



# An Esthetics of Injury: The Narrative Wound from Baudelaire to Haneke

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An Esthetics of Injury: The Narrative Wound from Baudelaire to Haneke

A dissertation presented

by

Ian Thomas Fleishman

to

The Committee on French and German Languages and Literatures

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
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in the subject of  
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Abstract

Examining literary and filmic representations of the open wound, this dissertation reveals injury to be an essential esthetic principle in the work of seven exemplary authors and two filmmakers from the French and German-language canons: Charles Baudelaire, Franz Kafka, Georges Bataille, Jean Genet, Hélène Cixous, Ingeborg Bachmann and Elfriede Jelinek, as well as Werner Schroeter and Michael Haneke. As a kind of corporeal inscription, the wound must be read, I argue, as a model for the variety of esthetic experience each artwork aspires to provoke—indeed, to *inflict*. Art for art, in these authors' and filmmakers' œuvres, becomes an injury for the sake of injury, and this dissertation traces the inheritance of Baudelairean decadence and estheticism into and throughout the twentieth century.

Each of the seven chapters reads an emblematic wound from the literary corpus under consideration, revealing injury as both the topic of these texts and as their guiding structural procedure. For all of the writers and directors treated in this dissertation the wound is more than a mere metaphor: paralleling textual dismemberment, on a formal level it is the site of both a breakdown of meaning and of its possible reconstitution and reconfiguration. At stake, then, in this examination is nothing less than the heritage of narrative after it has incorporated fragmentation into its structure—the very capacity of the 'wounded' artwork to continue to make meaning through an act of figural violence and deliberate deconstruction. With its broad selection of representative figures, the project seeks to suggest a literary history, and it is my contention that this peculiar textual violence becomes the key esthetic impulse of an important strain of European literary modernism.

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Ian Thomas Fleishman  
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## Introduction

In an infamous reading of his twelve-page text *Subito* at the 1983 proceedings of the Tage der deutschsprachigen Literatur in Klagenfurt, the frequently controversial competition surrounding the prestigious Ingeborg Bachmann Prize, young punk author Rainald Goetz delivered an impassioned attack on the sterility of the German-speaking literary establishment, comparing the novel as art form both to a cadaver and a sleeping poison—and advocating instead what one might rightly term *an esthetics of injury*:

es muß doch BLUTEN, ein lebendiges echtes rotes Blut muß fließen, sonst hat es keinen Sinn, wenn kein gescheites Blut nicht fließt, dann ist es bloß ein Pippifax oder ein ausgelutschter Büstenhalterträger, aber logisch nichts Gescheites, ein Blut ein Blut ein Blut, das müßte raus fließen, Spritz Quill Ström (*Subito* 66).

Goetz's is an ardent and aggressive manifesto, and with his call for blood—his call to arms—the author champions a literary revolution for which this brief intervention is, perhaps, intended as an opening chapter. The brutality of Goetz's language—in its belligerent repetition, its disruptive syntax and its frequent double negatives—reflects the artwork's aesthetic aim, which can only be described as the infliction of a psychical pain emulating bodily harm.<sup>1</sup>

Yet it was not this livid, at times even entirely nihilistic (“NeinNeinNein, immer alles zerschlagen” [S 74]) condemnation of the literary machine, of the very notion of authorship, of the critics on the jury and of the award itself, that turned Goetz into an overnight sensation—

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<sup>1</sup> As Petra Washescio and Thomas Noetzel summarize this desire in their work on Goetz and Heiner Müller: “Dahinter steht die Idee, daß der Körper letztendlich die eigentliche soziale und politische Instanz sei. Seine Konkretheit wird zur letzten Versicherung in einer Welt der zersplitterten Wirklichkeits- und Sinnproduktion. (...) Um die Drastik des Leidens an der Wirklichkeit zu vermitteln, die Zeitgenossen aufzurütteln, scheint also nur die Metaphorisierung der psychischen Qualen zu Bildern der körperlichen Folter zu bleiben” (201, also quoted in Anna Opel 94).

which is to say: despite the violence of their expression, the sentiments conveyed by *Subito* are nothing new. As the notoriously prickly jurist Marcel Reich-Ranicki insisted in his surprisingly supportive live response to Goetz's text:

Es ist ein Riesenprotest gegen das literarische Leben und darüberhinaus über alle Elemente unseres Kulturlebens. Natürlich in diesem Protest und mit diesem Protest gegen das literarische Leben entlarvt sich Rainald Goetz als ein typischer Literat. Das ist tief in der Tradition der Literatur, dass man das literarische Leben, dass man die Kritiker (...) und dergleichen attackiert.<sup>2</sup>

In the Austrian context of the Bachmann readings in Klagenfurt, Goetz's literary assault, for all its vitriol, has hardly anything original or revolutionary; instead his rhetoric of violence runs the risk of devolving into a hackneyed cultural cliché and his denunciation of literary life comes perilously close to vanishing into its own established literary tradition of (language) critique and skepticism dating back to Karl Kraus and Hugo von Hofmannsthal at least.

Goetz's reading is remembered, then, not for his words—"ein lebendiges *echtes* rotes Blut"—but rather for the very *real* blood that accompanied them. "Da erbrennt mein Kopf vor Schmerz. Ich muß ihn aufschlagen an der Tischkante. Da fällt das Hirn heraus. Ihr könnt's mein Hirn haben. Ich schneide ein Loch in meinen Kopf," the text continues, "in die Stirn schneide ich das Loch" (*S* 75).<sup>3</sup> And at this moment the author did just that: without interrupting his reading, Goetz drew a razorblade across his forehead, deliberately but without flinching, almost casually, as if to brush his bleached hair out of his eyes. In the recording of the television broadcast, it is only afterward, as Goetz continues reading, that the wound becomes apparent: dark blood flowing down his face and pooling on the pages of his manuscript until he finishes with a theatrical flourish, spreading blood across his forehead with his palm.

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<sup>2</sup> Respondents to Goetz's reading are quoted directly from the Österreichischer Rundfunk broadcast.

<sup>3</sup> As I will explore in subsequent chapters, there is a potential allusion here not only to Bachmann herself—whose protagonists suffer fatal injuries to their skulls on more than one occasion—but also to Franz Kafka, who writes in his journal of the "ungeheure Welt, die ich im Kopfe habe. Aber wie mich befreien und sie befreien ohne zu zerreißen. Und tausendmal lieber zerreißen, als sie in mir zurückhalten oder begraben" (*T*, 562). Goetz, too, laments in *Subito*: "Mit meinem Blut soll mir mein Hirn auslaufen. Ich brauche kein Hirn nicht mehr, weil es solche Folter ist in meinem Kopf" (*S* 75-6).

This literalization—indeed, *reification*—of the otherwise merely metaphorical dead letter is what Gerald Bartl has insightfully identified as *die Fleischwerdung der Literatur* in the twentieth century, and the scholar fittingly understands Goetz’s act of self-injury as an attempt to efface the “Grenzen zwischen Schrift und Körperwirklichkeit” (11).<sup>4</sup> Implicitly or explicitly, it is this literary-literal *incorporation* that the author proffers as the revolutionary character of his artwork,<sup>5</sup> and Bartl, following Hubert Winkels,<sup>6</sup> recognizes Goetz’s endeavor, “die diskursiven Ordnungen zu subvertieren, einen Kampf gegen das *Symbolische*, die vorgeprägte Redeordnung zu führen, um das *Reale* zur Erscheinung bringen zu können” (13, original emphasis). It is in his scandalous self-mutilation that Goetz seeks to situate the *authenticity* of the literary text, rebelling not only against the rhetorical standards of expression (against established symbolism) but also against the very notion of expression as the representation of a preëxisting reality (against symbolic language as such). Here, instead, it is the signifier that calls into being its own signified (or, more acutely, its own *referent*): with the signifier (the acoustic image *Blut*) comes its illustration, *actual blood*, as if the word were a razorblade.

Or as if the razorblade were a pen writing on the body: in its effort to eradicate the difference between sign and referent, the metaphor begins to work both ways—which is to say

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<sup>4</sup> While it is not an investigation of the wound *per se* but rather of the literary *body*, Bartl’s perspicacious book—*Spuren und Narben: die Fleischwerdung der Literatur im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*—also traces this phenomenon over the course of the twentieth century. Although in many ways analogous to his, my study differs from Bartl’s in that it takes a more skeptical perspective toward this literature of incorporation. For Bartl, the body continues to serve, or is even revitalized, as an “Authentifizierungskonzept” well into the postmodern, “selbst noch unter den Bedingungen einer Diskursivität des Körpers” (19). It is precisely on this discursivity of the body—of the *wounded* body in particular—that I shall focus here: in contrast to Bartl’s celebration of the persistence of a literature of incorporation, the emphasis of my study is on the evolution of an esthetics of injury that increasingly ironizes and indeed *deconstructs* itself from its earliest examples to the present day.

<sup>5</sup> Or, as Anna Opel has it: “Ein permanents Scheitern der sprachlichen Abbildung von [der] Welt wird in Goetz’ Texten variantenreich konstatiert und vorgeführt. Im Kontext von Wahrheitssuche und Widerstand taucht der Topos Revolution auf. Der unausweichliche Konflikt der großen Revolutionen: die Kluft zwischen Gedanke und Tat, zwischen gesellschaftlicher Utopie und der Gewaltätigkeit, die nötig wird, sie zu erreichen” (91).

<sup>6</sup> Winkels reads Goetz’s self-injury in the context of a poetic practice taking recourse to the body as a guarantor of a quasi-Christian understanding of spiritual communication, an “Engführung von Realem und Symbolischem zur physischen Tatsache” (240) that undoes the very notion of meaning—of signification as mediation: “‘Sinn’ beginnt dieser Praxis zufolge da, wo das Zeichen auf den Körper trifft, wo Schmerz entsteht, wo Blut fließt (...) als Garant einer nicht mehr phantasmatischen sondern ‘wirklichen’ Gewalt des Symbolischen” (239). As I shall observe, this bears a striking resemblance to Georges Bataille’s conception of what he too quite simply calls *communication*.

it deconstructs its own metaphoricity, radically uprooting the pretended primacy of the literal over the metaphorical. (Here the actual cut is merely a symbolic supplement approximating, or rather *signifying*, its metaphorical precedent.) Metaphor is no longer, as it would be etymologically, merely a *carrying over* of meaning from one domain to another, an allegorical *speaking otherwise*; it is no longer, as it has often been viewed, just rhetorical ornamentation to a linguistic representation of reality, a superfluous and purely decorative figure of comparison. Instead, it begins to constitute its own reality. If Goetz's cut—his attack on symbolic language—by *literalizing the metaphorical* initially appears to seek a point of unquestionably authentic contact between reality and its (seemingly straightforward) representation,<sup>7</sup> it instead (or at least also) succeeds in *metaphorizing the literal* by making it *symbolic*.

Read in this manner, Goetz perpetuates a tradition dating back at least a century, to Nietzsche, apparently insinuating that all language (if not 'truth' itself) is at base metaphorical—the literal being itself merely made up of dead metaphors and worn-out tropes. Goetz's act, then, indeed takes on a very Nietzschean character: creating its own truth more than representing a preëxisting one (what Nietzsche might term the 'will to power'), Goetz takes reality purely as an *esthetic* phenomenon. It is this double gesture—the simultaneous literalization of the metaphorical and the concomitant metaphorization of the real—that I refer to in what follows as *estheticism*. While I substitute the terms symbolic, metaphorical and allegorical (or, where necessary, synecdochal or metonymic) according to context, at issue in all cases is the question of the precarious, mutually interdependent relationship between reality and its verbal or visual representation.

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<sup>7</sup> One might compare this to what Lawrence Hinman, in an essay on "Nietzsche, Metaphor and Truth," has identified as a(n in his view erroneous) over-valuing of the literal in Occidental thought: an "attempt to establish some privileged point at which language and the world come, as it were, into direct contact" (182).

In any event, Goetz's cut consummates a tacit association between *schneiden* and *schreiben* that I intend to trace in the coming chapters from Franz Kafka to the present day: his (Goetz's) provocation is to inscribe this habitually metaphorical literary violence into an actual, literal body. Here I will expose the esthetics of injury underlying the author's act as one of the foundational mythologies of twentieth-century narrative from the very invention of literary modernity by Charles Baudelaire to the current postmodern(ist) concerns of 2004 Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek and acclaimed but controversial filmmaker Michael Haneke. My central claim is that, inasmuch as it consists of a corporeal inscription, the wound—which serves as an ideal(ized) esthetic model for the seven authors and two filmmakers treated here—is itself a kind of *text*. What follows will explore the consequences of this tautological textual model for the heritage of 'narrative thought': both the narratological workings of these texts (how they tell stories) and the underlying epistemology this reveals (whether or not these narrativists still believe in narrative at all).

My chapters are arranged chronologically, and not merely by convenience: my thinking is *comparative* throughout, and for this reason, this study aspires above all else to suggest a literary history—one history among others, one literary lineage alongside many. While they may belong to different national-linguistic traditions, the authors and filmmakers addressed by this dissertation are nonetheless directly influenced by one another, explicitly alluding to each other on many an occasion. My aim, in part, in constituting this (at times quite commonplace but at other moments novel) constellation of *auteurs* is to sketch the contours of a transnational canon united by an interest in and a celebration of esthetic injury. And if the texts chosen for consideration here are all in French or German, they nevertheless represent a wide variety of national and cultural backgrounds—from Kafka's upbringing as part of the German-speaking Jewish minority of Hapsburg-era Prague to Hélène Cixous's origins among the French-

speaking Jewish minority of Algeria, from the Austrian authors Bachmann and Jelinek to the truly cosmopolitan filmmakers Werner Schroeter and Michael Haneke, who are equally at home in a tradition of French or German-language cinema.

### 1: An Esthetics of Injury: Decadence and Estheticism

The dissertation is divided into three parts, the first of which, “An Esthetics of Injury,” seeks both to ground the study historically and to establish its two chief concerns: *decadence* and *estheticism*. Defining these terms *structurally* as well as thematically, I endeavor to trace the importance of these literary-historical categories—conventionally more closely associated with the nineteenth century—into and throughout the twentieth. The first two chapters, on Baudelaire and Kafka respectively, should be understood, then, as a dual introduction to the dissertation addressing each of these two (re)definitions in turn; the third chapter, on Georges Bataille, serves definitively to bring together questions of decadence and estheticism under a single heading, framing the approach for the two remaining sections.

I begin with an investigation of the 1857 trial of Charles Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*, and my first chapter stresses that all seven poems subjected to censorship involve central depictions of physical injury, with the wound condensing the poet’s numerous offensive excesses and becoming emblematic of literary decadence on a thematic level. The key question of the trial is whether the excision of these poems would constitute an amputation or, rather, a disfiguration; consequently, although Baudelaire is perhaps not primarily a storyteller, a defense of narrative becomes the rallying point for those advocating on his behalf. The later prose poetry is then written to accommodate precisely the kind of textual wounding to which his first volume was

subjected; incorporating fragmentation into the artwork's structure, Baudelaire gives birth to the form that might be seen as the very hallmark of modernity: the modernist miniature.<sup>8</sup> His texts become *grotesque* not only in the subject matter chosen, but also in their form or, perhaps, their formlessness (to speak with Bataille): they break apart and reform both in the act of writing and the act of reading, never taking definitive (narrative) shape. Baudelaire's trial thus marks a seismic shift in literary sensibilities and the historical beginning of a new esthetic era. I therefore define Baudelairean *decadence* formally as the decomposition of the artwork into ever briefer compositional elements—and it is this fragmentation and perpetual rearrangement that constitutes the *narrative* component of the esthetics of injury explored throughout the dissertation.

Its *semiological*, even *ontological*, dimension is introduced by my second chapter, on the ambivalent estheticism of Franz Kafka's *Ein Landarzt* (1917). In his journals and personal correspondence, Kafka explicitly champions the wound as an esthetic ideal, contending one should only read the type of books that bite and stab. More closely examining this early iteration of the *Fleischwerdung der Literatur* exposed by Bartl, I uncover the latent estheticism of its self-justification: *l'art pour l'art* disguised as injury purely for the sake of injury. But this estheticism also involves an idiosyncratic semiotic functioning: not only the increasingly literal treatment of metaphor described by Bartl's apt expression, but also, conversely, an increasingly metaphorical attitude toward the real. Kafka himself later interprets the open wound in *Ein Landarzt* as a premonition of his real-life *Lungenwunde*: the tubercular hemorrhaging that will ultimately prove fatal. In so doing he brings to life the metaphorical but also unwittingly reduces lived experience to a mere mental image—adopting the wound as a self-recursive *Sinnbild*, as an emblem of this precarious point of contact between the (autobiographical) real

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<sup>8</sup> This influential genre designation was introduced in 2007 by Andreas Huyssen, and will inform my discussion of both Baudelaire and Kafka.

and the symbolic. At stake in the formal composition of Kafka's miniatures is the legacy of Baudelaire's and the evolution of narrative form more generally.

Examining the philosophy and fiction of George Bataille, my third chapter reveals the literary violence (chiefly motifs of castration and decapitation) central to the author's last-published novel, *Le Bleu du ciel* (1927/1935/1957), to be in keeping with the strategy of self-destructive sovereignty Bataille identifies in Kafka's desire to have his books posthumously burned. Explicitly alluding to Baudelaire's description of his collection of prose poems as having neither head nor tail, Bataille's novel—repeatedly rewritten over the course of three decades and at one point set to flame—is composed of interrelated fragments in perpetual rearrangement. For Bataille, this literary self-destruction is intended to open up the text to an experience of the *real* that inherently exceeds well-ordered (narrative) discourse. Bringing together this *decadent* formal fragmentation with an *estheticist* fetish for the reality of representation, Bataille reveals the epistemological gravity of the esthetics of injury observed in the earlier authors and provides a philosophical framework to guide the remainder of the dissertation. Moreover, Bataille writes on both Kafka and, more critically, on Jean Genet—making him an apt transition between the two.

## 2: The Textual Orifice: Autobiography and Eroticism

The second half of the dissertation consists of two 'diptychs' held together by Cixous's affinity for Bachmann. (In her own scholarship, Cixous—whose *L'Ange au secret* [1991] alludes extensively to Bachmann—frequently engages with the earlier author's literature, lauding it as an example of the 'écriture féminine' she also discovers in Genet.) The first of these diptychs,

“The Textual Orifice,” treats works by Jean Genet and Hélène Cixous in order to highlight two additional elements of this injurious esthetic procedure—another pairing of concerns essential also to the previous chapters but less thoroughly explored therein: *autobiography* and *eroticism*. If the wound is intended as the site of an encounter with the real, then it is, by necessity, inextricably involved with an author’s own actual lived experience. As the estheticism in question here involves an idiosyncratic semiotic structure—the variety of precarious relationship between signifier and real-world referent I will observe in Kafka’s *Sinnbild*—, the literary wound becomes a trace or *scar* attesting to the author’s efforts to alchemize autobiography into an artwork. Opening the body to what is outside of it, the wound is also a site of intersubjectivity, the locus of an encounter with alterity—precisely what Bataille, somewhat misleadingly, theorizes as *expérience intérieure*. That there is an erotic component to this encounter is undeniable, and *every single one* of the key wounds addressed by my dissertation is in some sense sexualized.

In an early autobiography, written at the age of thirty-seven, Salvador Dalí describes his artistic career as a narcissistic vivisection, attributing its erotic appeal to a delicate balancing act between privacy and exhibitionism, concealing at the same time that it reveals:

Je l’exécute par goût—le mien—et à la manière des jésuites. En outre, voici ce qui prévaut : une vivisection totale n’a aucune importance d’un point de vue érotique ; tout reste aussi impénétrable et apprêté qu’avant d’avoir retiré la peau et la chair. Ceci est également valable pour le squelette dépecé. Ma méthode est de cacher et de dévoiler, d’indiquer avec précaution la possibilité de certaines blessures internes tandis qu’en même temps et ailleurs, à des endroits complètement ouverts, je pince les tendons nus de la guitare humaine. Je n’oublie en aucun cas qu’il est plus souhaitable de laisser retentir la résonance physiologique du prélude que la fin mélancolique du fait accompli (262).

The wounds that are displayed, Dalí cautions, as eye-catching as they may be, might ultimately be just foreplay concealing other wounds unseen. And this kind of burlesque strip show—hinting at autobiographical elements while at the same time obscuring them—is common to all

of the novels to be discussed here. From Baudelaire's trial onwards, each text borders at times (and most rather extensively) on the *obscene*—challenging the very limits of representation. Yet, while indulging in what is often a brutally graphic depiction of physical violence and a sometimes pseudo-pornographic approach to sexuality, these authors and filmmakers nevertheless all understand the erotic allure of suggestion—that the resonance of the overture is sometimes sexier than the act itself. Both in terms of autobiography and eroticism, then, “The Textual Orifice” explores the *hidden holes* in texts in order to reveal the narrative consequences of *omission*.

Genet's shocking *Pompes funèbres* (1947) is the subject of my fourth chapter, which expands upon a reading provided by Cixous during a seminar I attended in Paris in 2010. Eulogizing Genet's lost love(r),<sup>9</sup> Jean Decarnin, the novel lewdly oscillates between autobiographical recollections and violent erotic fantasies. Before examining the wound directly, then, I first consider Genet's treatment of another erotic(ized) orifice: the anus. Tracing the eventual omission of central scenes of sodomy and wounding as Genet's novel evolves from one edition to the next, this chapter demonstrates how censorship, whether external or self-imposed, becomes constitutive of narrative as such—of its deconstruction and its reconfiguration. This is followed by a genetic study of the hitherto unexamined manuscripts of Hélène Cixous's direct response to Genet's novel, her untranslated ‘fiction’ *Souffles* (1975), which reveals that the later drafts of the book work to conceal its poignant and surprising autobiographical origin.

Playing with the author's ambiguous assertion that “Ce qui est coupé repousse” (“What is cut off repulses/regrows”), I ultimately expose omission as a productive and polyvalent textual strategy. This is Cixous's particular inheritance of the decadent procedure of fecund

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<sup>9</sup> It is unclear to what degree the relationship between the two men was romantic but likely that its erotic nature was entirely fictionalized by the author.

structural disintegration that began with Baudelaire's prose poetry—and she, like Bataille, quotes the poet to establish that her writing has *ni queue ni tête*. But if, for Baudelaire, this fragmentation occurs especially on the level of the individual miniature, for Cixous, it operates even on the level of the phoneme, with the sounds of individual words dismantled and rearranged to make new meanings. Examining one of these polyvalent phonemes in particular, the Genet chapter also includes a discussion of Cixous's notion of the *sexe* (her portmanteau of *sexe* and *texte*) and her analogue to Genet's anus—the *con*—as a revision of the Freudian theory of castration.

