few seconds be asked to look in a pocket mirror to say how I like my hairdo. And I, cowardly, helpless, immersed in lewd thoughts, put up with it all and even find it pleasant; instead of saying: Judith, listen carefully, my dear. You are, as everyone can see, almost grown up, still somewhat playful, but nonetheless, for your age pretty capricious. I am the last one who would reproach you for that because I know the reasons. Your mother works, you have no friends. But — understand me well! I am no substitute for a playmate. Till now, I have enjoyed spending time with you. But, at this point, you are not a child any more. I cannot let you comb my hair for hours. Therefore, I would like to ask you to stop your visits immediately.

That is about what I should say to her. But how would she react? By evening, wouldn’t she tell everything to her dear Mama, who is just waiting to trap me? After all, this whole clique of conspirators has been intent on nothing but destroying me. Therefore, it’s better if I keep a check on my tongue.

Can one, may one, should one attribute any particular significance to dreams? I prefer to wait and see. At any rate, there seem to be proofs—as Lévy-Bruhl reports about the Indians—that some dreams do influence our lives. Indeed, as one listens to the teachings of dreams, one may suddenly change his attitude toward certain people because of this experience of the night.

I, for example, although I dream a lot, mostly muddled stuff that I immediately forget, I remember one dream, perhaps because I dream it often. I mean the dream in which Judith’s uncle appears. A nightmare. This uncle, a nervous little man with a bald red head, storms into the apartment just at the moment when Judith is innocently changing her clothes; he rushes into the room, sees me, throws himself on Judith, uninhibitedly seizes her, as if he needed to defend her from me—whereas I am in Judith’s room totally by chance and unprepared for this avuncular attack. After all, I remained in the room only because Judith before I had noticed it, was already standing naked in front of the closet. By running away, wouldn’t I have put the child in an embarrassing situation? Yet this furious uncle, who is not playing at this rage but has become one with it, who always gets everything wrong, imagines that he has caught me red-handed. Immediately, with Judith like a rolled-up pillow under his arm, he grabs for a knife that was left on a plate from lunch, swings it threateningly before my eyes, and runs after me as I jump up and try to get to the door. With Judith still under his arm, in his frenzy of rage, he misses his target and rams the table head on.

Sometimes I ask myself whether this dissonant avuncular assault really existed, even if in another connection. To be sure, I don’t really remember whether Judith has a bold uncle like this. But if such an uncle ever did see me in Judith’s room, at a moment when Judith was about to change clothes, the foundation of all possible suspicions would be laid. The mere thought of such a possibility is so deadly that I would prefer to be guilty than have to prove my innocence.
On the other hand, why is this any of my business; why is Judith really my business at all? Why am I worried about her development? If I weren’t concerned about her, everything would be in the best of shape. If Walpurga had a different daughter, a less pushy daughter, or better still, no daughter at all, I would live untroubled, happily devoted to my scientific research, and not eaten up and crushed by the lewd thoughts in my head as I am now. If I didn’t have to live in this city, if I hadn’t rented this apartment, if I had never met Walpurga, I wouldn’t know of Judith’s existence. Nothing but chance—a chain of coincidence on which I am bound. But precisely because I understand all this, that child should leave me cold. After all, what do I want from her? Do I really want something from her? Isn’t the opposite true, doesn’t she want something from me? What is real? What is reality after all? Is reality what affects me, what works on me, what undermines me, what eats me up?

Judith jumps into my hallway as soon as I open the door a crack. She wants to be seen. I see her. She has achieved her goal. I say: Hey, what are you doing? Then she comes into my room, with the comb already in her hand, and I must sit on a stool, and Judith begins to comb and brush my hair. Fine. Why not? I would let my daughter too—if I had one—comb my hair, my wife too—if I were married—my younger sister too. Let’s suppose Judith were my younger sister, for example, or I her younger brother, or Judith and I were the same age and she was combing my hair, although I were not her brother, nor her sister, nor her mother, in fact, not at all related to her: should she be permitted to comb me only if she is a relative? Ridiculous! Why am I racking my brains? After all, I don’t plan to amuse myself with Judith in an out-of-the-way bedroom. I don’t even have the courage to imagine myself lying side by side with her on a couch. But what drives me crazy, what tortures me constantly, what tears me, what eats me up, what cuts my soul into pieces, and why I open the door a crack is this mad wish, this thrilling, tingling, yet, as I recognize, perverted and tasteless desire to ride with Judith in a white carriage through the streets of the city— with Judith in a white wedding carriage through a spring landscape sharply contoured as in a photo after a refreshing May rain, when the asphalt steams and the young grass drugs the senses. This is what I am compelled to think about incessantly, what occupies me night and day like a mathematical problem that I know already I can solve only symbolically. Judith in a long dress, I in a black suit, over which is the camouflage of a light coat. An excursion into the green, alongside the river, through English park landscapes, in the suitcase Judith’s dolls, Judith’s love-pearl-bottles, Judith’s comb, and the little suitcase with hard and soft brushes, my camera, and the last gold record with Judith’s idols singing, their voices bursting with pleasure.