The question of castration is, in general, a distraction—and one that I will skirt as much as possible throughout. (Certainly, castration would constitute a wound, but this should not mean that every literary wound must uniquely signify castration.) Nonetheless one of the fundamental guiding mythologies of twentieth century thought, it is, however, impossible to avoid entirely: it is *the* single most frequently addressed issue under discussion in the scholarship on Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* and Kafka's *Landarzt*; it comes up again in Genet, who imagines Hitler castrated by a bullet, and in Derrida's important reading of Genet; and it is an essential (although ironic) intertext for the feminist interventions of Cixous and Jelinek. Wherever possible, I will read castration from a more poststructuralist perspective, as a function of language itself and as one allegory among many—as yet another literary treatment of the ageless trope that is the wound.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the literary history sketched here may well have its parallel in the history of thought: namely in its extensive resonances with the evolution of twentieth-century critical theory from Freud via Lacan and into deconstruction. Unfortunately, a thorough exploration of these resonances would exceed the scope of the

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<sup>10</sup> In this same vein, in an article on the uncanny, Neil Hertz insists that the inventor of psychoanalysis himself acknowledged the questionable *reality* of the primal scene—choosing to retain it perhaps, as the simplified representation of a universal condition (319). Samuel Weber similarly (and evocatively) suggests the necessity of reading Freud's notion of castration *structurally*, to wit: without “reducing castration to a ‘real’ event or by equating it with an imaginary or arbitrary fantasy” (1111).

present study. With regard to this genre of literary theory, then, here I will concentrate primarily on those thinkers who comment directly on the authors under consideration: Benjamin (particularly his work on Baudelaire), Deleuze and Guattari (on Kafka) and Derrida (especially significant in this context for his writings on Genet and Cixous).

### 3: The Filmic Cut: Mediated Reality

The ‘diptych’ that concludes the dissertation, “The Filmic Cut,” is a pairing of the two closely related Austrian authors Bachmann and Jelinek; in my sixth and seventh chapters I read their respective novels *Malina* (1971) and *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983) beside the filmic adaptations of the same by Werner Schroeter (*Malina*, 1991) and Michael Haneke (*La Pianiste*, 2001). The inclusion of the filmic medium adds another dimension to the question of aestheticism presented in the preceding chapters insofar as the ontological circumstances of cinema oblige it to an actual representation qua *reproduction* of a physical reality—what I will, following Stanley Cavell, explore in my final chapter as the potentially ‘pornographic’ nature of cinematic narrative on the whole.

It was none other than Elfriede Jelinek who was commissioned to write the screenplay for Schroeter’s *Malina*, and both she and the director were accused, at the time of the film’s début, of eroticizing and exploiting Ingeborg Bachmann’s real-life wounds—her untimely death by fire. Examining a general disposition toward injury as an esthetic principle in Bachmann’s oeuvre, in my sixth chapter I argue that Jelinek’s and Schroeter’s inclusion of biographical details from Bachmann’s life only perpetuates and intensifies the conflation of the literal and the metaphorical (particularly surrounding images of wounding) that was already an essential

element of the author's own narrative procedure. In the same manner that Kafka's *Sinnbild der Wunde* risks eradicating the difference between the real world and its literary representation, Bachmann's writing participates in a literalization of the metaphorical—a literary incorporation or *Fleischwerdung*. Perhaps demonstrating the dangers of this dynamic, the film made of her only published novel is an example of how an authorial, autobiographical real risks vanishing entirely into the textual imaginary.

Largely for this reason, my examination takes an at times quite critical stance toward the esthetic paradigm it endeavors to expose. Like the notions of estheticism and decadence employed here, the 'wound' of the title is both thematic (*what* these texts represent) and structural (*how* they conceive of representation): these are works intended by their authors to be wounding, but they are also all *wounded* narratives both in their formal breakdown (what I am calling decadence) and in their perilous conflation of the literary and the real (what I identify as their estheticism). Among the many other parallel literary histories interwoven with my own would be the heritage of what one might similarly dub 'an esthetics of ugliness'<sup>11</sup> or an 'esthetics of evil'—represented primarily by the French axis of authors reaching from Baudelaire to Bataille and onward to Genet. With their purposefully provocative celebration of the repugnant and the immoral, these writers oblige us to an *ethical* consideration of the esthetic choices documented here. While the precise political context of each artwork varies dramatically, then, there is nevertheless a common (un)ethical dimension to their estheticism in and of itself.

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<sup>11</sup> The phrase is first introduced, to my knowledge, with the publication of Karl Rosenkrantz's *Ästhetik des Häßlichen* in 1853—at the outset of the period to considered here, and has felt a reinvigorated notoriety in recent decades with studies such as Sabine Kleine's *Zur Ästhetik des Häßlichen* (1998), Lesley Higgins' *Modernist Cult of Ugliness* (2002) and, most recently, Umberto Eco's *On Ugliness* (2007). A particularly relevant strand of this trend is constituted by studies such as Elaine Scarry's (1985) and Linda Nochlin's (1994), which attempt to resituate the investigation in the realm of representations of the fragmented body in pain.

In regard to Cixous, Bachmann and Jelinek, these ethical and political concerns involve, in part, the critical feminist perspectives (different for each author) expressed within their works. More pertinently, however, and from a more semiological angle, the central ethical question raised by Jelinek and Haneke—and treated in my final chapter—has to do with the feasibility of such critiques of (gender) violence through a language that inevitably employs the same violent imagery it attempts to undo. Still, mine is not in any way intended as a study of violence as such. In my approach to this matter, I therefore follow—but also ultimately call into question—Marco Abel’s

basic methodological—indeed ontological—assumption, namely, that signaletic materials of any kind are not representations *of* something but, instead, constitute the *reality* of representations (or the real forces at work in what are often deemed representations). Put differently, unlike other critical studies of violence in literature and film, mine does not frame the encounter with violent images in terms of signification and meaning (mediation) but, instead, in terms of affects and force—that is, asignifying intensities (ix, original emphasis).

Akin to Rainald Goetz’s cut, which seems implicitly to combat the very notion of symbolic language, Abel’s book, *The Violent Affect*, resists the assumption that “(violent) images are representations—reflections of something prior to their emergence, that is, immaterial traces of absent presences” (ibid.) and therefore does not seek to unpack the allegorical meaning (the signifieds) of these images. Similarly, the ethical engagement of my project has less to do with an interpretation *per se* of the images and texts treated than with an interrogation into the epistemological consequences of their idiosyncratic semiotic functioning.

The persistence, even today, of an esthetics of injury can be in part attributed to the fact that it consists of its own deconstruction—tautological in this way, it is particularly difficult to demythologize. Central to my investigation, then, is the question of how the literary wound—once the modernist emblem *par excellence* of a metaphysics of presence, of an *immediate* esthetic experience—becomes implicated in the kind of postmodern mediated reality, the quasi-

deconstructionist perspective described above,<sup>12</sup> or, to speak again (anachronistically) with Nietzsche, how the ‘real world’ becomes a fable. As a literary topos, the ‘wound’ is so broadly metaphorical as to be at times almost all-encompassing and therefore nearly nonsensical. Over the course of the century-and-a-half covered by this dissertation, the authors treated repeatedly attempt to remove these scare quotes implicitly surrounding the trope by rendering it ever more literal—instead thereby succeeding at expanding them to encompass the entire notion of ‘reality’.

The most important question probed by Jelinek and Haneke is how one can achieve authenticity in an entirely mediated reality once this possibility of Reality, writ large, has been revoked. Focusing on another abhorrent image of self-cutting—which Jelinek insists is autobiographical in its origins—my final chapter demonstrates how she and Haneke both call into question the very possibility of such authenticity and, nevertheless, attempt to resurrect it, paradoxically proposing *mediation* as its own remedy. In order for this cure to work, it must operate injuriously, through fragmentation of any pretended narrative of totality. With regard to the work of Schroeter and Haneke, I therefore examine the syntax of their editing, *the filmic cut*, as a final iteration of the structural decadence observed first in Baudelaire. This cut is both a narrative *wound*, in the sense that it ineluctably injures narrative by severing and fragmenting cinematic images, but it is also a *narrative* wound: narrativizing these images by arranging them into a montage, which is to say, an overarching storyline, complete despite its fragmentation.

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<sup>12</sup> In this respect, my study parallels Elizabeth Ladenson’s *Dirt for Art’s Sake*—discussed more extensively in my opening chapter—which traces the evolution of the paradigm of *l’art pour l’art* from nineteenth-century provocation to twentieth-century truism.

**Part 1**  
An Esthetics of Injury

Chapter 1  
**The Literary Wound on Trial:**  
Poetic Decadence and Charles Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* (1857)

*for Carol de Dobay Rifelj*

1857: Baudelaire before the law, his *Fleurs du mal* on trial. In summary of the first review following the volume's publication, Baudelaire's friend and advocate Frédéric Dulamon cites only a single salient question: "Pourquoi donc étaler toutes ces plaies hideuses de l'esprit, du cœur et de la matière ?" (*ŒC* I 1189).<sup>1</sup> Admonishing Baudelaire for having flaunted the grotesque, the objectionable and the obscene, an incensed Gustave Bourdin, writing for the *Figaro*, had inspired the second landmark literary obscenity trial of the year: encouraged by his enraged review, French authorities, having failed effectively to censor Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* now turn instead to poetry,<sup>2</sup> challenging eleven of the hundred poems of Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* on the grounds of an "offense à la morale publique" and ultimately excising six of these from the work.

The eleven poems isolated by the prosecution can be categorized according to a nexus of certain distasteful excesses: unabashed nudity, explicit sexuality, horrifying violence and

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<sup>1</sup> Wherever possible, and unless otherwise indicated, all references to Baudelaire and to the documents surrounding his trial are to the Pléiade edition of the *Œuvres complètes* edited by Claude Pichois and Jean Ziegler. Those documents surrounding the trial not included in the Pléiade are cited either from André Guyaux's historical anthology or Yves Florenne's chronological edition of the *Œuvres complètes*.

<sup>2</sup> Among many others, Richard Sieburth notes that while such censorship trials were by no means a rarity at this point in history—alongside Flaubert, the brothers Goncourt and Xavier de Montépin were also tried for an "outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes mœurs"—Baudelaire was the first writer of *verse* (with the exception of a single example of poetry overtly aimed at political provocation) to be singled out. Sieburth—whose claim is that Baudelaire's work is brought under scrutiny by a conservative regime that permits unquestionable smut such as pornography, precisely *because* the poet's uncontested mastery of form intermingles high art and the obscene—reveals the essential irony of court's utter failure to recognize this novelty themselves: "Incapable of distinguishing between poesis and mimesis, the law simply lumped Flaubert's prose and Baudelaire's verse under the single rubric of 'realism'" (346). In fact, it is precisely this misreading and misplaced emphasis on the *visual* in the reception of Baudelaire's obscenity, in Sieburth's view, that allows for the decision to be overturned in 1949: "the bench concluded that Baudelaire's earlier judges were not legally in error, but were merely flawed as readers of literature; their verdict, 'ne s'attachant qu'à l'interprétation réaliste de ces poèmes et négligeant leur sens symbolique s'est révélé de caractère arbitraire'" (347).

vampirism, homosexuality and incest, and (of course) blasphemy.<sup>3</sup> But the rhetorical query quoted above points to something far more fundamental albeit perhaps somewhat less obvious: what all of these poems, without exception, have in common—and what the trial itself fails ever explicitly to denounce, even in the most horrendous cases—is a depiction and a celebration of physical wounding, often as eroticized as it is emetic. Still, Bourdin’s plaintive, telling condemnation of *ces plaies hideuses*—quoted here from Dulamon’s rebuttal—is not included in the reproduction of his article one finds in most editions of Baudelaire’s *Œuvres complètes*, and for good reason: these were words he never wrote. While attributed to Bourdin,<sup>4</sup> the precise diction comes from Dulamon himself, in a paraphrase of Baudelaire’s detractor.

While those who bring the *Fleurs du mal* to trial almost pointedly avoid naming the wound as such throughout, tacitly they seem to recognize it as the secret center of gravity of what they find offensive in the work. In what follows I intend not only to expose the wound as a crucial component of Baudelaire’s artistic project but furthermore to demonstrate how his book indeed inaugurates a new esthetics of injury that will become perhaps *the* dominant literary mode of the twentieth century. As the trial of the *Fleurs du mal* is taken up again (and its ruling overturned) in 1949, I can think of no better starting point for an exploration of this evolving literary landscape than an examination of those poems first reviled and later revered by French authorities—poems which, in the title of an article commemorating the centennial of the volume, Anna Balakian refers to, more tellingly than she intends, as the *stigmatized* poems of Baudelaire.

This chapter, then, will be divided into three parts—the first primarily historical, the second addressing questions of narrative and the third largely semiological. Roughly the first

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<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly, it is the poems pertaining to this final category that are spared suppression, perhaps because they are most easily defended as edifying via moral counter-example.

<sup>4</sup> Implicitly by Dulamon himself, for instance, but also by Elizabeth Ladenson in her chapter on Baudelaire’s trial (62).

half of the chapter concentrates on the trial of the *Fleurs du mal* (beside Baudelaire's early essays) in order to demonstrate how the figure of the wound becomes the standard representation for both a mode of writing and, perhaps just as importantly, a mode of reading: the defense given for Baudelaire consistently asserts that his literature turns to the *grotesque* and the *decadent*—designations appropriate not only to the injured bodies depicted in his poems but also to the historical import of Baudelaire's project as a transitional and transformative poetics—to an esthetics of ugliness and injury, even to an esthetics of evil precisely because it is his literary purpose to probe societal wounds. As such, the validity of this description itself is never challenged or contradicted. However, Baudelaire's advocates also implicitly advance a corollary claim insisting that the edifying aspect of the poet's work derives from how it injures its audience in turn. The prosecution's chief concern might be whether the notion of the artwork as injury (and, thus, as injurious) is appropriate to its unarmed reader, whether it has value *as a mode of esthetic experience*.

The second part of the chapter will attempt more thoroughly to map this esthetic mode structurally through a brief consideration of the construction of the volume as a whole—examining how Baudelaire incorporates the censorship to which his volume is subjected into the construction of his prose poems and *Épaves*. It is in this context that I intend to define Baudelairean decadence formally as a perpetual narrative decomposition and recomposition. Such violent reconfiguration also operates on the level of the individual poem—indeed the individual *sign*—and I therefore conclude with a reading of one of the eleven poems put on trial, *À Celle qui est trop gaie*, and the horrific wound that it depicts. As will be elaborated further on, this image has an idiosyncratic and peculiarly brutal method of making meaning. The Baudelairean wound is not, strictly speaking, symbolic, which is to say: it operates not metaphorically but rather in intentionally arbitrary metonymic chains. A reëxamination of

Walter Benjamin's description of what he dubs the *allegorical* in Baudelaire will reveal that the wound qua literary figure is simultaneously productive and destructive—in fact, it produces meaning precisely by doing harm. The *grotesque* aspect of Baudelaire's verse, in the understanding of this term to be employed below, is precisely this capacity to create new forms, constellations and meanings through an act of deconstruction—to create beauty via injury. As a pretended intrusion of raw physicality into the otherwise hermetically sealed realm of text, the wound might seem to promise the transcendence (or destruction) of mere textuality. But insofar as it is itself corporeal *inscription*, in fact it does precisely the opposite. An understanding of the wound as a *mise-en-abyme* of writing will allow an exploration of how the Baudelairean esthetic sets itself in violent opposition to an anticipated reader simultaneously complicit and antagonistic.

### 1: Literary Censorship: Amputation or Disfiguration?

The charge against Baudelaire in 1857 is that he simply shows too much, with too much skill and vigor, that he keeps nothing hidden. It is Bourdin again, Baudelaire's original accuser, who puts the sentiment most pithily when he protests that never before “on ne vit mordre et même mâcher autant de seins dans si peu de pages” (Guyaux 160); and it is on this particular surfeit, one of sexual violence—albeit innocuous by contrast to images we will observe a bit later on—that I wish to focus here. From the very beginning, the wound plays a role in Baudelaire's writing;<sup>5</sup> and almost immediately it is proscribed. As early as 1839, an imagery of injury begins

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<sup>5</sup> The first known document attributable to his hand is, incidentally, a letter from a twelve-year-old Charles Baudelaire to his brother, describing the former's injured foot and the remedies applied: “Je viens de me fouler le pied de là emplâtre sur emplâtre (ou amplâtre), et je déteste les emplâtres aussi bien que les médecins” (*Correspondance* 13).

to creep into his erotic poetry, as in a poem beginning, “Je n’ai pas pour maîtresse une lionne illustre...” Although written almost twenty years before the trial of the *Fleurs du mal*, this poem will first be published almost two full decades after it, and even then only with the offensive stanzas suppressed. (It will finally be printed in its entirety in 1884.) Considering this juvenilia in the current context, one might rightly cite the portions that were censored:

Et pourtant, me traînant chaque nuit sur son corps,  
Ainsi qu’un nouveau-né, je tette et la mords ;

Et bien qu’elle n’ait pas souvent même une obole  
Pour se frotter la chair et pour s’oindre l’épaule,  
Je la lèche en silence avec plus de ferveur  
Que Madeleine en feu les deux pieds du Sauveur (*ŒC* I 203).

In the view of Baudelaire’s most admiring editor, Yves Florenne, this is “la seule de ces poésies de jeunesse qui annonce *les Fleurs du Mal*” (I 1388); and, indeed, here already we have all of the key elements of Baudelairean injury that will be isolated and condemned during the trial of that masterwork. Both arousing and discomfiting, the image of breasts being bitten<sup>6</sup>—which, as Bourdin remarks, is to become a veritable leitmotif of Baudelaire’s poetic œuvre—is here linked to a form of incest, insofar as the newborn nursling is also the erotic lover. Thus coupling this puerile transference of bodily fluids with an image of violence, the poem subtly suggests bleeding, a type of vampirism, perhaps even transubstantiation. Lastly, what appears to be an innocent nudity, the scrubbing of flesh and anointing of shoulders, is rapidly rendered both sacrilegious and violent by the now sexualized reference to Luke: 37—washing Christ’s feet with her tears, Mary Magdalene is in a sense preparing them to be pierced during his crucifixion. In a moment apparently benign, a single playful wound, nipple taken between teeth,

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<sup>6</sup> This has its analogue both in Kafka’s prescription—to be discussed in the following chapter—that one ought only to read the kinds of books that *bite*, but also possibly in Baudelaire’s *Les Mystères galans des théâtres de Paris* (1848, the attribution is uncertain), which announces itself as a book that will bite “Pauvre petit livre, tu seras donc bien méchant! tu déchiras donc à belles dents bien des robes de soie, *bien de beaux seins*, bien de belles épaules, bien des... j’allais dire des cœurs” (*ŒC* II 983, my emphasis).

Baudelaire assembles every one of the offenses that later constitute his *outrage à la morale publique et aux bonnes mœurs*: nudity, sexuality, incest, violence, vampirism and blasphemy.

With both Flaubert and Baudelaire on trial, 1857 proves a critical year in the evolution of French literary sensibility. Nevertheless, the momentous import of this instant in literary history is something that the author of these events—Ernest Pinard, the imperial prosecutor leading the attack on both writers—takes special care to deny in his censure of Baudelaire’s verse. Repeatedly he insists that it is neither the delicate poet nor his unfortunate editors but rather the work itself that is in question, attempting to attenuate the emblematic significance of the censorship trial while confessing its inherent risks: “Si la poursuite n’aboutit pas, on fait à l’auteur un succès, presque un piédestal ; il triomphe, et on a assumé, vis à vis de lui, l’apparence de la persécution” (*ŒC* I 1206). And if, ultimately, the stakes of these proceedings are far greater than Pinard wishes to imply, one might at least congratulate him on the foresight that predicts his ultimate defeat and the triumphant success, over time, of these persecuted works. Baudelaire’s trial, regardless of the prosecutor’s assertion, is not merely about a book. Ultimately, it pits one mode of reading, one literary sensibility, against another. If the 1857 trial will resolve this confrontation in favor of the conservative, moralizing literary taste Pinard represents; the 1949 encore of this judicial performance will demonstrate with force just how thoroughly our sensibilities have been transformed, now taking Baudelaire’s excess as emblematic not of what writing has no right to do, but instead of precisely what it is meant to do.<sup>7</sup>

Justifiably apprehensive that an open trial might make Baudelaire into a martyr, Pinard takes care to divorce the poet from any grander cause or literary movement, instead

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<sup>7</sup> This argument draws on Ladenson’s central claim in her delightful book, *Dirt for Art’s Sake*. Intentionally eschewing self-congratulatory remarks on the amelioration of standard reading practices over time, Ladenson situates Baudelaire’s in a series of literary obscenity trials ranging from Flaubert to Henry Miller and beyond, demonstrating how by 1949, “art for art’s sake had passed into the realm of platitude” (77).

maintaining that “Charles Baudelaire n’appartient pas à une école. Il ne relève que de lui-même” (*ÆC* I 1206). But if the prosecution emphatically insists on the singularity of this writer, those who testify on his behalf seem at moments equally eager to assimilate his work into a larger body of texts and authors. Barbey d’Aurevilly, who among others provides an unpublished *article justificatif* in defense of the volume, situates Baudelaire with respect to a great number of other authors,<sup>8</sup> but chiefly Poe (to whom Baudelaire plays replica and younger brother [*ÆC* I 1191]) and Gautier—concluding finally that Baudelaire “est lui-même une fleur du mal venue dans les serres chaudes d’une Décadence” (*ÆC* I 1194). The identification with literary Decadence writ large is of primary importance here in tracing a link from Baudelaire into the twentieth century; but it is not a break in the way literature is written that is marked by the 1857 trial, but rather a seismic shift in its *reception*. Baudelaire himself is the first to point this out, noting that two of the poems put on trial had already been in print for quite some time without inspiring any notable scandal, and asserting, “[j]e pourrais faire une bibliothèque de livres modernes non poursuivis, et *qui ne respirent pas, comme le mien, L’HORREUR DU MAL*.<sup>9</sup> Depuis près de trente ans, la littérature est d’une liberté qu’on veut brusquement punir en moi. Est-ce juste ?”<sup>10</sup> (*ÆC* I 194, original emphasis). Attacking the intemperance of Baudelaire’s poetry, conservative authorities are attempting to correct an already well-established trend in

<sup>8</sup> Among these both Shakespeare and Goethe—genius figures for which the French literary tradition has no equally emblematic representative.