Let’s suppose that I could talk with someone about it. Let’s suppose I told Walpurga about it. Let’s suppose I tried to explain my feelings to Judith herself. Wouldn’t the clique of conspirators immediately jump into action to destroy me? It’s enough to drive me to the edge! I poke a pencil into one of my nostrils. I plug my ears with Judith’s chewed gum. I hold my hands over my eyes, I breathe
deeply, making an effort to think of nothing. I don't succeed. There is nothing to do. A raging still-life. Judith and I, we lie in a green valley. With the last convulsions of my brain, I calculate the possibility of our dissolution. On transparent butterfly wings, in the colorless trunks of insects my remains will reside. As I disintegrate, the river creates its new bed. Green are its hundred waters foaming toward the sea. In a jet of flame, the sun consumes itself. But that is not yet the end. The end is much more horrible. A year-long execution on a pin cushion. Facing this future, I would like to throw myself on the floor and roll on the carpet in a fit of anger and frustration.

Only a residue, a miserable residue of self-respect has until now kept me from finally surrendering. I say finally without exactly knowing what the end means; what it actually is: whether I will stroke her hair or attempt to kiss this little rat, who looks at me, alternately provocatively and suspiciously, or wring her neck or lure her with a box of candy to the attic and there where no one can overhear us, bind her with ropes to the beams and beat her bottom. It's possible too that the end will be much more harmless: that I invite Judith to a cafe, that I stroll with her arm in arm through the city parks, or that I read to her out of an adult comic book as she sits on my knee.

But no, that cannot be the end. I imagine the end much more violent, more dramatic, heart-rending, and ear-splitting, completely destructive, earth-shatteringly abominable in the highest degree. Simply: the end. And for this reason, only for this reason, I try to protect myself from it. Judith, on the other hand, appears only to wait expectantly for me to decide for the end, although she obviously knows as little as I do about what the end will be.

Let's suppose that in spite of everything, one day I... then it is better if I would call her to me and say as soon as she begins to fidget in front of me with a comb: come, leave your louse-rake behind. Today, I have to talk to you seriously. You are now twelve, almost thirteen years old, you are in the seventh or eighth grade already; I think the time has finally come for you to stop this foolishness, sit on your behind and learn something. You have fooled around for long enough, I believe. Yes, don't look at me like that. I mean what I say. Till now, I have been silent because I thought it was none of my business. But because your dear Mama has to earn money for both of you and therefore can't take care of you enough, I have to do it. Moreover, you could help around the house some. So, now disappear. I don't want to see you in my apartment for a while. Do you understand?

Practice strictness and discipline with yourself like Saint Philipp, for whom the cross was a daily prayerbook. But I know that I won't ever be able to carry out that much-needed strictness and discipline toward Judith. All the time, I think continually of the soft hollow under her knees, of the white, blue-veined childish hollow under her knees, of her long awkward legs, of her short skirts, of her fluttery dresses, of her thin, bony arms, of her fragile child's neck. Judith, your
knee hollows, your legs, your arms, your neck, your pattering feet—they are costing me my sanity. I’ll go mad; one day I will throw myself at your feet and kiss your heels.

Of course, I can’t go that far. Not that far, otherwise I should be trampled, torn, cut from head to toe. No, she can’t push me that far, I will not let myself be pushed that far; not out of regard for Judith, out of regard for Walpurga, out of regard for Sophie, out of regard for the rest of the conspirators, out of regard for the furious uncle, who certainly does exist and whom I picture every morning when Judith is in school, as I lie on the balcony in the sun in a striped chaise. Oh, that god-damned choleric shithead, who in order to carry out his program of intimidation is concerned with nothing but to exploit my most harmless, innocent, impeccable...that thunder, that cud-chewing bovine, that promising sophomore, that pricked balloon! I won’t be intimidated by him, not by a dinner party with 25 courses, and not by a drawn kitchen knife.

Out of the living room through the hallway into the bathroom, out of the bathroom through the hallway into the living room, out of the living room through the hallway into the kitchen, out of the kitchen through the hallway to the door, up the stairs to the attic, from the attic down the stairs to the cellar, out of the cellar through the washroom into the backyard. So! Aha! There we are. Right at the first ragged robin bush, in the middle of the dry rustling carpet of leaves, she stands, emerging glowing white out of rotting decay. Judith, wherever I look.

Look! Fresh air! Freedom! My head is clear. I see a solution, a grandiosely simple solution, not at all abstract. Well, what do you say? You couldn’t have thought of it; so easy, you cannot imagine. One has to have discovered it, one has to have come upon it. Yes—wriggle, go ahead and wriggle. I’ll let you wriggle as long as I like. It’s great fun to let you wriggle. Just so you know. It’s great fun. Your overpowering uncle I will let wriggle too, between geraniums and the fully automatic toaster in the winter garden on the creaking rattan sofa, with whose creaking—now I know—everything began.

Do you hear his secret snort? Do you see how greedily he looks at the marmalade jar? I like him like that, with his swollen nostrils and with his chin hanging like lumpy dough. He can’t get enough wriggling, the dear wolf. Right now, he too would like to eat you up. With each crunch of his jaw as he crushes you, Judith, I’ll become freer and lighter. Actually, I am so already, I am now already so, with the mere thought of this possibility. Happy and free with the mere thought, my head at the mere thought of this last lewdness, that this monster, that this uncle, that you, that this whole conspiracy, my head full to the brim in the name of justice. O Santissima, this crunch, this chomping, this smacking, this devouring, this monster, this whole clique, I can’t, I can’t endure it, I can’t endure it any longer in this filth, in this morass, in this last moment when I take a snapshot of you. Kick me, Judith, because I’m a miserable dog, but for you I will let myself be harnessed to a cart, and I will pull you; only remain as you are—remain as in the photograph that I have taken of you. And then I can go my way in peace.
the innkeeper of the bleeding heart courteously came to the door step to welcome his guests. he had hardly left the steps when a small, lame, and somewhat misshapen child of ten entered. he uttered a guttural sound. the whistling wind moved the rusty sheet metal shingle, on which you could see a red heart, pierced by an arrow.
a dense, dank fog was falling.
it was getting to be evening.

lorenzoni himself appeared and picked up a handful of fine sand which he threw into the killer’s face.
it was five o’clock in the morning.
it was cold and snowing.
lorenzoni had hardly left the room when a man suddenly scurried in. he took a hammer from the table, jumped onto the bed and fastened a thick sheet of cardboard against the wall, whereupon he withdrew again.

while the two fiery horses scraped the pavement of the courtyard, a gigantic footman banged shut the carriage door which was decorated with heraldry. a valet opened the two wings of the door and announced: “love and kisses, cousin, you’ve got gloves on.” thereupon he threw himself onto the arm chair, tossed his hat away with a gesture of despair, laid his left leg on his right leg, took his foot in his hand, and continued whining.
this moment seemed to be near.

the innkeeper’s wife heard a noise at the door, but she began to undress. she unsheathed a dagger which she had kept hidden in her corset and laid it on the mantelpiece. three edges were ground into the blade, and the point was poisoned.
the innkeeper’s wife was about forty years old, big, strong, ruddy, with a hint of a beard. her arms and her big hands hinted at extraordinary strength. often a dreary melancholy was reflected in her eyes. her little mouth, her fine straight nose and her chin were of the most lovely shape. blond braids fell over her cheeks. a rope of corals surrounded her blinding white neck. in fact, her much too loose dress barely allowed you to surmise her waist-line.

on the next day a bright autumn sun shone in the sky and the storm abated.

the coarse shoes of the innkeeper’s wife were fitted with hobnails. in short, for the time being nothing except her hands set her apart from the guests at the inn.

after a second the apparition disappeared again. the poet lorenzoni stood as if he were petrified. his name, depicted in horse teeth on a black wooden board, could be read at the door.