<sup>9</sup> Note that here Baudelaire capitalizes the word Evil, rendering it allegorical. As Antoine Compagnon points out, “Baudelaire met toujours un *M* majuscule au *Mal*, dans le titre *Les Fleurs du Mal*, pour insister sur la valeur théologique du terme” (13). But for Baudelaire’s greatest reader, Claude Pichois, even this clarification does not go far enough: “in his letters Baudelaire most often writes *Mal* with a capital ‘M’ and *fleurs* with a small ‘f’. *Mal* indicates clearly the metaphysical dimension of the collection: *fleurs* would have hardly any meaning (think of the etymological meaning, *anthology*) had Baudelaire not linked it to *Mal* through a powerful oxymoron” (*Cambridge Companion* 216). Whether or not this ‘evil’ should be capitalized is a tacit point of contention for the trial itself; in the remaining documents one notes that Baudelaire’s detractors tend to capitalize the *M* of “Mal,” whereas his defenders—with the notable exception of Baudelaire himself—do not. A similar ambiguity is present in the title of the volume. Pichois, for instance, insists that *Fleurs* is to be read in the singular—an antiquated word for an anthology—rather than in the plural—as flowers (797).

<sup>10</sup> Charles Asselineau is more specific in assembling this library, putting Baudelaire’s name at the head of a list including Lamartine, Hugo, de Vigny, Sainte-Beuve and Gautier as authors who have operated according to a similar writerly philosophy “depuis trente ans” (1362)—a temporal marker echoing Baudelaire’s and perhaps indicating the publication, under a pseudonym, of Poe’s first book of poetry.

contemporary writing, but too little too late. Pinard recognizes in Baudelaire all the symptoms of a nascent literary decadence, but is unable to halt the decay.

Baudelaire's *Choix de maximes consolantes sur l'amour*—first published in March of 1846 in the *Corsaire-Satan*, the short-lived Parisian daily at the origins of the Bohemian movement—is perhaps the first piece of mature writing to announce a new appreciation of what one might rightly term Decadence *avant la lettre*. Here Baudelaire presents his view of the world—“ce vaste système de contradictions (...) ayant toute caducité en grande estime” (*ÆC* I 546, my emphasis)—embracing inconsistency and ultimately advocating a radical revalorization of values; and as the word caducity suggests, this essay also points to a sense of decline and deterioration, that is: it signals decadence not merely as a precise literary movement but more broadly.<sup>11</sup> For Baudelaire this will be coupled with an esthetic-ethical program valorizing artifice and the ugly, notably through the image of the wound.

Baudelaire's maxims champion relativized esthetics, prescribing for each type of lover the *cultivated* appreciation of a different type of woman, and often suggesting a complementary relationship, with the beloved idol providing the antidote to the lover's primary desires and instead offering a secondary, *artificial* appreciation of her initially off-putting qualities. Predictably estheticist, this revalorization of values first focuses on esthetics rather ethics, coming to a new admiration of ugliness. As Baudelaire counsels, one must learn to “tirer parti de la laideur elle-même” (*ÆC* I 548), and no example of this phenomenon is more appropriate to the current context than his own:

Je suppose votre idole malade. Sa beauté a disparu sous l'affreuse croûte de la petite vérole, comme la verdure sous les lourdes glaces de l'hiver. Encore ému

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<sup>11</sup> Here I therefore capitalize the word only when I am referring to the Decadent movement as such and not when speaking of decadence as a broader phenomenon. In his introduction to Poe's *Nouvelles Histoires extraordinaires*, Baudelaire himself defends literary decadence against its critics—championing its procedures while dismissing the nomenclature that seeks to denigrate it. For the poet's relationship to decadence more largely, see Guyaux (who calls Baudelaire “l'instituter des decadences” [106]) (106-121) and Catherine Coquio's article, “La ‘Baudelairité’ décadente.”

par les longues angoisses et les alternatives de la maladie, vous contemplez avec tristesse le stigmate ineffaçable sur le corps de la chère convalescente ; vous entendez subitement résonner à vos oreilles un air *mourant* exécuté par l'archet délirant de Paganini, et cet air sympathique vous parle de vous-même, et semble vous raconter tout votre poème intérieur d'espérances perdues (*ŒC* I 548, original emphasis).

Through an artificial “*association des idées*” (*ŒC* I 548, original emphasis), the beloved is rendered desirable despite her vanished beauty, indeed precisely for her hideousness: “C’est donc surtout l’association des idées qui fait aimer les laides ; car vous risquez fort, si votre maîtresse grêlée vous trahit, de ne pouvoir vous consoler qu’avec une femme grêlée” (*ŒC* I 548). Her smallpox is more injury than illness, in a sense, considering how her malady inscribes the body with indelible markings—compared even more explicitly to writing by Baudelaire in the fragments of his *Mon cœur mis à nu*: “Le jour où le jeune écrivain corrige sa première épreuve, il est fier comme un écolier qui vient de gagner sa première vérole” (*ŒC* I 694). The selfsame erotic drive propels both writing and the wound: here pockmarks serve both as inspiration for the artifice of poetry and as the trophy of poetic accomplishment.

Notably, the simile runs both ways: the scar represents writing as much as writing metaphorically connotes the scar; each term is simultaneously signifier and signified, swapping positions in an endless gesture of artifice. This bidirectional allegorical relation—to be discussed more thoroughly later on—is fundamental to the semiotics of the wound in Baudelaire, and part of what constitutes both the novelty and the influence of his poetic project. It is the type of interpretative uncertainty that Geoffrey Harpham has in mind when he describes the grotesque not as an esthetic category but as an interval of understanding, “the middle of a narrative of emergent comprehension” (18). In Harpham’s view,

The interval of the grotesque is one in which, although we have recognized a number of different forms in the object, we have not yet developed a clear sense of the dominant principle that defines it and organizes its various elements. Until we do so we are stuck, aware of the presence of significance, or of certain

kinds of formal integrity, but unable to decipher the codes (...) this interval is the temporal analogue of the grotesque object, with its trammeling of energy and feeble or occluded formal principle (19).

If the signficatory schema of the *Maximes* advocates a suppression of an initial association in favor of a secondary, artificial meaning—what Walter Benjamin will theorize as the *allegorical* operation of Baudelairean verse—the grotesque is the interval of this transition, or as Michel Chaoli has summarized it, a process “of assembling and disassembling, of permitting one thing to morph into another” (47). On a formal level, then, the grotesque object (in this case: the scar) has its analogue in a particular model of making meaning: one that disfigures in order to allow novel constellations to take form, one that operates simultaneously through repulsion and esthetic attraction.

Even in this early statement of Baudelaire’s esthetic philosophy, physical disfiguration becomes the very emblem of an experience that can be estheticized and *eroticized* through artistic intervention—here a Paganini aria that represents an interior poem of perished hopes: “— Dès lors, les traces de petite vérole feront partie de votre bonheur, et chanteront toujours à votre regard attendri l’air mystérieux de Paganini. Elles seront désormais non seulement un objet de douce sympathie, *mais encore de volupté physique*” (*ÆC* I 548, my emphasis). The thorough (and, in Baudelaire’s view, potentially hazardously addictive) fetishization of the wound is, moreover, put into a provocatively religious context through the description of the pockmarks as *ineffaceable stigmata*. By this token, an esthetic preference for the repugnant quickly comes to take on ethical undertones.

Over the course of the essay, Baudelaire develops what at first appear to be primarily programmatic esthetic concerns into prescriptive ethical maxims, ultimately taking a somewhat surprising turn toward the moralizing. What began as specified advice for each type of lover has quickly taken on the status of a universal rule:

Pour certains esprits plus curieux et plus blasés, la jouissance de la laideur provient d'un sentiment encore plus mystérieux, qui est la soif de l'inconnu, et le goût de l'horrible. C'est ce sentiment, dont chacun porte en soi le germe plus ou moins développé, qui précipite certains poètes dans les amphithéâtres *et les cliniques*, et les femmes aux exécutions publiques. (*ŒC* I 548-549, my emphasis).

It is an admiration for the ugly,<sup>12</sup> claims Baudelaire, that is at the core of the quest for knowledge generally; and although the discourse is largely masculinist, authoritative, scientific—the more or less developed germ, the amphitheaters and clinics, public executions—the subject position is nevertheless lent to the poet and the woman, artists in their hysteric hyper-sensitivity, their morbid curiosity. Those deficient of this capacity are lamented for their lack of artistry: “Je plaindrais vivement qui ne comprendrait pas; — une harpe à qui manquerait une corde grave !” (*ŒC* I 549). More to the point: with his allusion to clinics and public executions, Baudelaire inaugurates a metaphoric discourse of the hospital that will come to dominate the documents surrounding his trial. Over the course of the proceedings, the courtroom itself begins to resemble an amphitheater, with Baudelaire's volume placed either upon an operating table or the bascule of a guillotine, depending on perspective.

Even at the end of his life Baudelaire will characterize his trial as mere misunderstanding, an “humiliation par le malentendu” (*ŒC* I 685). Ernest Pinard, however, does not once repent. As recent criticism has been keen on intimating, the 1949 reversal of the 1857 verdict reposes not on points of protocol—not on a rereading of the documents from the proceedings<sup>13</sup>—but rather on a reinterpretation of the esthetic and ethical value of the original texts. Condemning the first

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<sup>12</sup> As Jérôme Thélot astutely notes, in Baudelaire “[o]n ne sait jamais où passé la frontière entre dégoût et désir, laideur et beauté (37)

<sup>13</sup> Unlike Flaubert, Baudelaire could not afford a stenographer to transcribe the proceedings, and at the time it was not customary for the court to appoint one. Therefore it is questionable what records of the trial ever existed. Many of those that did were likely lost to a fire at the Palais de Justice in 1871.

prosecution's overly literal reading of Baudelaire's verse as 'realism,' the new authoritative stance emphasizes the necessity of reading poetry symbolically.<sup>14</sup> But while representative of a profound development, over the course of a century, in how we read literature; this perspective does not, perhaps, give Pinard due credit for his readerly perspicacity. (He was, after all, the very first to identify, albeit negatively, two of the foundational texts of literary modernity.) Indeed, the prosecution puts it perhaps not too unfairly when it claims that the poet's "principe, sa théorie, c'est de tout peindre, de tout mettre à nu. Il fouillera la nature humaine dans ses replis les plus intimes ; il aura, pour la rendre, des tons vigoureux et saisissants, il l'exagérera surtout dans ses côtés hideux " (*ÆC* I 1206).

On the basis of this statement one cannot justly accuse Pinard of having misread Baudelaire;<sup>15</sup> for while the imperial prosecutor's assessment seems indeed indicative of an indiscriminate desire to yoke the poet's verse together with an agenda of 'realism', the association is only confirmed by many of Baudelaire's own writings. Just two years before his trial, in an essay on laughter, Baudelaire had defended, even championed "le cas du grotesque" as "une création mêlée d'une certaine faculté imitatrice d'éléments préexistants dans la nature" (*ÆC* I 535), as a particular (comic) sentiment issuing from a sense of superiority over nature. These and similar reflections in the poet's *De L'Essence du rire* implicitly build on Hugo's 1827 defense of comedy vis-à-vis the epic in his preface to the publication of *Cromwell*; here Hugo contends that "le grotesque est (...) la plus riche source que la nature puisse ouvrir à l'art" (V 11). While never cited directly in *De L'Essence du rire*, Hugo—to whom three of the *Tableaux*

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<sup>14</sup> Eileen S. Burt focuses on the 1949 trial to show that "The shocking representations of 1857, outraging morality, are now understood to deliver the Wordsworthian 'shock of mild surprise' by which we recognize the original work of art. In 1949, the poems are precious artifacts; their language is not realistic by symbolical; its sensuous forms reveal an inner, spiritual meaning" (21). Yvan Leclerc, whose *Crimes écrits* catalogues the key literary trials of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, contextualizes this symbolic manner of reading in the same way as Baudelaire's ostensible realism: "Condamné pour réalisme grossier, Baudelaire est réhabilité au nom d'une autre école littéraire, le symbolisme" (279).

<sup>15</sup> Ladenson makes a similar argument regarding Pinard's assertion (54).

*parisiens* are dedicated and who commended Baudelaire on his condemnation (“une des rares décorations que le régime actuel peut accorder” [quoted in Guyaux, 250])—was certainly an influence. In his lengthy preface to an even lengthier play, he advocates the faithfully imitative (and hence ‘realist’) grotesque as a modern, Christian phenomenon, as a necessary complement to a melancholic society in decline.<sup>16</sup> Baudelaire, who isolates *violence* as a factor central to the genre, concurs.

This notion of what both Baudelaire and Hugo call the grotesque will constitute an important quilting point for the current considerations insofar as the mode, historically, challenges the limits placed on both imitation and ornamentation:<sup>17</sup> central concerns in Baudelaire’s early, programmatic writings—miniature manifestos such as his *Maximes* and his later essay on *Les Drames et les romans honnêtes*. Both here and in the *articles justificatifs* that shall later be submitted on Baudelaire’s behalf, Arnaud Berquin—a now all-but-forgotten eighteenth-century moralist and writer of didactic children’s literature—becomes the locus of critique. The absolute epitome of what Baudelaire disparagingly dubs *l’école du bon sens*, Berquin is one of those “personnes honorables” who “vien[nent] de blesser à mort la littérature” with their “décret satanique” (*ÆC* II 43) in favor of moralizing writing. Describing the works of *l’école du bon sens* as a fatal and satanic wound, Baudelaire breaks with the straitlaced literary model in vogue, paradoxically condemning it by means of a rhetoric strikingly analogous to the

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<sup>16</sup> One might note the similarities to Benjamin’s description of Baroque drama in his *Trauerspiel* book, which will be discussed in somewhat greater detail further on.

<sup>17</sup> The connection between the grotesque and ornamentation begins with the very origin of the word: *grotesque* designated the decorative style of the artificial grottos of Nero’s Domus Aurea. Nero’s ornamentation of artificial landscapes could be seen as a precedent for both the decadence and the triumph over nature that Hugo and Baudelaire, respectively, associate with the term. While the word itself grows out of a fifteenth-century rediscovery of Nero’s palace, modern theories of the grotesque often trace it back to Horace and Vitruvius’s reflections on artistic license and particularly the former’s maxim *ut pictura poesis*. Somewhat closer to Baudelaire chronologically, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing brings considerations of the rules placed on the visual arts (*Malerei*) and poetry back to the body in his *Laokoön*, wherein he argues that the poet has greater freedom to illustrate the ugliness of Laocoon’s physical suffering than the sculptor since poetry can depict this ugliness through beautiful language rather than merely through visual mimesis. While it precedes Baudelaire’s trial by almost a century, Lessing’s texts seems to intimate some of the questions that will be raised regarding Baudelaire’s ostensible realism. For more thorough accounts of the grotesque, see Bakhtin, Barasch, Kayser and Harpham.

one that will be leveled against him in his 1857 trial. The intentionally edifying stance is rendered immoral, and the self-justifying artistic one becomes ethical *de facto*: “L’art est-il utile? Oui. Pourquoi? Parce qu’il est l’art” (*ŒC* II 41). Even before it becomes necessary to defend himself in a court of law, Baudelaire’s estheticism has an ethical bent: in his view it is the very *artistry* of an artwork that is morally defensible and, indeed, right. Any attempt at overtly moralizing, by consequence, is fundamentally *unethical* because it will have deprived art of its necessary autonomy and thus of its artistic value. As radical and revolutionary as he admittedly is, Baudelaire’s thinking is fundamentally ambivalent—as evidenced here by the deeply moral dimension to his art-for-art estheticism. Dependent as they are on natural imagery, Baudelaire’s poetic principals never fully embrace artifice at the expense of nature; reliant as it is on religious tropes, Baudelaire’s love of vice cannot escape the structuring principles of virtue.

Here already then, six years before his trial—in the essay on *Les Drames et les romans honnêtes*—, Baudelaire provides the perfect apologia for both Gautier’s *l’art pour l’art* paradigm and the type of ‘realism’ authorities will later find so troubling in Flaubert’s *Bovary*:

Y a-t-il un art pernicieux ? Oui. C’est celui qui dérange les conditions de la vie. Le vice est séduisant, il faut le peindre séduisant ; mais il traîne avec lui des maladies et douleurs morales singulières ; il faut les décrire. *Étudiez toutes les plaies comme un médecin qui fait son service dans un hôpital*, et l’école du bon sens, l’école exclusivement morale, ne trouvera plus où mordre. Le crime est-il toujours châtié, la vertu gratifiée ? Non ; mais cependant, si votre roman, si votre drame est bien fait, il ne prendra envie à personne de violer les lois de la nature (*ŒC* II 41, my emphasis).

Clearly, it is not without grounds that the Pinard identifies Baudelaire’s poetry with what one might call realism or, later, naturalism: here Baudelaire, recalling the clinic and the amphitheater, positions the poet much as Zola would, as a cultural diagnostician in the vein of Charcot.<sup>18</sup> The explicitly medical aspect of Baudelaire’s simile recalls the clinics of his *Maximes*.

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<sup>18</sup> The extant version of Pinard’s prosecution, reconstructed in 1885 by Pinard himself from notes, is not entirely explicit in its charge of realism—waving as it does between a portrayal of Baudelaire as a singular author not

But if it is in order to emphasize the artistic necessity of studying ‘wounds’ that Baudelaire employs the metaphorical description of literature qua hospital, the inheritance of this image in the discourse of the trial can be quite revealing.

Bourdin, notably, adopts it in his review of the *Fleurs du mal*: “Ce livre est un hôpital ouvert à toutes les démences de l’esprit, à toutes les putridités du cœur ; encore si c’était pour les guérir, mais elles sont incurables” (Guyaux 160). But what is missing from this metaphor, otherwise so faithfully appropriated from the defendant himself, is clear: Bourdin echoes the image of the literary hospital, but in doing so, already he has suppressed the wound itself. It seems logical that this would be the source of Dulamon’s misleading paraphrase—with which I began this chapter—: “Pourquoi donc étaler toutes ces plaies hideuses de l’esprit, du cœur et de la matière ?” (*ÆC* I 1189).<sup>19</sup> But into the unspoken center of the original quotation, Dulamon insistently reinserts the wound.

In fact, throughout the scattered documents that still remain from Baudelaire’s trial, his proponents speak repeatedly of wounds and injuries, whereas the prosecution—suppressing these images—prefers to describe the *Fleurs du mal* as symptomatic of a malady. The subtle discrepancy between these two metaphoric fields is by no means insignificant. For the defense, a discourse of injury becomes the justification for the sober depiction of societal ills and moral sorrows of which the poet stands accused. This line of defense commences with Baudelaire’s legal advocate, Gustave Chaix d’Est-Ange, at the poet’s bequest.<sup>20</sup> Placing Baudelaire’s at the

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pertaining to any school and as an emblematic example—but Champfleury’s account of the trial insists on this aspect of the accusation. Guyaux discusses these differing accounts at some length (31-44).

<sup>19</sup> Dulamon’s quotation might be troping on the lauded “transports de l’esprit et des sens” (*ÆC* I 11) at the conclusion of what might be Baudelaire’s most famous poem, *Correspondances*—rendering it perhaps even less likely that this phrasing would have come directly from Bourdin.

<sup>20</sup> Chaix d’Est-Ange, as Yvan Leclerc has noted, takes most of his defense (often verbatim) from the *articles justificatifs*, while largely ignoring the notes prepared for him by Baudelaire himself: “Ce que l’avocat accepte de son client, ce sont les citations des autres qu’il fournit, celle de Balzac par exemple, sur les rapports de la morale et de l’art qui doit ‘montrer la plaie’” (255-6).

end of a chronology of literary masterpieces, Chaix d'Est Ange contends, quoting an unpublished letter of Balzac's:

Moraliser son époque est le but que tout écrivain doit se proposer (...) mais la critique a-t-elle des procédés nouveaux à indiquer aux écrivains qu'elle accuse d'immoralité ? Or, le procédé ancien a toujours consisté à montrer la plaie. Lovelace est la plaie dans l'œuvre colossale de Richardson. Voyez Dante : le *Paradis* (...) ne se lit guère, c'est l'*Enfer* qui saisit les imaginations à toutes les époques. (...) Enfin le doux et saint Fénelon n'a-t-il pas été contraint d'inventer les épisodes dangereux de *Télémaque* ? Otez-les ; Fénelon devient Berquin, plus le style ; qui relit Berquin ? Il faut la candeur de nos douze ans pour le supporter (*ÆC* I 1213, my emphasis).

An open and unadulterated examination of the naked wound—although of precisely what variety remains undetermined—becomes itself the moralizing position. Berquin, attacked in Baudelaire's essay on *Les Drames et les romans honnêtes*, is resurrected briefly by Balzac, but only as a straw man to be burnt back down, banished to the annals of forgotten literature.

Chaix d'Est-Ange's defense draws extensively on the *articles justificatifs* submitted by established writers, and it is here perhaps that he first finds his notion of the wound. Barbey, for instance, describes Baudelaire as an atheist Dante, "dans un temps qui n'aura point de saint Thomas" (*ÆC* I 1195);<sup>21</sup> and it is with a somewhat less direct allusion to incredulous Saint Thomas that Asselineau excuses Baudelaire's macabre tone: "On dira que parfois (...) le poète semble se complaire à irriter les plaies où il a glissé la sonde. Mais, à notre tour, prenons garde à ne pas tomber dans l'exagération" (*ÆC* I 1201). For the final contributor to Baudelaire's *articles justificatifs*,<sup>22</sup> Emile Deschamps, this procedure of probing the wound is precisely what constitutes the ethical quality of the *Fleurs*, as argued in a poem addressed to Baudelaire a week before his trial:

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<sup>21</sup> Harpham—discussing Eliot's description of Baudelaire as an "atheist Dante"—designates this comparison as an example of the type of category error that, in his view, constitutes the grotesque: "Certain features of Baudelaire's emerge only when he is seen through Dante's grid; the deliberate deforming of the image is an essential step in the process of reforming it" (15).

<sup>22</sup> Deschamps' contribution was not, in the end, concluded in the packet given by Baudelaire to his judges, but was eventually printed as an addendum to the 1868 edition of the work.

Bien plus, il est des temps, à traîner sur la claie,  
Dont aucun baume, hélas ! ne peut sécher la plaie.  
Il faut donc la sonder à toute profondeur,  
Et, pour seul antidote, étaler sa hideur (Guyaux 252).

Inheriting Asselineau's image, Deschamps renders it more radical. The abstract metaphoricity of the wound as representative of unspecified societal decline metamorphoses within the space of a single line into the chastisement for this selfsame decadence—*traîner sur la claie* denotes a punishment aiming at stigmatization, reserved for the cadavers (or on occasion living bodies) of those who had committed suicide, been vanquished in a duel or sentenced to death for particularly infamous crimes: the corpse of the condemned is bound to a wooden or metal grate and dragged through the city streets. Here the wound is a symptom that poetry can diagnose, and by diagnosing *heal*; however, this healing happens, in Deschamps' account, by way of another brutal injury, with the book viciously torturing its readership.

This gets to the heart of the offense. The passages Pinard chooses to cite all centrally display, flaunt even, images of injury<sup>23</sup>—the vampirism of the final stanza of *Le Lethé*, for example, or the penetrated wound in *À celle qui est trop gaie* (to be discussed at length in a moment). The sole exception might be *Les Bijoux*, but as Yvan Leclerc points out in his chapter on the trial, the poem “se présente comme un blason du corps de la femme dont les parties sont dénombrées et démembrées presque sans image, dans la plus exacte nomenclature anatomique” (232). Back in his amphitheater, Docteur Pinard cites almost the entire second half of the poem,

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<sup>23</sup> The second *Figaro* review following the publication of the *Fleurs du mal*, printed a week after Bourdin's, similarly chooses to cite an instance of injury:

*Moi, mon âme est fêlée, et lorsqu'en ses ennuis  
Elles veut de ses chants peupler l'air froid des nuits,  
Il arrive souvent que sa voix affaiblie  
Semble le râle épais d'un blessé qu'on oublie  
Au bord d'un lac de sang, sous un grand tas de morts,*

*Et qui meurt* SANS BOUGER, DANS D'IMMENSES EFFORTS (4, Haban's italics).

These are the only lines quoted from the book in this review. Thus condemning Baudelaire in his own terms, J. Habans concludes: “Comme c'est vrai, tout cela! et comme je donne raison à M. Baudelaire, lorsqu'il se juge ainsi!” (Guyaux 158). Habans seems to have a particular distaste for blood in Baudelaire's work. Some weeks earlier, in an attack on the nine poems Baudelaire had published in the *Revue française*, Habans cites as particularly offensive the image of the sun “noyé dans son sang qui se fige” (ibid.) without further commentary.

tellingly stopping just short of the final stanza and the fire that “inondait de sang cette peau” (*ŒC* I 158). From *Les Métamorphoses du Vampire*, he draws the lines:

Quand elle eut de mes os sucé toute la moelle,  
Et que languissamment je me tournai vers elle  
Pour lui rendre un baiser d’amour, je ne vis plus  
Qu’une outre aux flancs gluants, toute pleine de pus (*ŒC* I 159).

Marrow being sucked from bone—fellatio figured as an injury—and the female body is reduced entirely to an open wound. But Pinard reads this, perhaps not wrongly, as an illness instead of as a wound—advancing the first syphilitic interpretation of Baudelaire’s poetry: “De bonne foi, croyez-vous qu’on puisse tout dire, tout peindre, tout mettre à nu, pourvu qu’on parle ensuite du dégoût né de la débauche et qu’on décrive les maladies qui la punissent?” (*ŒC* I 1207). Operating instead within a discourse of *disease*, the prosecution can conclude those things that Baudelaire brings to light are, as Bourdin would have it, “incurables” (Guyaux 160); indeed, Pinard’s favorite, oft-repeated adjective for the *Fleurs* is *malsaines*.

Allusions to physical injury occur well over a dozen times in the few documents from the trial that still remain, and yet *plaie* is a word not once employed by Pinard, nor by his coconspirator Bourdin.<sup>24</sup> Here, in this trial, theirs is not a rhetoric of injury, although *blessé aux mœurs* is a far more commonplace expression than its legalese equivalent, *outrage aux mœurs*. The latter, introduced in 1819, was intentionally obscure, conceived—in the words of one contemporary legal authority—in order “de remettre seulement entre les mains de la société (...) une arme pour se défendre précisément sur le point où elle se sentirait blessée” (quoted in Leclerc 20, my emphasis). And Baudelaire’s lawyer, Gustave Chaix d’Est-Ange, himself comes to this conclusion: “Le mot *outrage* a été substitué dans la loi au mot *atteinte* que portait le

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<sup>24</sup> The word does, however, appear in the very first review of the *Fleurs du mal* (or at least the nineteen poems published under this title in the *Revue des deux mondes*) penned by Louis Goudall and preceding the release of the volume as a whole. Seemingly anticipating the line of defense to be chosen by Baudelaire’s advocates, Goudall contends: “Si *Les Fleurs du mal* ont été réellement écrites pour servir de traduction à certaines douleurs morales, j’estime que ces douleurs sont purement imaginaires, car elles n’ont rien de commun avec les grandes plaies intérieures qui dévorent l’homme moderne” (quoted in Guyaux 147).

projet ; on a compris que le mot atteinte avait un sens trop étendu” (*ŒC* I 1214, original emphasis). A language of violence is replaced by an obscure and euphemistic discourse permitting the authorities to accuse at will. Yet, the type of medical metaphors employed by Baudelaire and his defenders was a topos bordering on the cliché in the legal discourse of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France—the legal authority as medical examiner locating the wound and healing it.<sup>25</sup> So why this sudden vagueness in the case of Baudelaire? Why not call a wound a wound?

Perhaps the tables have been turned, the roles reversed. By themselves adopting medical discourse, and the position of the cultural diagnostician, Baudelaire and his colleagues leave Pinard no ground to occupy. In a sense, literature as cultural criticism charges itself with policing public values—and this is *his* domain. Confronted with the affirmation that the wound must be depicted in order to be healed, Pinard can only counter that it is not a wound at all, but instead an incurable illness. (It is in the nature of such broad metaphors: they are dangerously malleable, easily usurped.) In any event, it is both the health of society and the health of the artwork that is at stake in Baudelaire’s trial; and one of the key points of contention between Pinard and Chaix d’Est-Ange regards what one might call the work’s physical integrity. In the same manner that he attempts to diminish the political significance of Baudelaire’s trial by identifying the poet as an anomaly pertaining to no particular school or philosophy, Pinard isolates the poems in question from their context,<sup>26</sup> satisfied if even some are banned in warning to potential readers. Baudelaire’s advocates, however, emphatically insist on the necessity to read the work as a whole in order to understand its edifying nature. To an

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<sup>25</sup> Leclerc notes the prevalence of metaphors of wounding in the legal discourse of the day, although he makes no mention of its relative absence in the case of the prosecution against Baudelaire: “l’image de la blessure revient souvent dans les textes de loi ou les discours judiciaires, l’écrivain écorchant de la plume un corps social sain invité à se défendre, ou pire, dévoilant une blessure antérieure, une plaie vive sur laquelle il met le doigt. On retrouvera souvent ces métaphores médicales et chirurgicales qui semblent réunir, dans un même vaste amphithéâtre embrassant l’hôpital et le prétoire, la littérature du XIX<sup>e</sup> et sa police” (23).

<sup>26</sup> As Leclerc puts it: “Le policier des Lettres découpe la citation, coupe du texte, mutile, retranche. L’image médicale et chirurgicale classe dans un même espace métaphorique l’écrivain, le critique et le magistrat” (113).

extent—informed by a perspective predisposed to look at either injury or illness—the debate becomes whether the offending poems can surgically be excised or if this amputation would, in effect, constitute a wound inflicted on the text.<sup>27</sup>

## 2: *Ni queue ni tête* [1]: Structural Fragmentation as Literary Decadence

In an attempt to recuperate his losses, Baudelaire's editor, Auguste Poulet-Malassis, will push this metaphor further into the literal, actually tearing the offending pages from the already published volume and continuing to sell it in its dismembered form—an action Baudelaire will condemn as a “ridicule opération chirurgicale” (*Correspondance* I 429). As Leclerc points out, it is most likely with this in mind that Baudelaire assembles his collection of *Petits Poèmes en prose*.

In his dedication to his new editor, Arsène Houssaye, Baudelaire writes:

Nous pouvons couper où nous voulons, moi ma rêverie, vous le manuscrit, le lecteur sa lecture; car je ne suspends pas la volonté rétive de celui-ci au fil interminable d'une intrigue superflue. Enlevez une vertèbre, et les deux morceaux de cette tortueuse fantaisie se rejoindront sans peine. Hachez-la en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part. Dans l'espérance que quelques-uns de ces tronçons seront assez vivants pour vous plaire et vous amuser, j'ose vous dédier le serpent tout entier (*ŒC* I 275, discussed by Leclerc 263).

Baudelaire conceives not of a textual body resistant to wounding, but rather one that can integrate the wound into its very architecture. The offensive metaphorical figure secretly lurking in the shadows of all of the banned poems has been transformed by its condemnation into a structural principle: the contagious violence of Baudelairean verse has provoked a counter-violence, exercised against the work itself, which must now be predicted and

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<sup>27</sup> An inescapable historical irony would have it that Louis Goudall's review of 4 November 1855—the very first to attack certain poems contained within the *Fleurs*—begins with a plaintive account of just such textual dismemberment: Goudall apologizes for “la façon déplorable dont a été imprimé notre dernier article (...) Notre page de début se trouvait reléguée à la troisième colonne, si bien que notre *Revue*, ainsi décapitée, n'était pas sans quelque analogie avec ce bon saint Denis portant sa tête sous son bras” (quoted in Guyaux 141).

assimilated into the literary form. Before the printing of the second edition of the *Fleurs* (with thirty-five poems added to replace the six removed) Baudelaire insists that the “seul éloge que je sollicite pour ce livre est qu’on reconnaisse qu’il n’est pas un album et qu’il a un commencement et une fin” (*Correspondance* II 196)—precisely the recognition he was denied in 1857. Having failed in court to win just this verdict, with the collection of prose poems, he will take what (initially) appears to be an opposite strategy, instead ultimately aiming for the volume to have “ni queue ni tête, puisque tout, au contraire y est à la fois tête et queue, alternativement et réciproquement” (*ŒC* I 275).<sup>28</sup>

The lability of these prose poems and the uncertain relation between part and whole become defining architectural traits of what Andreas Huyssen has dubbed the mode of the *modernist miniature*—a tradition whose origins he traces back to Baudelaire himself (30-31). This genre designation is critical, as it will later make it possible to trace a link from Baudelaire’s writing to Kafka’s and from there into the twentieth century and the rest of this dissertation. What is more, the genre of the modernist miniature is fundamentally linked to the considerations on the grotesque above. Focusing on the experience and representation of metropolitan space, Huyssen identifies these miniatures as hieroglyphic “scriptural images” (or “*Schrift-Bilder*”) denied “the promise of linguistic transparency (...) in the complex texture of ekphrasis, metaphor, and abstraction” (31). Huyssen himself implicitly draws the connection to the grotesque when he claims that “[a]t stake with modernist miniatures was a profound transformation of the literary project that crossed the disciplining borderline between language and the visual, between narrative and space, as it was codified in the eighteenth century in G.E. Lessing’s *Laokoon*” (32). Challenging the limits of (visual) representation in language, the

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<sup>28</sup> A.W. Raitt, following Fritz Nies, reads this quotation—as I will in a moment—as one possible hint to interpret the relation between individual poems not only in *Spleen de Paris* but also in the *Fleurs du mal* (159).

miniature is itself a broken body: often, in speaking of the miniature, it becomes apparent that Huyssen in fact is more interested in the *fragment*.

But one need not subscribe to Huyssen's spatially-inflected argument in order to comprehend the relevance of the grotesque, fragmented character of Baudelaire's *poèmes en prose*. Indeed, the importance of fragmentation is apparent even as a structural practice. The construction of the volume is itself grotesque, at least if we follow Bakhtin in his assertion that the grotesque body—like Baudelaire's hacked up, disserved serpent—"is a body in the act of becoming (...) never finished, never completed" and consequently define the grotesque itself as an operation of "build[ing] and creat[ing] another body" (317). One might say of Baudelaire what Huyssen does of Rilke in this context—namely that he "turned to prose because his ability to write poetry seemed to have abandoned him" (28)—but in Huyssen's view this nimble counter-reaction to poetic aphasia is ultimately fortuitous: "The modernist miniature as a specific mode of writing may indeed be more central to the new in literary modernism than the novel or poetry" (29). Incorporating fragmentation into its structure, Baudelaire's writing gives birth to the literary form that might be seen as the very hallmark of modernity.

But the fragmentary flexibility perfected in the prose poems is already nascent in Baudelaire's earlier work. One could look to the Belgian publication of the *Épaves* for instance: ruins and remnants, dismembered vestiges reassembled into a *recueil*, just as an injured starfish regenerates the whole from any single limb. Frustrated with the different drafts of the desired frontispiece for this volume—intended to borrow in part from a 1543 engraving—Baudelaire comes to a startling but indicative conclusion:

Si vous tenez absolument à un frontispice, coupez proprement avec des ciseaux l'image [originelle] et demandez (...) un *fac-similé*, strictement, rien de moins, rien de plus (...) *Ce frontispice n'est plus le nôtre, mais il va au livre d'une façon telle quelle, il a ce privilège de pouvoir s'adapter à n'importe quel livre, puisque toute littérature dérive du péché. —Je parle très sérieusement*" (*Correspondance* II 286, original emphasis).

One could say that Baudelaire's resurrected *épaves* have the same adaptive capacity: cloven from their original context, they still manage to (re)form into a coherent whole. But considering that the poems banned in France were published unrevised, this assertion would imply that they already possessed this quality, even when they were still a part of the *Fleurs*. More radically still, I would like to suggest that, despite appearances, it was in fact this very aspect of Baudelaire's verse that caused it to come onto the chopping block in the first place. Already in 1855, Louis Goudall complains of the initial publication of nineteen poems later to be found in the *Fleurs du mal*: "je m'applique à en pénétrer le sens dans leur ensemble, à trouver l'idée capital qui relie ces diverses pièces l'une à l'autre. J'avoue que j'ai de la peine" (quoted in Guyaux 144). It is unsurprising then that the question of (dis)unity would be central to the trial.

By the authorities the work was received as a collection of miniatures; but beginning with Barbey d'Aurevilly's assertion (most likely at Baudelaire's immediate urging) that "chaque poésie a (...) *une valeur très importante d'ensemble et de situation* qu'il ne faut pas lui faire perdre, en la détachant," indeed, that the volume contains an "*architecture secrète*" (*ŒC* I 1196, original emphasis), there have been any number of studies attempting to demonstrate the narrative progression constituted by the volume as a whole.<sup>29</sup> This tradition, from the poet's legal defense onwards, insists, in the words of James Lawler, that the work has a meaning "beyond

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<sup>29</sup> To give a very limited list, among the most prominent critics attempting to uncover this secret architecture are Albert Feuillerat, Marcel Ruff and finally James Lawler, who characterizes the progression of the various poems as dialectically structured. Which is not to say that there are not also influential critics who ultimately consider the attempt at an overarching architecture—if one is admitted to exist—a kind of failure, among them Claude Pichois and F.W. Leakey as well as, in a somewhat different sense, Leo Bersani, who, speaking psychoanalytically, as always, refers to the Lacanian fragmentation of the volume on the whole. Most recently, and most influentially for the current project, Randolph Paul Runyon attempts to link the ordering of the *Fleurs du mal* to the structure of the collection of prose poems and sees both as structured by a type of Wagnerian *leitmotif* or Lévi-Straussian *bricolage*. I would argue that the necessity for a sort of *readerly bricolage* is equally present: picking up on various motifs and repetitions throughout the volume, and reassembling them into new constellations. It is chiefly this aspect of the *Fleurs du mal* that contributes to their interpretative open-endedness and fuels the controversy surrounding the work in 1857 and afterward.

the meaning of its individual poems (...) it traces a pattern, composes a sequence" (13); and it is this pattern that would lend the collection its edifying aspect and ethical import.<sup>30</sup> It will not be necessary here to go into the specifics of this argument or to advance yet another theory on the ordering of poems in either edition of the *Fleurs*.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the very fact that this debate continues to this day seems to prove that Baudelaire's work both provokes it and offers no hope of resolution; the secret logic behind the relationship between the various poems will likely never be conclusively determined. Instead, my aim is to imply that the uncertain architecture of the *Fleurs*—which sets in motion an inevitable dialogue between the fragmentary miniature and the plenary volume that has had critics, poets and scholars debating the relationship between poem and collection for over a hundred and fifty years—is itself an embodiment of the mix-and-match esthetic philosophy outlined in the prefatory epistle to the prose poems. After all, to borrow Lawler's terminology, if the volume composes a sequence,<sup>32</sup> then each individual poem must also be an entire unit on its own, interpretable in isolation.

Are the authorities then justified in taking ten poems out of context? Or are the *baudelairistes* correct in their assertion that the volume must be read cover to cover? Paradoxically, the answer is and must be: both. We might, along these lines, take Leo Bersani's psychoanalytically inflected claim about the *Fleurs* on a purely structural level: "There is another 'secret architecture in *Les fleurs du mal*, one which both explains the need for and subverts a stabilizing thematic architecture (...) *the poet would invite us to conceive of architectural*

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<sup>30</sup> F.W. Leakey, writing against the "'architectural' fallacy" advanced by Barbey d'Aureville, "though never by Baudelaire himself" (13), opposes yoking together the ordering of poems with the notion of an overarching moral message. Runyon follows suit, reading the ordering of poems structurally and esthetically more than thematically or ethically, although he critiques Leakey for having (wrongly in his view) attributed the conflation between a secret architecture and a moral message to Barbey.

<sup>31</sup> Generally critics discussing the architecture of the volume tend to trace a narrative from birth to death, grouping the poems either thematically or otherwise into sequences or cycles of varying length: Lawler insist that Baudelaire favors groupings of threes and fives, Mario Richter reads the poems in pairs, Runyon in "concatenate" series, anticipating the rhizomatic quality of Kafka's writing to be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>32</sup> Along these lines, Huyssen notes that the cycle of poems has been considered the "seminal" form of literary modernity (32).

*orders as made of movable parts*” (19, emphasis mine). It is precisely this variety of architectural mobility that the current study will observe as a productive decay of narrative, and such nimble narrative arrangement is a defining structural characteristic of the texts to be addressed throughout, most palpably those by Georges Bataille (as is also noted by Bersani), Jean Genet and Hélène Cixous. Moreover, and this point is crucial, it is precisely this procedure, read on a formal level, that makes the Baudelairean œuvre definitively *décadent*. In an influential 1881 essay on Baudelaire, the novelist, poet and literary critic Paul Bourget defines the structural component of literary decadence as just such a decomposition and fragmentation—the formal manifestation of a decadent epistemological paradigm, reflecting a wounded and fragmented understanding of reality:

Un style de décadence est celui où l’unité du livre se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la page, où la page se décompose pour laisser la place à l’indépendance de la phrase, et la phrase pour laisser la place à l’indépendance du mot. Les exemples foisonnent dans la littérature actuelle qui corroborent cette hypothèse et justifient cette analogie (23).

And yet this literary decomposition would not be bothersome if it did not, ultimately, still suggest the wounded whole. After all, even if only certain poems are condemned—as Pinard himself points out—they are not condemned in isolation but rather as a means of marking the entire volume with an appropriate stigma. Alongside offensive content—repugnant wounds for instance—it is in part the paradoxical nature of the relationship between individual poems that constitutes the radical provocation of the *Fleurs du mal*: if, on the whole, the volume develops an overarching allegorical narrative seemingly indicating ethical as well as esthetic import,<sup>33</sup> its status as an assemblage of individual miniatures always and inevitably forces the reader to return to such poems as *À celle qui est trop gaie*, thereby subjecting to ethical scrutiny individual poems which, on these grounds, can only hope to offend.

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<sup>33</sup> Lawler’s attempt to discern the architectural structure of the volume, for instance, focuses—as his title would suggest—on moral dialectic.

In prosecuting the work, Pinard would then be faithfully following a readerly reaction already encoded into the text. To the same degree that Flaubertian free indirect discourse requires a peculiarly active readerly presence, so too does the Baudelairean textual body—a body in becoming, implying links between the limbs but by the same gesture keeping them severed and fragmented—inevitably eschews conclusive (ethical) interpretation, instead announcing itself as always unfinished and thus to a certain degree deformed. And—just as Dominick LaCapra convincingly demonstrates that it is less because of its content (banal adultery) than its form (in part free indirect discourse, which is to say: the absence of an authoritative and sufficiently stern and disapproving narrative voice) that Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* is put on trial—one might intimate that it is this *textual*, structural aspect of Baudelaire’s volume (its architectural hesitation between the fragment and the whole, its provocative re-appropriation of the classical sonnet) as much as its shocking subject matter (including the actual imagery of injury) that marks the work as a rupture—as a productive wound in the side of literary history.

### 3: Injurious Allegory: The Semiotics of the Wound

Ultimately, the perception of the *Fleurs du mal* as a literary wound is not one imposed upon it by the authorities (Baudelaire’s and his defenders’ ostensible surprise notwithstanding) but one that is proposed, performed and problematized by the work itself. Indeed an esthetics of injury is so central to Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal* that it is impossible at points to distinguish between wounds and the titular flowers. A study of wounds in the first edition of the *Fleurs du mal* alone could easily fill volumes, but a single example might suffice. Consider, for instance, *À celle qui est*

*trop gaie*—one of the six poems successfully banned by the authorities, and perhaps one of the most troubling depictions of a wound in literary history. Even before the female body is injured at the conclusion of this poem, it is fragmented by the poetic gaze<sup>34</sup>—but made meaningful in the process:

Ta tête, ton geste, ton air  
Sont beaux comme un beau paysage ;  
Le rire joue en ton visage  
Comme un vent frais dans un ciel clair.