at the initial flaring of his rage, the poet wanted to suffocate the boy with his arms. however, he took hold of himself and pushed the boy back on his chair. the boy, who trembled involuntarily and made an ugly face, said: “poor father.” “it’s nothing,” answered the poet, who had regained his composure. “i have an old wound on my leg which still hurts a lot at times.”

the innkeeper’s wife who was sitting in a big easy-chair that was covered with straw-colored material wore a black velvet dress that accentuated the beautiful work of her wide collar and the english point-lace cuffs.

regardless, she tossed out carelessly:
“i haven’t murdered a cattle trader.”

the moon’s thin, narrow crescent began to gleam wildly.

the silence was complete.

“father, the water in the pitcher is frozen,” called the boy.

“so, break the ice.”

“it’s too thick. father, please break the ice in the pitcher.”

without a doubt the innkeeper’s wife had mixed a sleeping potion (perhaps opium) for lorenzoni. for a few hours he was totally unconscious, and when he woke, a long whitewashed wall ran away at the other end of the room. when he smiled you could see the tips of his teeth, almost all of them black.

“pardon me, i’ll follow you.”

what had to happen, happened.

the countess, pale as marble, was dressed in a white muslin shawl. a sudden, jerky move threw her off the couch, while the countess’s brother paced impatiently up and down in the observatory.

the poet used this occasion to make a statement:
“i have my secrets!”

“my god, where do you get such ideas from?” the innkeeper’s wife couldn’t resist
asking.
"from the forest, where the strawberries grow," answered the artist.
"this house has three pretty rooms and a swiss dairy in which the countess played milkmaid as a child."
"i'm all ears," gasped the old man with the utmost exertion, spit flashing over his lips.
through a mighty effort he was able to sit on the last step. he was listening and heard noises. so he counted the steps; there were thirteen.
"only as a precaution." at the same time he knitted his brows and made a gesture.
lorenzoni was soaked with tears. that could spoil everything.
lorenzoni got up, walked around the outside of the house and didn't catch sight of anybody. the count had disappeared.

the dairy now showed itself without the veil of leaves. to his astonishment old joseph heard his master trill a hunting song as he entered.
"but you drum exceedingly well!"
"i'm sure you've forgotten to have the guns in the hunting den cleaned!"
lorenzoni called, and he cried bitterly as he threw himself down into the straw beside his turtle. he felt something very cold at his feet; he reached down: it was a puddle. to be sure the turtle swam like an otter. a chair stood in the middle of the room, and a rope hung over its back. at this a murmur of displeasure spread amongst the guests.

"ah, spring; children merrily rolling in the grass!" "that's blood on your shirt! are you injured, master? why didn't you ring?" responded joseph sadly. "you are quite a rascal; and now you are crying. see, that hurts me. do you want water?"
"no, just air," croaked lorenzoni.
the poor child had fallen to his knees again and folded his hands, but couldn't utter a word; you could only hear his chattering teeth.
"it's ice-cold here!" remarked the countess.
"that's funny!" hollered joseph who seemed to have forgotten his duties altogether. he had pushed himself into a corner and threateningly wielded an ax.
and the poor wretch battered the door so violently that the worthless lock jumped off. occasionally he called: "the innkeeper gave me permission, and i run around in the garden and look around thoroughly. in the left corner there is a fir. i start coughing so hard that the countess will say: 'i'd be pleased to bring you a glass of water.' "
"correct," noted lorenzoni without opening his eyes. then he stood up, walked over to the window and began to warble a little melody while he tapped the glass. "i'll put a scrap of paper into my snuff-box so i won't forget my name."
the old grandfather clock chimed the ninth hour.
then total silence set in.

the maid appeared. with the greatest calm lorenzoni reached under her dress, pulled out a small, doublebarrelled pistol, showed it to the girl and put it back again. the room filled up slowly with snow.
“that’s terrible,” murmured the countess’s brother, at the same time angrily throwing his telescope on the floor.

the violent storm had abated, but the clouds, driven by the wind, were so black and hung so low that it was almost dark. furthermore joseph returned leading a wether on a leash. joseph stopped at the door and watched his master worriedly and tensely.

“and the horses,” asked lorenzoni.