Le passant chagrin que tu frôles  
Est ébloui par la santé  
Qui jaillit comme une clarté  
De tes bras et de tes épaules (*ŒC* I 156).

It is this pseudo-synechdocal dismantling of the body that permits the poem (artificially) to engender meaning. Corporeal (*tête*) and metaphysical (*geste, air*) attributes intermingle from the very first line, which dissolves into what appears to be an intentionally clumsy simile: the rhythmic repetition of the adjective *beau* in the second line seems to mock the codified nature of a rather standard association between the woman's body and a landscape. Subtly, then, Baudelaire emphasizes the *violence* inherent to signification: every aspect of the female form is *compared* to something natural—not strictly metaphorically but through such similes that emphasize the artificial character of this comparison, the poetic instinct that describes a woman's health as radiating “*comme une clarté*” rather than as simply radiant or clear.

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<sup>34</sup> In this respect, the poem is connected to the visual arts insofar as Baudelaire first sent it anonymously to Apollonie Sabatier under the title *À une femme qui est trop gaie*; Sabatier was also the subject of the sculptor Augustse Clésinger's marble *Femme piquée par un serpent*, which can be viewed at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. As Wendy Nolan Joyce notes, Gautier admired this sculpture as the first depiction of what he considered to be the modern woman. More pertinently, the artwork again recalls Lessing's thoughts on Laocoon insofar as it is necessary “to move around the sculpture and take it in as a sequence of fragments” (Nolan 168). As in *Les Bijoux* or *À celle qui est trop gaie* itself, “the female body and its contours are arranged in such a way to prevent a total, encompassing view. Her body is parceled out, and can be experienced only as a progression. From the front one can make out fragments of exposed breast and jutting elbows, but no head. From the back the head is clearly visible, but only thanks to the unnatural overextension of the spine, a distortion which provoked cries of anxiety rather than sighs of desire” (ibid. 180). This simultaneous fragmentation and narrative ordering is, of course, an important aspect of what I am identifying as narrative decadence.

The woman portrayed—apparently inspired the demimondaine Apollonie Sabatier, one of the nineteenth century’s favorite muses—appears to experience the alienation from one’s own body that Walter Benjamin designates as a key symptom of melancholy, and hence of what he calls the allegorical (to be explicated momentarily). Her laugh, personified and active, seems to act *upon* her; she is merely a blank canvas—an impression reinforced by the diction itself, specifically the word *paysage*: is the subject being compared to a natural landscape or rather to a painting thereof? Each body part (head, arms, shoulders) is transformed in turn into an element of signification inasmuch as it becomes the medium of meaning for something else, a *representation* of a natural image, through the written sign: the body has been transformed into a text.

Literally *incorporating* textuality in their depiction, these superfluous similes initiate a chain of signifiers:

Les retentissantes couleurs  
Dont tu parsèmes tes toilettes  
Jettent dans l’esprit des poètes  
L’image d’un ballet de fleurs.

Ces robes folles sont l’emblème  
De ton esprit bariolé ;  
Folle dont je suis affolé,  
Je te hais autant que je t’aime ! (*ŒC* I 156-157).

Sabatier’s “esprit bariolé” is first expressed through “retentissantes couleurs” that express themselves in turn through an *image* of a ballet and finally as flowers. If this manner of making meaning seems to operate on similarity, it also operates on redundancy: a colorful soul represented by loud colors themselves repeated by (presumably) colorful flowers. This redundancy is also evident in the repetition of the word “folle” used to describe both the woman and her clothing: an attribute that appears, moreover, to be contagious inasmuch as the poet is also *affolé* by its effect. Baudelaire himself describes this poetic process as emblematic (“Ces

robes folles sont l’emblème”), which is to say: *not* symbolic, *not* possessing the pretended transcendence of the symbol, *not* naturalized; but rather artificial, deliberate—allegorical.

This exclamatory apostrophe—“Je te hais autant que je t’aime!”—concludes the first half of the poem with its declaration of an antagonistic but simultaneously complicit rapport with an intended reader of sorts: a love-hate relationship that I would like to identify as Baudelaire’s esthetics of injury. I label the female subject here a *reader* not only because Baudelaire’s gesture of having sent an early draft of this poem to Madame Sabatier would seem a tacit dedication, but also because the mistress of the poem will soon—through the wound to be inflicted—become an obvious recipient (read: *victim*) of *text*. The apostrophe above constitutes a central textual breaking point: not only does it divide the poem in two almost exactly, but it also marks the first evocation of the lyric *I*, which commences here in a typically Baudelairean state of *spleen* (“atonie”) before being awakened by a ray of sunlight that is said to *tear* into the poet’s chest:

Quelquefois dans un beau jardin  
Où je traînais mon atonie,  
J’ai senti, comme une ironie,  
Le soleil déchirer mon sein ;

Et le printemps et la verdure  
Ont tant humilié mon cœur,  
Que j’ai puni sur une fleur  
L’insolence de la Nature (*ŒC* I 157).

The violence perpetrated by the sudden sunlight marks a break even in temporal perception as the habitual plurality of the *imparfait* (“Quelquefois [...] je traînais”) is interrupted by the singular experience of the *passé composé* (“J’ai senti”). Moreover, this injurious sunlight is of a particularly literary variety inasmuch as the poet experiences it “comme une ironie”—a rhetorical figure, and doubly so, considering that it is once again expressed via simile. The

ballet of flowers has become an entire garden, and the woman's body has now slipped entirely into the metaphorical, completely becoming a landscape to be ravaged by the poet.

That Baudelaire first avenges himself against a 'flower' before turning his rage toward his mistress is an inescapable indication that the wound about to be inflicted shall be one of the eponymic *fleurs du mal* of the *recueil*—a word that operates a double meaning here as both a collection of poetry and as a harvest (*cueillir* is to pick fruits or flowers):

Ainsi je voudrais, une nuit,  
Quand l'heure des voluptés sonne,  
Vers les trésors de ta personne,  
Comme un lâche, ramper sans bruit,

Pour châtier ta chair joyeuse,  
Pour meurtrir ton sein pardonné,  
Et faire à ton flanc étonné  
Une blessure large et creuse,

Et vertigineuse douceur !  
À travers ces lèvres nouvelles,  
Plus éclatantes et plus belles,  
T'infuser mon venin, ma sœur ! (*ŒC* I 157).

Taking his cue from the sunlight itself ("Ainsi"), the poet—now turned perpetrator—crawls forward ("ramper") on all fours to violate his victim, with the aim of 'spoiling' her pardoned breast. (*Meurtir*, for a fruit, means *to bruise*, but for a person it also carries the connotation of a mortal wound.) On a structural level—*how* meaning is produced as much as the meaning itself—this image of injury at the conclusion of *À celle qui est trop gaie* will set in motion a violent reconfiguration of the sign corresponding to what Walter Benjamin, in his *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (first published in 1928) and his writings on Baudelaire, dubs the "Majestät der allegorischen Intention": the "Zerstörung des Organischen und Lebendigen" (1:2, 670). The mortal wound occupies a paradoxical position as both a return to origins (insofar as it is made comparable by to the vaginal opening) and the doorway to death; this orifice is at the

intersection between life-affirming libidinal urges and the death drive: it is a reinvigoration through destruction.

As Benjamin writes in his final fragments on Baudelaire, the posthumous collection titled *Zentralpark* (1938-1939): “Das Herausreißen der Dinge aus den ihnen geläufigen Zusammenhängen (...) ist ein für Baudelaire ein sehr kennzeichnendes Verfahren. Es hängt mit der Zerstörung der organischen Zusammenhänge in der allegorischen Intention zusammen” (1:2, 670). The vapid and clichéd conceit anticipated with the introduction of the flower is ravaged and deconstructed so that a novel constellation may come into being, producing a new, more meaningful, albeit artificial ‘flower’. The anti-natural, artificial and highly allegorical character of such flowers of evil makes it clear: they are shorthand for the very poems that Baudelaire is writing. The wound in *À celle qui est trop gaie* is thus a mise-en-abyme of the poetic project on the whole: it is a flower within a flower, a poem within a poem. And through this mise-en-abyme the wound at the conclusion of *À celle qui est trop gaie* is twice allegorized: both as a flower and as *text*.

Both a rhetorical method and an attitude toward the world—an epistemological disposition, a means of perception or interpretation—the allegorical in Benjamin is simultaneously productive (insofar as it seeks to signify) and destructive (insofar as it is a demythifying process opposed to the desired unity of the Romanticist symbol). Attempting to advocate and rehabilitate the allegorical mode, Benjamin is in part seeking to resurrect an esthetics of brokenness in the Baroque and in Baudelaire—not dissimilar to what I have referred to here alternatively as the ugly or the grotesque—against what Naomi Stead, in this same context, has called “the hegemony of beauty in aesthetics, an ascendancy exemplified in the aesthetic symbol” (55). The destructive aspect of allegory—what Bainard Cowan characterizes as “an intimation of mortality” (110)—is critical both to Benjamin’s own use of

concept and to those scholars who have sought to apply it to Baudelaire,<sup>35</sup> among them (and most recently) Antoine Compagnon, who insists that “[t]outes les explications de Baudelaire par l’allégorie dissimulent une figure toujours présente : celle de la discontinuité ou de la caesure interne, de la disproportion” (157). On the level of a single image, then, allegory (in Benjamin’s idiosyncratic use of the term) might operate the same type of fragmentation and disfiguration that I have noted in the assemblage of the volume as a whole.

This same dynamic of deconstruction-reconfiguration characterizes Baudelaire’s position in literary history. As Jean Pommier notes (188), Baudelaire inherits the abhorrent image at the end of *À celle qui est trop gaie* in part from his friend Théophile Gautier, to whom the *Fleurs du mal* are dedicated. In Gautier’s *Comédie de la Mort*, as in the early Baudelairean poem (“Je n’ai pas pour maîtresse...”) examined above, the loss of virginity is brought into close constellation with the wounds of Christ:

Quel amant a jamais, à l’âge où l’œil reluit,  
Dans tout l’enivrement de la première nuit,  
Poussé plus de soupirs profonds et pleins de flamme,  
Et baisé les pieds nus de la plus belle femme  
Avec la même ardeur que vous les pieds de bois  
Du cadavre insensible allongé sur la croix !  
Quelle bouche fleurie et d’ambroisie humide,  
Vaudrait la bouche ouverte à son côté livide ! (76)

Religious devotion to the image of the crucifixion initially takes precedence over erotic desire, but in the end the terms are reversed as even Christ’s wound becomes a “bouche ouverte” waiting to receive an ardent kiss. Gautier’s wound is already the locus of an unsteady allegorical relation inasmuch as it is impossible definitively to determine whether the sexual valence is employed as extended metaphor for the religious or vice versa. As I noted earlier

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<sup>35</sup> Beginning with Benjamin’s cryptic concept of allegory as both a rhetorical and an experiential mode central to modernity, there have been a number of studies exploring the concept in Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du mal*—the most important being Hans Robert Jaub’s reading of *Spleen II*, Paul de Man’s response to that essay in his chapter “Reading and History” (54-72, esp. 65-70), Patrick Labarthe’s *Baudelaire et la tradition de l’allégorie* and most recently Antoine Compagnon’s final chapter on allegory in his *Baudelaire devant l’innombrable*.

with regard to Baudelaire's treatment of *la petite vérole*, signifier and signified are so thoroughly exchangeable that the reader begins to be abandoned in a world of signs<sup>36</sup> with no ultimate connection to an anticipated extratextual meaning.

As I will observe throughout the present dissertation, the wound qua writing often has this character: the pretended transcendence of sterile structures of signification through the visceral intrusion of the corporal in fact ultimately highlights the hermetic *textuality* of text, its status as artifice and its self-referentiality. This is the perhaps unintended result of Gautier's attempt entirely to uproot the most established and strictly codified of representational traditions—stigmata—reinvigorating it, allowing it to take new life and create new meaning. Such re-allegorization of the worn-out tropes of the religious is precisely what Baudelaire envisions in his cultivation of the flowers of Evil (writ large) and precisely what constitutes the provocation of his poetry both on the level of content (willful blasphemy, even if as moral counter-example) and formal functioning. As Nicolae Babut points out, the religious overtones of Baudelaire's *À celle qui est trop gaie* endow the mistress's "body with a sacred attribute. She is forgiven or freed from the original sin" (70). It is indeed a decadent literary philosophy reposing on renewed transgression, but nevertheless a moralizing one, insofar as this transgression aims ultimately at a new sort of salvation. What is more: the infliction of injury is the very procedure by which the initial *ennui* of the first line is conquered and by which meaning can once again be produced—the explicit aim of the Baudelaire's poetic (and perhaps political) project, as laid out in his prefatory *Au Lecteur*, where he enlists his reader in a combat

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<sup>36</sup> Here we are free to pick our favorite theoretical flavor and call this Benjaminian allegory, the Lacanian Symbolic order or even Derridean *archi-écriture*. In this constellation, I partly follow Bainard Cowan in his admirable explication of Benjamin's notoriously difficult notion of allegory. Cowan writes that, for Benjamin, the form that the allegorical experience takes is "fragmentary and enigmatic; in it the world ceases to be purely physical and becomes an aggregation of signs" (110). Cowan himself compares this to grammatology and specifically to the notion of *archi-écriture* (112). This view is also in line with Paul de Man's (at times more Derridean than Benjaminian) reading of allegory in Baudelaire: "L'allégorie nomme le processus rhétorique par lequel le texte littéraire se déplace d'une direction phénoménale, orientée vers le monde, à une direction grammaticale, orientée vers le langage" (68).

against violent and (as Ross Chambers argues in an essay on the poem) even ‘despotic’ *Ennui*. That the wound of *À Celle qui est trop gaie* is addressed to *ma sœur*, moreover, recalls the “Hypocrite lecteur,—mon semblable,—mon frère” (*ÆC* I 6) from this first poem, definitively recasting that dedication in terms of an intended injury: read within this context, the book’s aim would be to *wound* its reader.

The primary impulse of the poem, in Babut’s view, “may be to communicate the venom, whether syphilis or spleen or melancholy (...) in the hope perhaps that, if it works, she [the mistress] will then truly become his sister, in both the spiritual and physical senses” (71). But if the wound-flower association established by this poem can be taken as indicative of a larger literary strategy—with the eroticized injury representing the artwork itself—this desire for ‘communication’ carries with it more significant implications for the *pacte de lecteur* established between Baudelaire and his audience. The mistress becomes sister only via one of the most appalling poetic images imaginable—her body being endued with a new (and ‘more beautiful’) orifice which becomes the new site of sexual desire and penetration.

It is through the wound in *À celle qui est trop gaie* that the poet not only comes into contact with the Other, but—more acutely—with the sibling who, consanguineous, already maintains the unique status of simultaneously being both self and other. Through the proximity of the two dedications to the *Fleurs*—the first (addressed to Gautier) paratextual and the second (*Au Lecteur*) liminally inscribed both within and outside of the volume itself—Gautier too becomes the hypocrite reader, double and *brother* to the poet. Thus Baudelaire establishes a relationship of kinship and complicity with his audience, but one by no means free of violence—it is founded, rather, on what Herschel Farbman has aptly identified as “fratricidal bloodlust” (1163).

This sadomasochistic relation to the reader is precisely the mark of the modern in Baudelaire's verse. As Jérôme Thélot intimates, in Baudelaire, "autri est menacé par le poème (...) il y a de la violence dans le poème, comme il y a de la violence dans le langage. C'est à cause de la violence dont les mots sont porteurs que la nécessité et la légitimité de la poésie sont sujettes à caution" (14). A violent readerly comportment is then also programmed into the poetry insofar as Baudelaire's verse establishes a reciprocally antagonistic relationship with its reader, thereby *provoking* the legal violence (or in any event: the moral indignation) to which it is inevitably subjected. Self-pitying cries of *malentendu* aside, it is not a matter of chance that Pinard chooses Baudelaire (or Flaubert) to pick on: this is the readerly reaction set in motion by a particular mode of writing, by an *aesthetics of injury*.

Baudelaire is not alone on trial; he brings his intended reader to the stand with him.<sup>37</sup> What is at stake is not merely conflicting interpretative strategies—questions of how to *read* literature—but conflicting esthetic sensibilities. Pinard has not *misread* Baudelaire; in fact, he understood the significance of this revolutionary work with an impressive astuteness. To borrow a metaphor from Baudelaire's defense: Pinard has put his finger directly in the wound. Examining a literary corpus injured by Baudelaire's *oeuvre*, French authorities attempt to amputate the most malignant pieces, but Baudelaire remains a step ahead as a response to the

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<sup>37</sup> This is accomplished in part through Baudelaire's ability to be lewdly suggestive without always being entirely explicit. Paul de Man, for instance, speaks of "the potential violence of the signifier," noting that Baudelaire "does not threaten us, or himself, directly, and by keeping the menace wrapped up, as it were, within a play of language, he does not actually draw blood. He seems to stop in time, to fence with a foil—for how could anyone be hurt by a mere rhyme?" (66). Gesturing at an escape from text, at a violence it refuses to deliver, the wound as semiotic system confers this project onto its reader, making its audience responsible for and complicit in this violence. Playing with established—indeed one might say *emblematic*—structures, such reinvented religious images make their reader responsible for recognizing the violence implied. Surprisingly, then, and against what might be our initial intuition, it is not the pretended physicality of the wound (the brutal reference to the body) that is so disturbing, but instead the fact that this reference remains mere word play: "because it is a verbal thrust and not an actual blow, allows itself to be taken figurally but, in so doing, opens up the way to the performance of what it only seems to feign or prefigure (...) only after we have (...) noticed and recognized it as such, does the actual threat inherent in the fiction (...) become manifest" (de Man 66). Which is to say: because it suggests a literality that its own strict metaphoricality can only hint at, the poem makes the reader complicit in the violence we are asked to imagine. These are the ethical implications of an *aesthetics of injury*; I will return to this question of readerly complicity in imag(in)ed violence in my final chapter—particularly in my examination of the cinema of Michael Haneke.

audience's antagonism is also inscribed within the text—as is reflected by the increasingly labile presentation of these modernist miniatures.

It speaks, perhaps, to the success of this strategy that it does not take long for the process of rehabilitation to begin. Already by 1864—seemingly without any sense of irony—Baudelaire's original accuser, Gustave Bourdin, will himself enthusiastically present portions of the poet's *Spleen de Paris* in the very same journal, *Le Figaro*, where he printed his condemnation of the *Fleurs du Mal*. And as Jacques Hamlin, among others, points out, with the documents from the original trial consumed by fire during the days of the Commune, the restitution of the *Fleurs du mal* are based not on a rereading of the trial but rather on a rereading of the book itself: “la notion d'outrage aux bonnes mœurs se transforme (...) curieusement en une notion d'outrage à l'opinion littéraire et artistique. Les magistrats semblent appelés moins à faire application de textes juridiques qu'à tenir compte des faveurs esthétiques” (21). By 1949, then, these pieces are rehabilitated not on legal but on esthetic grounds; even more remarkably, the offensive nature of these poems is now recognized by the legal authorities as the very indicator of their esthetic import, as the attorney responsible for the appeal summarizes:

Nous pouvons proclamer aujourd'hui que les poèmes ne dépassaient pas en leur forme expressive les libertés permises à un poète de génie; qu'au fond, loin d'outrager la morale, ils étaient d'inspiration probe et comportait sous leur apparente audace la leçon qui se dégage d'une âme inquiète et d'un esprit tourmenté, qu'enfin certains d'entre eux, devenus immortels, ont pris définitivement place parmi les plus beaux morceaux de la langue française et les chefs-d'œuvre poétiques de tous les temps (quoted in Hamelin 30-31).

Thus these poems regain their rightful place in the *Fleurs* and Baudelaire, regretted by his new attorney as a “grand artiste ulcéré” (ibid., 32), is posthumously cleared of any charges of wrongdoing. But these once-maligned, now-lauded poems are perhaps still not universally

considered essential to the overall health of the work, considering that many editions of the *Fleurs* still publish the *Épaves* separately—or not at all.<sup>38</sup>

The current dissertation will examine this evolving sensibility and the heritage (both indirect and at times explicit) of Baudelaire's esthetics of injury—this peculiar form of decadence—in twentieth-century literature. In what became for his contemporaries the emblematic poem of the Baudelairean esthetic<sup>39</sup>—*Une Charogne*—Baudelaire himself appears to ponder the legacy of his work, contrasting the ostensible permanency of his writing to eroticized decay:

Alors, ô ma beauté! dites à la vermine  
Qui vous mangera de baisers,  
Que j'ai gardé la forme et l'essence divine  
De mes amours décomposés ! (60)

Similarly, in the final line of Baudelaire's *Remords posthume*, the vermin writ(h)ing inside the wounded corpse will themselves become a figure of authorship, as *vers de terre* metamorphose into *vers de poésie*: “—Et le ver rongera ta peau comme un remords” (63). (Baudelaire is playing on the etymological intimacy of the word *remords* and the biting—*mordre* means to bite—of the worms devouring the deceased.) Yet here again it becomes unclear if the wound—Baudelaire's carcass is itself little more than a blooming wound—is a productive figure of artistic potency or an image of decay.

The eponymic corpse of *Une Charogne* is itself another flower of evil: “Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe / Comme une fleur s'épanouir” (59). But again signifier and signified seem to swap places: are earthworms being allegorized as authors or are lines of poetry being

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<sup>38</sup> Leclerc, for instance, closes his chapter on Baudelaire with an anecdote regarding the “texte intégral” endorsed by the Académie Goncourt, which contains no portion (and no mention) of the censored poems.

<sup>39</sup> Baudelaire's role as the “roi des charognes” is discussed by Guyaux, who notes that “[t]oute une tradition fait (...) d'*Une Charogne* la figure de proue de l'esthétique baudelairienne” (49) and later conjectures that if “Baudelaire a lui-même insisté sur l'unité de son recueil, s'il a ressenti la censure de six poèmes comme une dépossession, c'est qu'il a vu se construire la lecture sélective des *Fleurs du mal*. La fixation sur *Une Charogne* en est le meilleur exemple, le poème le plus sévèrement critiqué, et le plus imité” (85).

allegorized as earthworms? Is the corpse being rendered as a flower or are Baudelaire's *Fleurs* themselves being cast as corpses, as images of rot, of decadence? In Benjamin's description of allegory, the process of becoming significant is also a process of unbecoming, and the *memento mori* is the most emblematic (self-reflective) representation of this allegorical operation: "die Allegorisierung (...) kann nur an der Leiche sich energisch durchsetzen" (I:1, 391). As an allegorical figure in this sense, the wound attempts to signify productively through an act of (self-)destruction and decay. The chapters to come will examine the consequences and the sustainability of such a procedure, both as an authorial technique and as a manner of reading (the world)—as modernity's own injurious mode of esthetic experience.

Chapter 2  
**“Sinnbild der Wunde”:**  
The Ambivalent Estheticism of Franz Kafka’s *Ein Landarzt* (1917)

“Aber es tut gut,” writes a youthful Franz Kafka in a letter to a friend, “wenn das Gewissen breite Wunden bekommt, denn dadurch wird es empfindlicher für jeden Biss. Ich glaube, man sollte überhaupt nur solche Bücher lesen, die einen beißen und stechen. Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch?” (*Briefe 1900–1912*, 36). Already in 1904, almost a full decade before ever publishing a word, the already aspiring author has proclaimed a kind of literary violence to come: good writing, contends Kafka, should work to wound its audience, as it is only with the aim of being wounded that one should read at all. As a reader, he insists, one must seek those books that bite and stab. The purpose of literature, it appears, is the infliction of pain; and the sensation of this suffering is also its own *raison d’être*: the enhancement of our sensitivity to every bite.

This is Kafka’s brutal reinscription of an old estheticist tautology: *l’art pour l’art* has been transformed into an injury purely for the sake of injury. This early letter can be understood as a miniature literary manifesto; and it will, for this reason, be the guiding thread that ties together the current chapter. In it the author espouses both an artistic method and a manner of interpretation—heralding, like Baudelaire before him, the inauguration of a new era of esthetic sensibility: one for which this capacity to leave deep wounds constitutes the key criterion of literary success. And while Kafka as a reader is sharpening his nerves, Kafka-qu-author is sharpening his knives. If the experience of reading he prescribes is a painful one, implicitly he also advocates an authorial technique that would operate injuriously to awaken its

reader with a blow to the head. Plainly put, he designates the *wound* as the ideal model for the variety of readerly reception he desires to provoke—or rather, to *inflict*.

In the pages to come my aim is fourfold: (1) to establish the wound as a precariously aestheticist textual figure promising a transcendence ultimately subverted by its very *textuality*; (2) to demonstrate the ontological aspect of this aestheticism by sketching the *semiotics* of this figure as a literalization of the metaphorical; (3) to demonstrate how it structures the *narrative* of the work around its own inescapably recursive logic of deconstruction-reconfiguration; and (4) to explore the (historical) implications of this logic on narrative form, on *genre*, more generally. The wound, in Kafka's work, is more than a mere metaphor: paralleling textual dismemberment, on a formal level it is the site of both a breakdown of meaning and of its possible reconstitution; the present study builds on two recent articles—namely, Stefani Engelstein's and Gaili Shahar's comparisons of wounds in Kafka and Kleist (published in 2006 and 2007 respectively)—to explore narrative fragmentation as the structural corollary to wounding and a key source of beauty in Kafka's work.<sup>1</sup> Like the mutilated bodies represented therein, Kafka's texts can be said to be *grotesque* in the sense established in the previous chapter: they morph and change continuously but never seem to take their final shape. My considerations on Kafka therefore conclude with an investigation into status of the (modernist) miniature discussed previously in order to expose and explore the heritage of the Baudelairean prose poem for the apparently fragmentary narratives typical of the later author.

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<sup>1</sup> Although surprisingly similar in subject, the two essays nevertheless have a slightly different focus. Shahar's study concentrates on the textual 'fragment' (anecdotes, *Erzählungen*, epistles, etc.) as the literary equivalent for the wounded bodies it depicts. Engelstein more explicitly reads the direct intertext between Kafka's *Landarzt* and Kleist's *Michael Kohlhaas*, hoping to refocus interpretations of the former onto questions of *beauty*, which for her (as for Kafka) is only made possible through the wound: "This probing of fissures in the body, in the text, and between texts to find beauty in the interstices opens a corresponding space for internal reflection within the reader, a breach that, if healed, would bar the aesthetic experience. The beauty that emerges from the wounding encounter between reader and text, and through to multiple and proliferating texts (...) does not imply cohesion or promise conformity, but issues a demand for endless confrontation and interpretation" (354). Shahar is also the author of *קפקא של הפצע* (*Kafka's Wound*, 2008), which unfortunately remains untranslated.

While a mere inventory of the injuries in the author's writings could fill a chapter,<sup>2</sup> here I focus primarily on what Shahar has called "Kafka's most perfect wound" (460): the abhorrent lesion in *Ein Landarzt*—an *Erzählung* from the collection of the same name, first printed in 1918 and composed the year previous. Written in the first person, Kafka's short text (fewer than ten pages in most editions) recounts the nocturnal journey of a country doctor to a distant village where he has been called to the care of a young boy. Initially concluding that the patient is in almost perfect health, the doctor prepares to leave but is instead detained by the boy's sister, "ein schwer blutiges Handtuch schwenkend" (*Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 257-58). Looking once again, he discovers that the boy, indeed, is ill—and in his side there is an open wound.

One of the most frequently interpreted images in the entirety of Kafka's writing, this shocking injury is depicted, as Henry Sussman has remarked, with "an intensity of narrative description rare in the author's work" (190):

In seiner rechten Seite, in der Hüftengegend hat sich eine handtellergroße Wunde aufgetan. Rosa, in vielen Schattierungen, dunkel in der Tiefe, hellwerdend zu den Rändern, zartkörnig, mit ungleichmäßig sich aufsammlendem Blut, offen wie ein Bergwerk obertags. So aus der Entfernung (*Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, 258).

The pink chiaroscuro of the injury—the almost artistic ornamentation of its gradient shadings and uneven bleeding—initially appears to be the very essence of legibility, as open as a mining pit. But the initial impression begins immediately to unravel. Like a mine, the wound as well conceals great depths:

In der Nähe zeigt sich noch eine Erschwerung. Wer kann das ansehen ohne leise zu pfeifen? Würmer, an Stärke und Länge meinem kleinen Finger gleich, rosig aus eigenem und außerdem blutbespritzt, winden sich, im Innern der Wunde festgehalten, mit weißen Köpfchen, mit vielen Beinchen ans Licht. Armer Junge, dir ist nicht zu helfen. Ich habe deine große Wunde aufgefunden; an dieser Blume in deiner Seite gehst du zugrunde (*DzL*, 258).

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<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the wound in Kafka has already been the subject of a certain number of studies. Worthy of mention are Bluma Goldstein, Winfried Menninghaus (who dedicates a significant portion of his study on disgust to the topic of injury in Kafka, 427-71), as well as Engelstein and Shahar. There is also a great wealth of secondary literature on the wound in *Ein Landarzt* specifically, which will be discussed further on.

Greeted with a whistle of esthetic appreciation—a puckering of the lips, as if the preparation for a kiss—the abhorrent gash requires ceaseless reinspection. As Hans Hiebel has it, in his book on Kafka’s *Landarzt*, the wound paradoxically appears to be “unerklärlich’ und symbolisch zugleich” (70). Endlessly interpretable<sup>3</sup> and yet never definitively so, it is to my mind not only representative of Kafka’s literary approach, it is in fact emblematic of his singular brand of allegory.

The great challenge in writing on Kafka resides not only in this allegorical supersaturation with which the writer endues such figures but also in the already overabundant literature on the author and on this wound specifically. The current study is conceptually of a piece with trends in the Kafka scholarship of recent decades, and here I follow, in part, Mark Anderson’s established example in his still-influential *Kafka’s Clothes: Ornament and Aestheticism in the Hapsburg Fin-de-Siècle* (1992). This much acclaimed monograph was perhaps the first study to take a truly cultural-historical approach to Kafka, reconciling the author with the contemporary context of fin-de-siècle decadence, estheticism and *Jugendstil* ornamentation. Tracing Kafka’s oscillating relationship to estheticism over the course of his career—from the early ornamental miniatures into the pared down prose of such later texts as *In der Strafkolonie* (1914), which he reveals to be self-critical in regard to the estheticist impulse—Anderson succeeds in situating Kafka within a “Franco-German cultural axis” including Baudelaire and

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<sup>3</sup> Hiebel alone, in an enlighteningly detailed, even fastidious monograph on the short story, provides a catalogue of (some of) its potential signifieds, including the author’s own *Lungenwunde*; the trauma of the First World War; a sign of original sin; Freudian castration anxiety; psychic illness; the artwork itself; and any number of intertextual referents ranging from the wounds of Christ to Chrétien’s de Troyes’, Wolfram von Eschenbach’s or Richard Wagner’s *Parzifal* to what is likely the most direct literary predecessor, Gustave Flaubert’s *Légende de Saint-Julien l’Hospitalier*. The wound has been, as Hiebel notes, read as an *Existenzwunde* (P.K. Kurz), a *Lebenswunde* (Rösch) and a *Todeswunde* (G. Kurz) all at once (all cited in Hiebel, 22). The *Landarzt*-wound has been so thoroughly over-read, it would appear, that in his comments on it in his recent chapter on disgust in Kafka, Menninghaus declines even to address any of the extensive scholarship directly, instead merely acknowledging in a single footnote that many of the details of his reading “sind bereits in anderen Kontexten erwogen worden. Ohne jeden Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit verweise ich hier nur auf die in der Bibliographie ausgewiesenen Arbeiten von Cohn, Goldstein, Hiebel, Kurz, Marson, Rösch und Sokel” (453).

Benjamin (23), allowing us to consider the apparent outlier from Prague as an important part of the literary-historical narrative sketched by the present dissertation.

The current chapter supplements Anderson's interpretation of *In der Strafkolonie* by revealing its concerns and structures to be part of a broader esthetics of injury in Kafka's work. It then expands this argument to the somewhat later text, *Ein Landarzt*, which further complicates the author's attitude toward the potential perils of estheticism and literary decadence—parodying their strategies while nonetheless perpetuating them. While Anderson is rightly praised for his revolutionary approach to Kafka's estheticism, his take on the author *is*—initial appearances aside—in keeping with at least one important earlier account; for Deleuze and Guattari, as well, already in their 1975 book on Kafka, it is a similar trajectory that propels the author's “antilyrisme” and “anti-esthétisme”:

Les impressions esthétiques, sensations ou imaginations, existent encore pour elles-mêmes dans les premiers essais de Kafka (...) Mais toute l'évolution de Kafka consiste à les effacer, au profit d'une sobriété, d'un hyper-réalisme, d'un machinisme qui ne passent plus par elle : 'Empoigner le monde' au lieu d'en extraire des impressions, travailler dans les objets, les personnes et les événements, à même le réel, et non dans les impressions. Tuer la métaphore (127, original emphasis).

For Deleuze and Guattari it is, in part, this murderous comportment toward metaphor that gives Kafka's texts their rhizomatic—and thus inherently socio-political—quality;<sup>4</sup> reading against the grain, I intend to demonstrate that the death of metaphor they so aptly diagnose is itself a symptom of a new estheticism: what I am calling Kafka's esthetics of injury.

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<sup>4</sup> Anderson understands Kafka's work as a constant alternation and productive tension between estheticism and anti-estheticism; but for Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's move toward mannerism (143-4) is of a piece with an esthetic and social strategy of flattening: a generalized rhizomatics. Nonetheless, one important incarnation of this horizontal, anti-hierarchical sociality—the Kafkan *artiste par excellence*—is, for Deleuze and Guattari, none other than the solitary *promeneur* (130): a vestige, I would argue, of the decadent *flâneur*. After a few twists and turns, Kafkan anti-estheticism has seemingly returned to its roots in the Baudelairean *poète maudit*.

## 1: Textuality: Esthetic(ist) Injury

The first instance of injury in Kafka's *Landarzt* is both sexualized and textualized. Called to his patient's bedside in the night, the unnamed narrator (the titular country doctor) unwillingly leaves behind his servant, Rosa, with a mysterious stranger who has brutally bitten her and who is threatening much graver injuries. This bite in Rosa's cheek, recalling Kafka's books that bite, is both a violation of the female body and a *textual* crime insofar as the wound is literally inscribed into—in fact even *printed* onto—Rosa's flesh, if we note the near-identity of *drücken* and *drucken*: “rot eingedrückt sind zwei Zahnreihen in des Mädchens Wange” (*DzL*, 254). It is clear from the outset of this tale that *wounds* will be analogous to *text*. But if Kafka's 1904 letter suggests that a book act like a wound, here the literary wound itself behaves much like a printed book; with the direction of the meaning now reversed, the distinction between signifier and signified begins to blur.

An association between injury and writing is hardly unique to this one story, however. Indeed, it is almost omnipresent in Kafka's work—and most manifestly in his *In der Strafkolonie*, where the injury inflicted is, quite literally, *text* inscribed into the skin of the condemned by Kafka's terrifying writing machine. “The powerful text *penetrates* the reader,” concludes Clayton Koelb in his seminal analysis of this novella, “There is a theory of reading implied here wherein the reader does not act upon the text, but rather *submits*” (513, original emphasis). In essence, he understands the novella as an example of Kafka's wounding literature, although he does not draw the parallel to the letter from 1904. Kafka, throughout his writing, idealizes such violent textual contact, such wounds, as the promise for a visceral, transcendent encounter between self and other—akin to what Bataille will later call *communication*—but this possibility is revoked

by the same gesture: itself a text, the very essence of textuality, the literary wound cannot grant access to the real, cannot transcend the artwork.

*In der Strafkolonie* is primarily a dialogue between an officer of the penal colony, the last remaining champion of the old order of the previous commandant, and a foreign visitor. Throughout the novella, the officer desperately attempts to persuade the visitor as to the merits of his machine, eventually executing himself by way of illustration. Like the rows of teeth in Rosa's cheek, the text left by this torture device also appears in parallel lines, as the officer explains while complaining of a faulty sprocket in the inscriber (here also a kind of tooth, a "Zahnrad im Zeichner" [*DzL*, 207, my emphasis]<sup>5</sup>): "Die Nadeln sind eggenartig angeordnet, auch wird das Ganze wie eine Egge geführt, wenn auch bloß auf einem Platz und viel kunstgemäßer" (*DzL*, 207). With the prisoner laid like paper on the bed beneath this harrow, Kafka's apparatus resembles an early printing press.

This particular inscription is a literary device meant to engender a corporeal comprehension of an arcane writing pronouncing judgment on its very audience. But if the condemned man of the penal colony (and later, more importantly, the officer himself) is at once medium and audience within this fantasy—"an artist who has become his own artwork," as Anderson would have it (175)—he is not the *only* audience. "*Wie* nahmen *wir* alle den Ausdruck der Verklärung von dem gemarterten Gesicht," exclaims the faithful officer, the author of this bloody text, "*wie* hielten *wir* unsere Wangen in den Schein dieser endlich erreichten und schon vergehenden Gerechtigkeit!" (*DzL*, 226, my emphasis). The twice-repeated exclamatory *how*

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<sup>5</sup> Such 'toothed' sprockets also appear in Kafka's office writings as a potential source of injury. In a report on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt* where the author was employed, it is noted, "daß zahlreiche Unfälle dadurch herbeigeführt wurden, daß bei *Zahnradern* einzelner Arbeitsmaschinen (...) die gebotenen Schutzvorrichtungen ungenügend waren oder gänzlich fehlten" (*Amtliche Schriften*, 458, my emphasis).

[*wie*] implicitly approximates a figure of comparison (“*wie* [...] *wir*”) by which the victim’s experience is communicated to his observers: he speaks to his audience through his wounds. Furthermore, the mirroring of the martyred face and the observers’ cheeks—as well as this repeated proximity of this *wie* and *wir*—again recalls Kafka’s familiar description of his books that bite.

“*Wir* brauchen,” continues Kafka in the very next sentence of the letter quoted at the outset of this chapter, “die Bücher die auf uns wirken *wie* ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, *wie* der Tod eines, den *wir* lieber hatten als uns, *wie* wenn *wir* in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, *wie* ein Selbstmord” (*B 1900–1912*, 36, my emphasis). While this might appear to imply immediacy—the appropriation of the raw physicality of the wound as a model for esthetic experience—its expression is instead repeatedly mediated both by a strangely extended series of similes (recalling Baudelaire’s) and by the notion that this pain is meant to be experienced by proxy. This dynamic also determines the reader’s rapport vis-à-vis the book: as the site of an injurious inscription, the reader himself will also be textualized, will also *become text*. Rather than being absorbed merely in a plot, as readers we are made the subject of this drama, incorporated into the text’s structure. Rendered hypothetical by the near-identity and insistent proximity of this *wie* and *wir*, the reader, too, has been estheticized and transformed into text. The book has not so much escaped its own textuality to wound its audience as it has drawn us into the wound of art. Like the officer’s final performance in the *Strafkolonie*, at stake in this esthetic ‘suicide’ is a peculiar subjectivity, the vicarious self-murder that has happened to another—a stranger who is closer even than ourselves.

The injurious textual model fails, however, in the *Strafkolonie*. If the wounding, biting, that communicates the crime of the condemned is indeed a kind of print, as the officer insists, it is an artful and an ornamental one—which is to say that it is thoroughly estheticist: “Es müssen

also viele, viele Zieraten die eigentliche Schrift umgeben; die wirkliche Schrift umzieht den Leib nur in einem schmalen Gürtel; der übrige Körper ist für Verzierungen bestimmt" (*DzL*, 218). The esthetic component of the text (its ornate decoration) takes precedence over its ethical content (the judgment it communicates), and in a problematic way—indeed, much to the detriment of the writing's semantic component. While ostensibly intended as an edifying inscription, the privileging of form over content will strip the hollow verdict of its moral force.

Here I follow Anderson's example, and Margot Norris's before him, in regrouping the text with Kafka's late works on performance (*Ein Hungerkünstler* [1922] or *Josephine* [1924]) rather than with the somewhat earlier works on justice and punishment fantasies (*Das Urteil* [1912], *Der Proceß* [1914-1915]). As Anderson puts it, the

emphasis on the Law has meant that the condemned man in Kafka's text is understood primarily as a criminal, similar to the 'guilty' Georg Bendemann and Josef K., rather than as (...) akin to the performing artists of his last works (...) A blind spot in such interpretations is their emphasis on the written judgment inscribed into the prisoner's skin and the corresponding failure to account for the other corporeal marks, namely, the ornamental arabesques or 'Verzierungen' covering the entire body (...) Allegorical readings focus on the script, the legible markings, thus failing to account for or even mention the purely decorative, abstract, aesthetic context of the judgment, the 'embellishments' or 'Verzierungen' (175).

"Es ist sehr kunstvoll" concludes the visitor to the penal colony when presented with this arabesque script, "aber ich kann es nicht entziffern" (*DzL*, 217). With the distraction of these ornaments and embellishments, one can only understand the text through corporeal suffering: "es ist nicht leicht," responds the officer a few pages later, "die Schrift mit den Augen zu entziffern; unser Mann entziffert sie aber mit seinen Wunden" (*DzL*, 219-20). It is evident that Kafka deliberately stylizes the wounds within his texts to appropriate literary form and generate literary affect.

"The machine," writes Arnold Weinstein of this work, "is indeed intolerable in its flagrant violation of the body, but it functions as a sublime symbol of Kafka's—and all artists'—

aspirations: to read his work is to be penetrated by it; his words are inscribed in our flesh” (129). And although this account indeed agrees with Kafka’s own idealized aspiration for the kind of books that stab and leave deep wounds, this desire for an immediate and transcendent experience of the artwork is ultimately disappointed—“kein Zeichnen der versprochenen Erlösung war zu entdecken” (*DzL*, 245), concedes the narrator, describing the visage of the deceased. Here the author slips into free indirect discourse, making it effectively impossible to determine whether the judgment to be pronounced is the traveler’s opinion or the perspective of the unidentified narrative voice: “das war ja keine Folter, wie sie der Offizier erreichen wollte, das war unmittelbarer Mord” (195). It is precisely this *Mittelbarkeit*—and with it *Mitteilbarkeit*, the capacity for communication—that is at issue here. In the penal colony, a judgment is first written onto paper, with its ornaments and embellishments, and then transferred to the body to inflict an experience meant as much for the onlookers as for the victim himself—it is a constant movement of mediation. Paradoxically, then, the machine malfunctioning produces a more visceral and *immediate* experience than the sterility of the intended artistic and estheticized wounds: an *unmittelbaren* murder. In all events, the failure of the machine at the conclusion of Kafka’s novella betrays again that (if at all) the injurious text is effective only on an affective or an *esthetic* level: its meaning has been lost to ornament.

In Kafka justice is just decoration: for elaborate punishment fantasies such as *In der Strafkolonie*, wounding is both a manner of punitive discipline and also itself a transgression insofar as a *Verletzung* can be perpetrated either against bodies or the law. As the author punningly points out in a brief chapter from *Der Proceß*:

so wäre es fast einfacher gewesen, K. hätte sich selbst ausgezogen und dem Prügler als Ersatz für die Wächter angeboten. Übrigens hätte der Prügler diese Vertretung gewiß nicht angenommen, da er dadurch (...) seine Pflicht schwer *verletzt* hätte und wahrscheinlich *doppelt verletzt* hätte, denn K. mußte wohl, solange er im Verfahren stand, für alle Angestellten des Gerichtes *unverletzlich* sein (*Der Proceß*, 115-116, my emphasis).

Through corporeal punishment, the supposed wound (here: *Verletzung* rather than *Wunde*) against the law has been supplanted by a wound against the body: injury is the aim of the law, but it is also its impetus. The wound is unique in its capacity to be at both the origin and the endpoint of a process. It is both the crime and its punishment—thereby rendering any corporeal chastisement inherently analogical.

It is not surprising then, that in many passages in Kafka, punishment through penetrative wounding produces a Janus effect, promising not only a transcendental enlightenment but also looking backwards to an (often only imagined) originary transgression: for instance, in the morbid and enigmatic, unpublished miniature, *Der Schlag ans Hofstor* (also known, after its first line, as *Es war im Sommer* and composed the same year as *Ein Landarzt*). Here the castigatory injuries to be inflicted are only intimated by the narrator:

als ich die Schwelle der Stube überschritten hatte, sagte der Richter, der vorgespungen war und mich schon erwartete: “Dieser Mann tut mir leid.” Es war aber über allem Zweifel, daß der damit nicht meinen gegenwärtigen Zustand meinte sondern das was mit mir geschehen würde. Die Stube sah einer Gefängniszelle ähnlicher als einer Bauernstube. Große Steinfliesen, dunkelgraue kahle Wand, irgendwo eingemauert ein eiserner Ring, in der Mitte etwas, das halb Pritsche halb Operationstisch war (*Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente* 1, 311).