“you spoil me,” answered his smiling servant. then he duly took a seat on the bench beside the stove. the innkeeper cast a withering look at him, as if to say: the dear lady will be pleased. at the beginning of winter he had become raving mad. with his long grey moustache he sat beside the door and guarded the guests. he had five children, the youngest of whom was four, the oldest barely twelve, his sick mother, and finally the daft eighty year old grandmother.

the countess thought of her children.

the daft grandmother thought of nothing at all.

the horses whinnied happily in front of the house.

even though the wind had blown a hat into the room, an impeccably-dressed, white-haired black gentleman held a watch with a second hand in his left hand. while he stood outside in front of the window, he didn’t do anything with his right hand.

“you have a black tongue, lorenzoni,” moaned the innkeeper’s wife, as she looked deep into the poet’s eyes.

“black like ink,” he answered calmly. “you are quite right.”

after such deeds of heroism he didn’t feel so unhappy any more. although he never laughed, he smiled then, put his cap on his ear and sang the marseillaise. the cold was gone, and consequently the frugal joseph put the fire out.

as soon as the innkeeper’s wife had recovered, she took the old grandmother’s hand and asked: “where is the poor countess?”

“she is in the barn yard with her children.”

“i honestly didn’t know that,” declared lorenzoni solemnly.

two wallets lay on the table.

the two grooms were leaning against a tree. the air didn’t agree with them.

pale and with hands full of blood, an almost immobile joseph sank into the arms of the innkeeper’s wife. “i want to pass an idea on to you,” interrupted lorenzoni. “i’m thinking of dressing the countess in a red skirt, and clapping that plumed hat on her head. i’ll seat the count on a high chair, tie a bib around his neck, and she’s supposed to play the part of a barber with a big wooden knife.”

the old grandmother had to laugh at that.

“take heart, take heart,” shouted the count as he jumped through the door. cautiously joseph tried to reach the ladder leading from the centre of the room to
at that moment the unhappy countess entered the room behind the count, and asked: 

"you're not from these parts?"

joseph had already put his foot on the topmost rung when lorenzoni grabbed his spindly legs and pulled so hard that the old man couldn't hold on anymore. he fell down the ladder, hitting all the rungs with his face. that was his way of life, and often he had told anybody who wanted to hear it that he had to live this way, or else he'd suffer headaches all day.

"it was cherry-red," joseph roared in a fit.

when the count heard these words he turned deathly pale and was in danger of falling down.

"he's innocent, i'll swear an oath!" lorenzoni replied eagerly.

the count stopped. awkwardly he bent over and held the long knife, flashing in the twilight, between his teeth.

when he had placed him in the appropriate position he took it out.

the sun set. the whole countryside was totally still.

"silence," screamed the count, while he made a half-turn. "nobody?" joseph sighed incredulously and bowed. they showed him some bread and meat and he followed the bait.

the countess's brother still sat in his observatory and finally said: "o, the lovely sun." his instruments and devices were in a very disorderly state.

from morning till night, although especially from evening till dawn, one could hear him call: "o, the lovely sun." but the sun didn't stir.

after the count had learned all that, he returned to his house and postponed his visit with the poet lorenzoni to the next day.

the innkeeper's wife waved her hand lightly. "is it really true, dear lorenzoni?" a secret policeman disappeared through the side door. at that moment one could hear bells.

it had become night; they lit straw torches and tied the countess on a bench which was carried on the shoulders of the innkeeper and the maid. the innkeeper and his wife didn't seem to be pleased about it and showed their teeth, while the countess was triumphantly carried about. after the countess, it was lorenzoni's turn: a gigantic lackey carried him around in his arms.

everybody, even the servants, the old grandmother and the children surrounded lorenzoni. one of them carried a fox, the other his marmot, the third a guinea pig. some had bag pipes and played them: in a word, there was noise. behind them followed the black; almost everybody held straw torches in their hands, as you can imagine, and shouted as if possessed: "bravo lorenzoni, long live poetry!" and the ladies fell into each other's arms. so the retinue moved through the countryside.
Keine Sorge,
unseren Autos passiert nichts.
Kein Kratzer im Lack, kein geplatzter Reifen.
Nur der Fahrer
wird unter die Räder kommen.

Keine Sorge,
unseren Häusern passiert nichts.
Kein zerborstener Ziegel, kein Fleck im Kalk.
Nur die Bewohner
werden blind aus den Fenstern fallen.

Keine Sorge,
den Fabriken passiert nichts,
und auch nicht ihren Besitzern
in Florida.
Nur die Arbeiter
werden brüllend in den Starkstrom torkeln.