A choreography comparable to the writing machine of the penal colony, if the exact nature of these wounds can only be guessed at, the absolute certainty—“über allen Zweifel”—of their predictability effaces the utter *uncertainty* of the crime with which the story begins: “Es war im Sommer, ein heißer Tag. Ich kam auf dem Nachhauseweg mit meiner Schwester an einem Hofstor vorüber. Ich weiß nicht, schlug sie aus Mutwillen ans Tor, oder in Zerstretheit oder drohte nur mit der Faust und schlug gar nicht” (*NSuf*, 310). The questionable blow with which

the miniature begins will return to the hypothesized, imagined violence with which the story ends.<sup>6</sup>

Such a conception of justice reposes, as many have noted, on the semantic ambivalence of the German word, *Urteil*, which means both *judgment* and *sentence*. Here, as in Kafka's imagined penal colony, guilt is irrelevant: the definite ontological standing of the wound functions as an artistic *Ersatz* for the ultimately absent sin itself.<sup>7</sup> The punishment is of chief importance, with the physical injury creating its own crime and making *Urteil* in its primary sense (*i.e.* judgment) unimportant. "Die Schuld ist immer zweifellos" (*DzL*, 212), concludes the officer in the *Strafkolonie*, justifying his arbitrary verdicts. "So wie Du in der verzweifelten Sterbestunde nicht über Recht und Unrecht meditieren kannst," agrees Kafka in his journals, "so nicht im verzweifelten Leben. Es genügt, daß die Pfeile genau in die Wunden passen, die sie geschlagen haben" (*Tagebücher*, 883).<sup>8</sup> Operating as an apposite substitution, the violence of the *Urteil* qua retribution intrinsically vindicates the violence of an *Urteil* as a verdict. Even here, where the wound appears explicitly intended to exercise political authority, its existence is again justified not as an ethical phenomenon, but as an *aesthetic* one.

In Clayton Koelb's interpretation of *In der Strafkolonie* as a quasi-theatrical performance of a scene of reading, he maintains that the writing-reading machine deliberately self-destructs by pushing clichéd tropes to their absolute limits. Günter Anders has argued that the novella is

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<sup>6</sup> Ewald Rösch compares this *Schlag ans Hofstor* to the country doctor's absentminded *Schlag ans Stalltür* (222), which will be examined later in the current chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, among others, makes the same observation regarding guilt in Kafka's *Strafkolonie* (191) and points out that mere accusation constitutes guilt within the twisted justice of *Der Proceß* (151).

<sup>8</sup> Gilman notes that in 1912 Kafka was meant to pose nude for the artist Ernst Ascher as a model for Saint Sebastian: "Sebastian, of course, was almost martyred by being shot full of arrows. These arrows, as we shall see, represent Kafka's anxiety about his own masculinity, an anxiety as closely tied to his sense of self as his anxiety about his illness. Each category transforms into the other; each is linked to the other in Kafka's expressions of his sense of who he is" (5).

nothing other than the literalization of the common idiom of reading with one's wounds: "am eigenen Leibe etwas erfahren" (quoted in Koelb, 524). *Ein Landarzt* can be similarly understood as a performance *in extremis* of the estheticist cliché parodied by *In der Strafkolonie*: the country doctor is no passive reader of the wound; instead he is integral to its coming-into-being, which is to say: he is its artist.<sup>9</sup> The country doctor, while clearly not an ideal reader, is nevertheless our model reader: it is the protagonist himself who *performs* the initial interpretation of a wound that has fascinated and bewildered its audience for nearly a century.

"Noch für Rosa muß ich sorgen," he laments before discovering the boy's wound, which then suddenly appears a few lines later, announced also by the appellation "Rosa," as if summoned by the incantation of this magic word (*DzL*, 257). The sight of the sister's "schwerblutiges Handtuch" has a similar function. In another context, Kafka contends that the aim of writing is "den Vorhang zu heben und die Wunde zu zeigen. Nur nach Erkenntnis der Krankheit läßt sich ein Heilmittel finden" (*NSuF* I, 430). Here too this bloody handkerchief appears to be an iconic red-velvet theater curtain lifted to reveal (the performance of) a hidden lesion. The stage is set. The horses stick their heads in through the window to observe, and their heckling reveals the wound: "ach, jetzt wiehern beide Pferde; der Lärm soll wohl (...) die Untersuchung erleichtern—und nun finde ich: ja, der Junge ist krank" (*DzL*, 258). A crowd assembles—an audience of enraptured spectators who themselves contribute one more layer of mediation, a chain of signifiers of the kind to be discussed more thoroughly in a moment: "Die Familie ist glücklich, sie sieht mich in Tätigkeit; die Schwester sagt's der Mutter, die Mutter dem Vater, der Vater einigen Gästen, die (...) durch den Mondschein der offenen Tür

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Canning similarly suggests that this wound is the product of transference: an injury inflicted by the narrator (who himself feels violated by the impending rape of Rosa) on the boy: "By another of the vicious 'structures' of 'Ein Landarzt,' the boy who is 'perfectly healthy' and just needs to be 'driven out of bed' will be *injured*, that is, wounded in the (thought) process. Now he is vindicated, the punishment did not 'fit' the crime but erased it; the solution altered the conditions of the problem, rendering it insoluble. Where is the boy's fault? It is the doctor who is at fault" (205, original emphasis).

hereinkommen" (*DzL*, 258). The spectacle is even accompanied by the singing of a school choir gathered before the house.

If the performance has the feel of a religious experience, it is because the doctor is only the newest iteration of an older tradition: "Den alten Glauben haben sie verloren; der Pfarrer sitzt zu Hause und zerpupft die Meßgewänder, eines nach dem anderen; aber der Artzt soll alles leisten mit seiner zarten chirurgischen Hand" (*DzL*, 259). The priest tearing his garments is, in this makeshift domestic amphitheater, the same as the surgeon (what would be *Wundarzt* in more antiquated German) tearing flesh. One can find the doctor's fingerprints in the description that he offers: the "handtellergröße Wunde" bears the mark of his palm and the worms burrowing inside of it resemble his fingers, "an Stärke und Länge meinem kleinen Finger gleich" (*DzL*, 258). This, *not* healing, is the doctor's art—a notion also reinforced by the association between the loss of "meine blühende Praxis" (*DzL*, 261) and the boy's own blooming wound. The wound is as contagious as it is exemplary; the doctor is ultimately taken ill and put in bed beside the injured boy—laid flat, again, in the same position as the officer in the penal colony. And like the penal colony's officer championing an older order (or like Josephine or the *Hungerkünstler* later) the doctor will be martyred to his art. As in his *Strafkolonie*, Kafka is therefore critical of this estheticist martyrdom while nonetheless participating in it—deconstructing the decadent cliché of artistic suffering while simultaneously perpetuating its structures by dint of the esthetics of injury chosen for this very critique.

## 2: Semiotics: *Sinnbild der Wunde*

Kafka's ambivalent estheticism—the injury for the sake of injury outlined in his early letter—is thus revealed to be as much a structural phenomenon as a literary-historical one. And if in an infliction of injury is the ultimate goal of the literary work, the wound is also the opening from which all writing emanates. Of the sleepless composition of his breakthrough literary effort—*Das Urteil* (1912), commonly considered the first of his mature *Erzählungen*—Kafka concludes a number of years later: “damals brach die Wunde zum ersten Mal auf in einer langen Nacht” (*Briefe an Milena*, 235).<sup>10</sup> Like his nocturnal tubercular hemorrhage, the *Lungenwunde* he will often designate as a symbol (*ein Sinnbild*: an emblem or, more literally, a *mental image*) for his calling as an author, his writing is a bleeding that will not be quelled: his hemorrhaged lung is a symptom of vocation. In the same vein, the author later recasts the *Landarzt*-wound, specifically, as a premonition of this illness. “Auch habe ich es selbst vorausgesagt”, he claims in a letter to Max Brod, “Erinnerst Du Dich an die Blutwunde im ‘Landarzt’” (*Briefe 1914–1917*, 314). And only ten days later Kafka begins a new journal with the observation that his “Lungenwunde” is “nur ein Sinnbild (...) Sinnbild der Wunde” (*T*, 831). Like the penal colony's violent literalization of the idiomatic (*am eigenen Leibe etwas erfahren*), here the metaphor of the wound has been literalized in Kafka's life; but, by the same gesture, this real-life wound has been made metaphorical and transformed into an heuristic thought experiment. The wound, writes Kafka, is but a mental image—but it is the image of the wound.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Stefani Engelstein also reads this first mature composition as a kind of unclosing and un-closeable wound: “Writing pronounces death, both our own and that of others; it is a disclosure that implicates the body. After the completion of ‘Das Urteil’ in a single night, which has often been seen as Kafka's breakthrough as a writer, he wrote in his diary, ‘Nur so kann geschrieben werden, nur in einem solchen Zusammenhang, mit solcher vollständigen Öffnung des Leibes und der Seele’. The openings that Kafka creates through which he produces his work, and that constitute his work, are never stable or static, and are always accompanied by the anxiety of closing” (353).

<sup>11</sup> Hiebel also reads these two mentions of the *Lungenwunde* together—but coming at them from a much different angle by focusing (following Sokel, one would assume) on the author's aversion to married life: “Aus den zitierten Bemerkungen ergibt sich die Schlußfolgerung, daß die Wunde des Jungen in der Tat etwas mit der Lage des Arztes und dem Verlust seines Dienstmädchens zu tun haben kann” (18).

It is, in part, the paradox of this tautology that my dissertation endeavors to address: the process by which the real becomes just literary artifice. As Hiebel summarizes this self-referentiality in his study of *Ein Landarzt*: “*Das Symptom ist die Sache selbst*. Die Wunde im ‘Landarzt’ ist ihr eigenes ‘absolutes Sinnbild’ ihre eigene ‘absolute Metapher’” (98, original emphasis). This, precisely, is the death of metaphor discussed by Deleuze and Guattari—and what they mean when they call Kafka anti-allegorical: the wound is by no means a metaphorical representation of an external, preexisting reality; rather it is a reality in its own right. More pertinently, this is the *semiotic*, even *ontological*, component of what I am calling Kafka’s *estheticism* and how I will continue to define the term throughout this dissertation:

- (a) If the author represents the wound as text and text as a wound, then both terms are simultaneously the *signifier* and the *signified* of one another.
- (b) While perhaps revolutionary in its semiotic functioning, without recourse to an external referent, the wound is—pace Deleuze—apolitical in any concrete sense: its (self-)justification is instead esthetic(ist).
- (c) The difference between wound-qua-text and text-qua-wound reveals the wound itself as a figure of difference, of non-self-identity. Thus perpetually self-fragmenting, the figure is always in becoming.

Considered from this angle, it is, perhaps ironically, nothing other than the *estheticism* of Kafka’s work—despite Deleuze and Guattari’s protest to the contrary—that renders it rhizomatic: the ceaseless rupturing and reconfiguration operated by this semiotic structure are precisely what permit for the heterogeneity and concatenation characteristic of the rhizome.

It has frequently been claimed that *Ein Landarzt* follows a progression from the wounded servant Rosa to the ‘rosa’-colored wound, but this linearity does not entirely obtain. Instead, as Hiebel summarizes:

Durch die Ausmalung der ‘Wunde’ wird aus der ‘gleitenden Metapher’ ein ‘Strahlenbündel’, so daß schon im Innern der Beschreibung und erst recht in bezug auf den Gesamttext *alles auf alles verweist*, die Verweise sich wechselseitig potenzieren, die Ebenen von Vergleichendem und Verglichenem austauschbar werden, so daß von ‘Metapher’ im eigentlichen Sinne nicht mehr die Rede sein kann (126, my emphasis).

The wound in Kafka's *Landarzt* is emblematic of this process through which every element of the text refers to each and every other—not unlike Baudelaire's volume of prose poems, where every individual poem is intended as both head and tail at once. The notorious polyvalence of Kafka's *Landarzt* is a result of just this structure: "In vielfachen Verdichtungen und paradoxen Umkehrungen verwirrt sich der Text (...) endgültig zum unauflöselichen Sinn-Knäuel, zum 'Rhizom'" (Hiebel 68). It becomes impossible to determine what is being represented and what is doing the representing, as signifier and signified continue to swap places or to fuse into a single indissoluble *Sinnbild*, in this case: the figure Rosa. Not only does the wound, "Rosa, in vielen Schattierungen," replace its namesake, but it is also populated by large worms redundantly both "rosig aus eigenem und außerdem blutbespritzt" (*DzL*, 258).

Such redundancy is significant as a recurring figure of excess resulting from an originary lack,<sup>12</sup> what Joseph Vogl has aptly dubbed a "Zirkel des Verlusts" (125). At stake is

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<sup>12</sup> I am intentionally leaving aside the question of castration that has dominated much of the secondary literature on Kafka's *Landarzt*. Like Rotpeter's in *Ein Bericht für eine Akademie*—the conclusion to the same collection of *Erzählungen*—the location of the *Landarzt*-wound "in der Hüftengegend" (*DzL*, 258) opens up the tale to oedipal interpretations, although the association is by no means as "ganz unzweideutig" as Vogl would have it (127). Instead it is the uncertain status of this castration, its ontological indeterminacy, that makes it interesting: the young boy's wound both *is* and *is not* the scar of an oedipal battle with all of its traditional narrative accoutrements. That Kafka was himself to some degree familiar with early Freudian thought is known (cf., for example, Hartmut Binder [1966] and Karen Campbell [1987]), and some have therefore read *Ein Landarzt* as a sendup of the project of early psychoanalysis (cf., for example, Eric Marson and Keith Leopold [1964]). Later poststructuralist readings—particularly Hiebel's (1984) and Vogl's (1990)—take a more Lacanian inflection, rereading castration as itself a function of language.

Without becoming unnecessarily distracted by recondite psychoanalytic jargon, one might concentrate on what is most productive in those readings that fixate on the semiological aspect of oedipal anxiety. Focusing on the paradoxical play of oppositions, both Hiebel and Vogl ultimately argue that the boy's wound equates desire itself to castration, wanting to loss. If the wound in *Ein Landarzt* does in some way represent the site of castration, it does so as a bundle of (self-)contradictions, which is to say: as a figure of difference. For Lacan, the phallus itself is the supreme figure of difference, itself implying a lack; and reading the *Landarzt*-wound as encoded castration would again mean understanding it as a such a lack, as a "Mangel, der eine Reihe fortlaufender Substitutionen eröffnet und ein Bild des 'Lebensflusses' nur im Prozeß des Verschwindens erfaßt, die Gleichung zwischen Wunsch und Kastration" (Vogl, 129). Read structurally—a literal interpretation is of little value here—the question of castration puts into motion a chain of signifiers issuing from an originary absence. The confusion between eros and thanatos implicit in this interpretation is indebted only to Lacan but also, and more pertinently, to Georges Bataille's definition of eroticism as the assenting of life up unto the point of death.

While I will not address the issue of castration in greater detail at the present moment, it therefore requires at least this brief mention (and this caveat) as it is nevertheless one of the guiding 'myths' that will repeatedly be reread over the course of this dissertation: in Bataille, in Derrida's take on Genet and in Cixous's important

nothing less than the capacity to signify at all. “Rosa is the only figure in the story with a name,” astutely notes one of the tale’s most recent commentators,

but its origin and transmission revokes the possibility of proper naming and enters into circulation not only reference but desire. The wound is a consolation prize, offered to the doctor in response to his awakening realization that some losses cannot be made good (Engelstein, 350).

This wound is both the site of the failure of language and the opening through which meaning can continue to be made—precisely *by* that failing, by the fact that arrival at a definitive referent has been refused. Instead, as in Baudelaire’s particular allegorical bent, this wound operates via a constant play of deconstruction and reconstruction. “Stets gibt es in Kafkas Texten etwas, was von Beginn an ‘niemals gutzumachen ist’” (470), writes Winfried Menninghaus, in his 2002 study of literary disgust, in reference to the doctor’s following the “Fehlläuten” of the story’s final line (*DzL*, 261), and indeed the tale also begins “in großer Verlegenheit” (*DzL*, 252): the lack of horses, then the loss of Rosa. If we concur that the boy’s wound is an echo of these early losses, of the wound in Rosa’s cheek with which the tale begins, then we can trace this chain of signifiers—as have so many interpreters—from one wound to the next: the kind of semiotic chain ceaselessly established and reestablished in the rhizome as Deleuze and Guattari describe it.<sup>13</sup> This series of wounds is as much a structural principle as it is a repeated motif, as Engelstein implicitly insists: “The examples not only form reiterations of a trope, but also represent a coherent and motivated series of substitutions, each of which

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feminist rejection of the notion of female genitalia as a wound. We must then take a middle ground between those readings that would attempt to establish Kafka’s reception (or rejection) of these concepts and those that attempt to interpret his work exclusively with recourse to an easy arsenal of psychoanalytic models. If the *mise-en-scène* of castration anxiety is to be of any use here, then, it must be taken metaphorically, even mythically—of the same ilk as Kafka’s own reworking of the trope of the wound. Itself an allegorical heuristic, a *Sinnbild der Wunde*, castration cannot be a key to interpreting the *meaning* of *Ein Landarzt*, but it can provide a hint to how its meaning is to be made.

<sup>13</sup> Kurt Fickert is, to my knowledge, the first to note the identity of Rosa the character and ‘rosa’ the wound, and Hiebel the first explicitly to address the chain of signifiers that connects them: “eine Assoziationsreihe, die von ‘Rosa’ und ‘rot eingedrückten Zahnreihen’ zu ‘rosa Wunde’, ‘Blut’ und ‘Blume’ führt. Auch das Bild der Mutter—Tränenvoll die Lippen beißend—gehört zu dieser Signifikantenkette” (50). This view will be adopted and productively adapted by Josef Vogl, among many (if not most) other interpreters after him, including the most recent commentators, Shahar and Engelstein.

*emerges from the gaping hole* created by the previous loss, *but without healing it* (349-50, my emphasis). The “*Fehlläuten der Nachtglocke*” of the story’s final line returns us the opening (DzL, 261, my emphasis); but this ringing is not so much a false alarm as it is the signal of a failing, of an absence, of a hole that will remain unfilled.

### 3: Narrative: Fragmentation as a Textual Strategy

The plot of *Ein Landarzt* hatches from its own fragmentation. The country doctor, his horse having perished the night previous, is in desperate need of transportation for an urgent house call ten miles distant: “ich fand keine Möglichkeit; zerstreut, gequält stieß ich mit dem Fuß an die *brüchige* Tür des schon seit Jahren unbenützten Schweinestalles. *Sie öffnete sich* und klappte in den Angeln auf und zu. Wärme und Geruch *wie* von Pferden kam hervor” (DzL, 253, my emphasis). Kicking in the door, the narrator penetrates a disintegrating threshold within his own home—*brüchig* here means *fragile* but can also imply that the door is already *cracked*: in literary discourse, *Bruchstück* is a textual fragment. And, investigating inside, he discovers hidden horses called into being through a hypothesis conjectured based on sensuous similarity: *wie von Pferden*. The foreign wound to be discovered first opens up at home and is, again, a rhetorical mediation of reality: an apparently unnecessary simile, merely positing the imagined horses although they turn out to be real—or at least as real as any other element in the dreamscape of the tale. Like Kafka’s *Sinnbild der Wunde*, the simile calls into being its own signified.

This gaping structural wound—its swinging doors like flaps of skin—anticipates and doubles the young patient’s wound. Moreover, it is an architectural injury that will be twice

repeated in the first few pages of the story, first as the doctor and his carriage are *torn* away like wood and he hears the *Pferdeknecht* chasing his servant, Rosa, through the house (“der Wagen wird fortgerissen, wie Holz in die Strömung; noch höre ich, wie die Tür meines Hauses unter dem Ansturm des Knechtes birst und splittert” [DzL, 255]) and then again when the horses he has been provided poke their heads in uninvited through the window of the doctor’s patient (“Diese Pferde, die jetzt die Riemen irgendwie gelockert haben; die Fenster, ich weiß nicht wie, von außen aufstoßen; jedes durch ein Fenster den Kopf stecken und, unbeirrt durch den Aufschrei der Familie, den Kranken betrachten” [DzL, 256]). That these various domestic openings are thus linked explains in some manner the unexpected proximity of the narrator’s home to his patient’s: “als öffne sich unmittelbar vor meinem Hoftor der Hof meines Kranken, bin ich schon dort” (DzL, 255). Through the wound, the narrator finds immediate access to the Other—time and space having been eradicated.<sup>14</sup>

The association between bodily harm and the splintering and bursting of these wooden doors and windows<sup>15</sup> is made explicit in a fragment Kafka enters in his journal a few years prior to the composition of *Ein Landarzt*. Here the narrator recounts his nightly wrestling matches with a neighbor. “Einmal hatte ich die Türe versperret, weil ich lesen wollte,” he laments, “aber mein Nachbar schlug die Tür mit der Hacke entzwei und da er, was er einmal gefaßt hat, nur schwer aufgeben kann, war ich sogar von der Hacke gefährdet” (T, 523). In *Ein Landarzt*, the threat to the body by the *Hacke* is reinforced, moreover, by the notion that the boy’s wound has

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<sup>14</sup> In her article on *Ein Landarzt*, Dorrit Cohn executes an exacting study of the verb tenses in the tale to demonstrate what she calls an *einmals-niemals* dichotomy that ultimately leaves the narrator abandoned in an eternal present, noting that the conclusion of the narrative “continues into infinite time, and the story ends by returning to the present tense, now no longer narrating events, but describing a wretchedly stationary and eternal condition” (147). As concerns the spatial aspect, Deleuze and Guattari would find this unexpected contiguity of spaces perfectly in keeping with the topography of the rhizomatic as they describe it (see especially the eighth chapter of their Kafka book, “Blocs, séries, intensités” [131-44], and the helpful illustrations on page 134).