Keine Sorge,
der Haarspange deiner Frau passiert nichts.
Auch das Katzenauge am Fingerring bleibt ganz.
Nur deine Frau wird verenden,
schreiend wie eine zerquetschte Katze.

Keine Sorge,
dem Spielzeuggewehr deines Kindes passiert nichts.
Auch seinem Teddybär fallen nicht die Haare aus.
Nur dein Kind wird sich am Boden winden
wie ein zertretener Wurm.

Keine Sorge,
den Generälen und ihrem Präsident passiert nichts.
Auch nicht dem Waffenfabrikant.
Es sei denn:

Wir schaffen sie ab.
Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to our cars.  
Not a scratch in the finish, no flat tires.  
Only the drivers  
will get run down.

Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to our houses,  
no loosened shingles, no spots on the paint job.  
Only the inhabitants  
will tumble blind from the windows.

Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to the factories,  
and the owners will be safe, too,  
in Florida.  
Only the workers  
will stumble howling into the high voltage.

Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to your wife’s hair clasps.  
And the tiger’s eye in her ring stays intact.  
Only your wife will go down  
screaming like a crushed cat.

Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to your child’s toy guns.  
And the teddybear’s hair won’t fall out.  
Only your child will writhe on the ground  
like a worm someone stepped on.

Don’t worry,  
nothing happens to the generals and their president.  
Nor to the weapons’ manufacturer.  
Unless:  
we eliminate them.
Jürgen Theobaldy

WIE FRIEDE

Über dreissig, keinen Feind berührt,
nicht ausgesetzt dem Grab in den Wolken,
der qualmenden Spur, nicht gekämpft
um den Rest, der noch sprechen wollte,
der sprach mit trockenen Augen.

Leben, bunt von den Bretterzäunen,
Tod, schwarze und weisse Vergangenheit,
schwarz, das keine Farbe ist, und weiss,
das alle Farben enthält, die Freude
am Schrecken vor soviel Zukunft.

Etwas wie Friede, etwas in dieser Nähe,
der Schatten des Flugzeugs auf den Gesichtern,
flacher Ausblick nach Golffeldern hin.
Lächeln, rauchen, beieinanderstehen,
manchmal Lust auf Schönes, alte Bilder.
Jürgen Theobaldy

SOMETHING LIKE PEACE

Over thirty, not an enemy touched,
not exposed to the grave in the sky,
the billowing trail, not fought
for the remnant that still wanted to speak,
that spoke with dry eyes.

Life, colorful with wooden fences,
death, the black and white past,
black that is no color, and white
that contains them all, the joy
in the shock before so much future.

Something like peace, something in this vicinity,
the shadow of an airplane on the faces,
level outlook toward the golf courses.
To smile, smoke, to stand by each other,
and sometimes need something beautiful, old pictures.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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BARBARA FRISCHMUTH was born in 1941. The story “Time to Read Chekhov” was originally published in her collection of short stories entitled Rückkehr zum vorläufigen Ausgangspunkt, Residenz Verlag Salzburg, 1973.

HANS JURGEN FROHLICH was born in 1932 in Hannover. He studied music and held various jobs with publishers and second-hand book stores. The story in this issue was included in his collection entitled Einschüchterungsversuche, published by Carl Hanser Verlag in 1979.
SARAH KIRSCH was born in 1935. After working in a sugar factory, she studied biology at the university of Halle. In 1977 she moved to West Berlin. Her most recent collection of prose poems, entitled La Pagerie, received great acclaim by the critics. Other volumes of her poetry from which the selection in this issue are taken include: Landaufenthalt, 1967; Die Vögel singen im Regen am schönsten, 1968; Gedichte, 1969; Zaubersprüche, 1973; Rückenwind, 1976; Musik auf dem Wasser, 1977; Katzenkopfpflaster, 1978.

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PAUL MONACO is a member of the History of Ideas faculty at the University of Texas at Dallas. He has published Cinema and Society: France and Germany during the Twenties.

HELGA NOVAK was born in 1935 in Berlin. She studied philosophy and journalism. She has published poetry and prose, and in 1968 Novak received the Rudolf Alexander Schröder Literature Prize for her volume of poems Colloquium mit vier Häuten (Colloquium with Four Skins). The poems in this issue are from that collection.

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