<sup>15</sup> Wood-working was in part the subject of Kafka’s day job too. Much of Kafka’s diurnal office work for the *Arbeiter-Unfall-Versicherungs-Anstalt* was concerned with safety mechanisms “bei diesen besonders gefährlichen Holzbearbeitungsmaschinen” (AS, 469)—with the reduction of the risk of severed fingers to “nur ganz unbedeutende Verletzungen (...) Rißwunden, die nicht einmal Unterbrechung der Arbeit zur Folge haben” (AS, 199).

itself been inflicted by an ax. While the precise origins of this wound remain obscure—at one point the sufferer will even claim it is congenital (“Mit einer schönen Wunde kam ich auf die Welt” [DzL, 260])—the doctor ultimately identifies a pickax as its author: “Im spitzen Winkel mit zwei Hieben der Hacke geschaffen. Viele bieten ihre Seite an und hören kaum die Hacke im Forst, geschweige denn, daß sie ihnen naher kommt” (DzL, 260). And this ax recalls the central passage from the letter discussed earlier, which we can now unpack in greater detail:

Aber es tut gut, wenn das Gewissen breite Wunden bekommt, denn dadurch wird es empfindlicher für jeden Biss. Ich glaube, man sollte überhaupt nur solche Bücher lesen, die einen beißen und stechen. Wenn das Buch, das wir lesen, uns nicht mit einem Faustschlag auf den Schädel weckt, wozu lesen wir dann das Buch? Damit es uns glücklich macht, wie Du schreibst? Mein Gott, glücklich wären wir eben auch, wenn wir keine Bücher hätten, und solche Bücher, die uns glücklich machen, könnten wir zur Not selber schreiben. Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord (*B 1900–1912*, 36).

The seeming singularity of the wound as a signifier gives birth to a plurality, to an overabundance of potential associations—substituting one apparently equivalent comparison for the next. The final sentence stumbles forward through the surfeit of these similes and the excessive, almost ornamental alliteration (“wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden”) of Kafka’s anaphoric *wie*. It is a properly uncanny experience of pain, operating through a play of identity and non-self-identity tellingly performed by its expression’s eloquently stuttering syntax.

Akin most closely to a filmic cut, here Kafka’s comma splices abort and sever each of these descriptions while nevertheless imposing upon them a narrative sequence.<sup>16</sup> Placed within

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<sup>16</sup> This understanding of the cinematic cut, which will be influential for my final chapters, is borrowed in part from Patrick French’s treatment of the same in Bataille’s *Histoire de l’œil*: “Technically, the filmic cut is that interstice between shots which itself is not seen, the instant which interrupts vision and remains invisible, but which enables the *montage* of images and the production of meaning. The cut itself is the instantaneous, a negation of time which punctures it as substance and duration. The instant, the cut in time, functions, nevertheless, as the operation which inaugurates a structural play. *Histoire de l’œil* brings the moment of that instantaneous cut into the foreground and shows how it restructures and destructures meaning” (4).

this close constellation, it appears to be their similarity that is of chief rhetorical importance, as if each were in redundant apposition. But it is, instead, their difference that will be emphasized: each term complements and qualifies the last—the necessary excess of each new supplement reveals a fundamental *faute* in what precedes it, indicating the shortcoming of the previous description. Like the chain of signifiers in *Ein Landarzt* slipping forward from Rosa to *rosa*, the esthetics of injury outlined here operates according to a structure of repeated substitutions, on such figures of excess all issuing from an underlying lack, an inherent multiplicity of meaning made inevitable by the incapacity to come to a unique, one-to-one schema of signification.

Each comparison subtly *differs* from what came before and *defers* a stunning consummation: all of this is merely preamble to what is certainly one of the most commonly cited pronouncements by any modernist author on the purpose of literature, which is again appended to the rest and yet held apart—dismembered—by another comma splice:

Wir brauchen aber die Bücher, die auf uns wirken wie ein Unglück, das uns sehr schmerzt, wie der Tod eines, den wir lieber hatten als uns, wie wenn wir in Wälder verstoßen würden, von allen Menschen weg, wie ein Selbstmord, *ein Buch muß die Axt sein für das gefrorene Meer in uns*. Das glaube ich (*B 1900–1912*, 36, my emphasis).

An author of such splices, here this ax appears to have turned against itself, against the structure of the very phrasing in which it finds its first expression—eight commas within a single sentence: it is as if it has been hacked to bits. And yet it is precisely the rhythmic crescendo of this chopping that gives the passage its rhetorical strength.

What I would like to argue here is that the *Landarzt*-wound is the very consummation, thirteen years later, of the literary philosophy advocated in Kafka's letter of 1904: if we can assume the ax [*Hacke*] that produces it to echo the book-ax [*Axt*] of Kafka's epistle, then the wound in *Ein Landarzt* is nothing less than a representation of the desired effect of literature on

its reader.<sup>17</sup> (This is the tacit association between *schneiden*<sup>18</sup> and *schreiben* that I mentioned with regard to Rainald Goetz, who contends, possibly with Kafka in mind, that “Kunst haut einen um” [*Abfall für Alle*, 357].) The metaphoric body is itself the focus of this literary program, becoming a medium, a blank page awaiting the wound of text. “All great texts begin,” writes Hélène Cixous of Kafka’s ax, “in this manner that breaks: they break with our thought habits, with the world around us, in an extreme violence” (59). But an ax can *cleave* or it can *hew* (as in *hauen*)—and both simultaneously denote severance and joining. In the same manner as the ax-like comma splices of its first iteration, the ax—as an instrument of dismemberment and whittling—also carves the text into form. This ax, as Sussman notes, “loosen[s] while it binds. A wound is all the text brings into the world to hold itself together” (193). A self-negating figure, like the boy’s wound, the text’s ax-scar is a marker of identity: the ax as an author reveals such fragmentation to be the binding structural principle of Kafka’s work, transforming wounding into a fecund textual strategy.

This cut will be no conclusion, as it is precisely through these ruptures that Kafka’s texts make meaning. In their essay on the rhizome, Deleuze and Guattari speak of what they call the “Principe de rupture assignifiante: contre les coupures trop assignifiantes qui séparent les structures ou en traversent une” (16). The unique signifiatory capacity of the rhizome (like Kafka’s fractured texts or Baudelaire’s prose poems) is to regenerate where it is severed: “Un rhizome peut être rompu, brisé en un endroit quelconque, il reprend suivant telle ou telle de ses lignes et suivant d’autres” (ibid.). Along new lines or along old, it will inevitably regrow. The

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<sup>17</sup> While both the ax of Kafka’s 1904 letter and the ax of *Ein Landarzt* have received extensive attention in the literature on Kafka, I have only seen this claim made (more or less implicitly) by Engelstein, who laconically comments, comparing the two passages, that the “ax in the forest is also literature” (352).

<sup>18</sup> In the scholarship on Kafka, *cutting* comes up far more frequently than the ax as a metaphor for Kafka’s injurious aesthetic. Menninghaus, for instance, prefers to focus on the knife as metaphor, what Kafka calls the “Messerwirkung” of literature (*BaF* 659, cited in Menninghaus 433). Both Sussman (193) and Menninghaus (427-450) speak at some length of the significance of the knife and knife-wounds in Kafka’s work. While it is not an examination of the wound, *per se*, Gilman’s book on Kafka has been quite influential on the three most recent studies on the subject (Menninghaus, Shahar and Engelstein) insofar as it relates the author’s tuberculosis, Jewish slaughter, circumcision and castration (esp. 112-56).

significatory profusion that results from this loss—this writing by dismantling, rebuilding, then dismantling again—has, of course, been the subject of the present analysis; and the most recent interpretations of *Ein Landarzt* take a similar stance in reading Kafka’s wound as a model for textual and narrative fragmentation. Engelstein, for instance, contends that her

term ‘literature of wounds’ suggests that there is a literary corpus in German that justifies a specific interpretation of the wounded body and the possibilities of its representation. According to this reading, the representation of the wounded body is a challenge that leads literature to redesign its poetical tools and structures of narration. The use of the fragment is one of the responses of literature to this challenge (463, note 2).

It is precisely such a ‘literature of wounds’ that my dissertation aspires to explore; and it is my hope that the preceding pages have succeeded in situating Kafka’s most important wound within the context of his oeuvre, not only as a *mise-en-abyme* of the artwork itself, but as the apogee of his esthetics of injury. By way of transition, the conclusion to the present chapter will briefly begin to examine the importance of this esthetics for the course of the particular literary history to follow.

#### 4: Genre: The Modernist Miniature

Speaking of his own bloody artistry, the officer of Kafka’s penal colony contends: “Es darf natürlich keine einfache Schrift sein: sie soll ja nicht sofort töten, sondern durchschnittlich erst in einem Zeitraum von zwölf Stunden; für die sechste Stunde ist der Wendepunkt berechnet” (*DzL*, 217-18). Significantly, this description of the dramaturgy of the reading experience resembles Goethe’s formula for the ideal novella. The *Wendepunkt* recalls the kind of “unerhörte Begebenheit” central to Goethe’s famous pronouncement:

Denn was ist eine Novelle anders als eine sich ereignete unerhörte Begebenheit. Dies ist der eigentliche Begriff, und so Vieles, was in Deutschland unter dem Titel Novelle geht, ist gar keine Novelle, sondern bloß Erzählung oder was Sie sonst wollen (quoted by Eckermann 68).

Moreover, just as with Kafka's torture device—or the novella that tells of it—Goethe's novella requires a long exposition, “die nicht allein an sich, an ihrer Stelle, gut und notwendig ist, sondern wodurch auch alles Folgende eine größere Wirkung gewinnt” (ibid., 69), followed by the crucial turning point described above. In Kafka's account, this *größere Wirkung* is achieved by continuously clearing out new spaces for the wound:

Die Egge fängt zu schreiben an; ist sie mit der ersten Anlage der Schrift auf dem Rücken des Mannes fertig, rollt die Watteschicht und wälzt den Körper langsam auf die Seite, um der Egge neuen Raum zu bieten. Inzwischen legen sich die wundbeschriebenen Stellen auf die Watte, welche infolge der besonderen Präparierung sofort die Blutung stillt und zu neuer Vertiefung der Schrift vorbereitet. Hier die Zacken am Rande der Egge reißen dann beim weiteren Umwälzen des Körpers die Watte von den Wunden, schleudern sie in die Grube, und die Egge hat wieder Arbeit. So schreibt sie immer tiefer die zwölf Stunden lang (*DzL*, 218).

The body is caught in a constant rotation of wounding and healing—but healing so that the wounds can then be cut again, and ever deeper, in order that the pain of reading be intensified. Again, ten years after the epistle first outlining an esthetics of injury, it is implied—but now, of course, not entirely without ironic distance—that it is good to sustain deep wounds when reading as we thus become more sensitive to every bite.

One might then read Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie* (like Goethe's own *Novelle* [1828]) as a self-conscious performance of the genre's form as he would conceive of it. In December of 1914—the same year that he composed *In der Strafkolonie*—Kafka muses in a journal on the novella as a form of incompleteness heralding its own impossible totality:

Anfang jeder Novelle zunächst lächerlich. Es scheint hoffnungslos, daß dieser neue noch unfertige überall empfindliche Organismus in der fertigen Organisation der Welt sich wird erhalten können, die wie jede fertige Organisation danach strebt sich abzuschließen. Allerdings vergißt man hiebei, daß die Novelle falls sie berechtigt ist, ihre fertige Organisation in sich trägt,

auch wenn sie sich noch nicht ganz entfaltet hat; darum ist die Verzweiflung in dieser Hinsicht vor dem Anfang einer Novelle unberechtigt; ebenso müßten Eltern vor dem Säugling verzweifeln, denn dieses elende und besonders lächerliche Wesen hätten sie nicht auf die Welt bringen wollen (*T*, 711).

The novella is described directly as a grotesque (Kafka's *lächerlich* recalls the Baudelairean category of the grotesque as a variety of humor) body-in-becoming, implying its own completion but never arriving there.<sup>19</sup> Huyssen takes special care to distinguish his historically specific modernist miniature from "the fragments of the Jena Romantics" (30), and yet it cannot be denied that Kafka's genre definition of what he, above, calls the novella bears a striking resemblance to Friedrich Schlegel's apologia for the form of the Romantic fragment: "Andere Dichtarten sind fertig, und können nun vollständig zergliedert werden. Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann" (183). Wholeness is as much at issue as perpetual becoming: always unfinished, the fragment cannot be dismantled (*zergliedert*), taken limb from limb.

In the second 'lecture' of his *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (1997), called "Unworking Romanticism", philosopher Simon Critchley contends that this textual strategy is part and parcel of an intentional poetics of failure:

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<sup>19</sup> Kafka's texts of course provide a wealth of grotesque bodies for consideration, although they unfortunately lie beyond the scope of the current study. In *Ein Landarzt* alone there are the horses and the worms, which both Canning and Menninghaus convincingly reveal to double one another. With their many legs writhing indiscriminately, these worms recall the first depiction of the insect-like apparition of Gregor Samsa's transformation: "Seine vielen, im Vergleich zu seinem sonstigen Umfang kläglich dünnen Beinen flimmerten ihm hilflos vor den Augen" (*DzL*, 115); this comparison highlights the fundamental incongruity of Kafka's brief description in *Ein Landarzt* (that these so-called 'worms' would have *Beinchen* to begin with). Like Gregor Samsa after his *Verwandlung*, they are bodies still in becoming, an intentionally unspecified chimera, marked as *Ungeziefer*—unthings, vermin or monstrosities—by the excess of their many legs. The stranger in the tale is also a hybrid creature, a beastly *Pferdeknecht* first portrayed crawling forward on all fours. David Wellbery, in a reading of Kafka's single-sentence *Wunsch, ein Indianer zu werden*, has identified such centaur figures as a common thread through much of the author's work. In a study of Kafka's animal stories, Matthew Powell defines the author's use of the grotesque as a melting point between the self and alterity—resembling both the function of the wound and Kristeva's notion of the abject: "By playing off of this tension between human and non-human, between what is 'the self' and what is 'not the self,' Kafka is able to explore the *ontology of otherness* that clarifies the space between the self and other. This space is critical to maintaining notions of the self and identity. Kafka uses the grotesque as a means of illuminating the enviroing shadows that are not oneself and that allow for definition of self" (130). For a more thorough consideration of the role of animal figures in Kafka's tales, see Fingerhut's book-length study on the subject.

the specificity of the fragment, its uniqueness, is that it is a form that is both complete and incomplete, both a whole and a part. It is a form that embodies interruption within itself. That is to say, the fragment fails. Thus, the success of Jena Romanticism is the development and deployment of a genre that embodies failure within itself, whose completion is incompleteness, whose structure is essentially ambiguous (107).

Seen from this perspective, the abject miscarriage of an aesthetics of injury in Kafka's penal colony—the spectacular self-destruction of the machine and the poetics for which it was intended to be emblematic—may well be the ultimate achievement of precisely this poetic method. At odds with the completeness of the world, the Romantic fragment, Kafka's hypothetical novella or the self-dismantling machine at the center of his actual novella are not dissimilar from Deleuze and Guattari's inherently revolutionary notion of a *littérature mineure*—theorized based on Kafka's work. In an endnote, Critchley sketches this connection, bringing considerations of Romanticism closer to the concerns of the present chapter:

there are significant parallels between the model of romanticism that I offer here and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic conception of writing. One might note that Deleuze and Guattari's conception of writing draws upon a certain 'romanticism', that of Kleist rather than Schlegel. (...) What I am claiming here for the fragment and for an unworked romanticism could well be related to Deleuze and Guattari's opposition to *major* literature of totality in terms of a *minor* literature and a generalized rhizomatics (194-5, note 61).

If there is an inherent politics to Kafka's writing (an opposition to a literature of totality) it is chiefly a matter of esthetic form: the 'minor' form of the *Erzählung* or novella, for instance. While *Ein Landarzt* (let alone *In der Strafkolonie*) is likely longer than what Huyssen had in mind with his notion of the modernist miniature, the questions raised are similar. For Huyssen—whose concern, as I have noted, is also with the literary *fragment*, despite the terminology employed—the modernist miniature signals a certain decay of storytelling as the temporal aspect of narrative gives way to “a foregrounding of vision and the legibility of urban space” (29). Overwhelming spatiality, more than storytelling, comes to define this new genre; and Huyssen's chief examples chosen from Kafka are therefore the twisted, terrifying spaces of

the unfinished novel, *Der Proceß* (1914–1916), rather than the early prose-poem-like miniatures, mature *Erzählungen* or even the letters, as one might otherwise expect. Huyssen’s miniatures are not complete and self-contained but rather fragments of an unfinished whole.

He conceives of his category in contrast to Benjamin’s essay on the storyteller, which for Huyssen, “seems to theorize the loss of storytelling” (28–29); but Benjamin’s *Erzähler* essay offers us, perhaps, a redemptive counter-model. Here Benjamin makes important distinctions between the driving impulses behind the novel (what we could call a major literature) as opposed to those impelling the *Erzählung* (the most perfect form of Kafka’s minor literature). The novel has a focus on *one* hero and *one* story, attempting to cast a meaning of life through the perspective of the protagonist’s exemplary death—precisely the variety of meaningful demise the reader is denied by the violent conclusion to Kafka’s *Strafkolonie* or the eternal wanderings of the country doctor. The *Erzählung*, on the other hand, is not concerned with the meaning of life, but rather with the moral of the story: something that demands ceaseless interpretation and reinterpretation. Benjamin compares this literary form to carefully crafted, ornate miniature carvings, complete within themselves and made of many layers—like the overlapping layers of allegories in Kafka’s texts—: tiny totalities.

Huyssen’s miniatures are then indeed distinct from the Romantic fragment in that they are not complete unto themselves. Kafka’s miniatures, while perpetually self-fragmenting, are.<sup>20</sup> But not all of Kafka’s forms are whole. A novel, too, can constitute minor literature, and like Huyssen, Deleuze and Guattari—obsessed by Kafka’s abandoned works—fixate on the author’s

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<sup>20</sup> This is a debate in the *Landarzt* literature as well. Early on, Heinz Politzer proclaimed that the story “does not stammer because Kafka had decided to reject coherency; it stutters because the language failed Kafka. Its fragmentariness is not a structural principle but an artistic deficiency” (89). Sussman comes to Kafka’s defense, seeing *Ein Landarzt* (much as I do) as an allegory of its own deconstruction: “But for all its declared and dramatized inconclusiveness, the tale is a suggestive allegory of how texts configure themselves. There is no lack of structure here” (183). Nevertheless, Sussman speaks of amputation: “The arbitrary truncation of this text is merely one further manifestation of the loss of control that it has embellished. The losses and concerns that the text dramatizes are not to be recuperated” (195).

apparent incapacity to complete a novel.<sup>21</sup> “L’expression doit briser les formes,” they contend in a manner that recalls Benjamin’s thoughts on *allegory*, “marquer les ruptures et les embranchements nouveaux. Une forme étant brisée, reconstruire le contenu qui sera nécessairement en rupture avec l’ordre des choses” (*Kafka* 52). And certainly, the constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari’s preferred phrasing) operated by a minor literature resembles the productively self-destructive motion of Benjaminian allegory.

The fragmentary novels—like many of the works to be read in later chapters of the current dissertation—offer the most dramatic illustration of such ruptures and new sproutings, but these are to be found, as we have seen, in shorter texts as well. This fragmentation is necessitated, moreover, precisely by the peculiar semiotic structure of Kafka’s particular aestheticism—in part a privileging of signifier over signified. In the lines directly preceding those just quoted, Deleuze and Guattari explain that “Une littérature majeure ou établie suit un vecteur qui va du contenu à l’expression : un contenu étant donné, dans une forme donnée, trouver, découvrir ou voir la forme d’expression qui lui convient. (...) Mais une littérature mineure ou révolutionnaire commence par énoncer, et ne voit et ne conçoit qu’après” (*ibid.*, 51-52). This is how Kafka’s *Sinnbild der Wunde* works: as a signifier that calls into being its own signified.

By all accounts, Kafka’s is a violent poetics of injury and rupture—and one that turns upon itself. When the originally intended victim of the penal colony’s literary torture device is released and replaced by his authorial surrogate, the narrator remarks, “Der Verurteilte hatte schon infolge seiner Ungeduld einige kleine Rißwunden auf dem Rücken” (*DzL*, 237). That

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<sup>21</sup> It is, again, these ruptures that make the rhizomatic nature of the author’s work a possibility; mapping out five overarching reasons for Kafka choosing to abandon a text, Deleuze and Guattari conclude that : “Chaque échec y est un chef-d’œuvre, une tige dans le rhizome” (70)

these wounds are the result of ripping rather than incision (or inscription) is doubly a failure of the proposed literary procedure; for not only does the machine not function as anticipated, this ripping is placed, moreover, in close constellation with a veritable bevy of lexical references to *paper* in the following paragraph, which I will quote at length in order to emphasize the explicit connection made here between bodily wounding and the materiality of reading:

Er [der Offizier] ging auf den Reisenden zu, zog wieder die kleine Ledermappe hervor, blätterte in ihr, fand schließlich das Blatt, das er suchte, und zeigte es dem Reisenden. “Lesen Sie”, sagte er. “Ich kann nicht”, sagte der Reisende, “ich sagte schon, ich kann diese Blätter nicht lesen.” “Sehen Sie das Blatt doch genau an”, sagte der Offizier und trat neben den Reisenden, um mit ihm zu lesen. Als auch das nichts half, fuhr er mit dem kleinen Finger in großer Höhe, als *dürfe das Blatt auf keinen Fall berührt werden, über das Papier hin*, um auf diese Weise dem Reisenden das Lesen zu erleichtern. Der Reisende gab sich auch Mühe, um wenigstens darin dem Offizier gefällig sein zu können, aber es war ihm unmöglich. Nun begann der Offizier die Aufschrift zu buchstabieren und dann las er sie noch mal im Zusammenhang. “Sei gerecht!—heißt es”, sagte er, “jetzt können Sie es doch lesen.” *Der Reisende beugte sich so tief über das Papier, daß der Offizier aus Angst vor einer Berührung es weiter entfernte*; nun sagte der Reisende zwar nichts mehr, aber es war klar, daß er noch immer nicht hatte lesen können. “Sei gerecht!—heißt es”, sagte der Offizier nochmals. “Mag sein”, sagte der Reisende, “Ich glaube es, daß es dort steht” (*DzL*, 237-8, my emphasis).

The close proximity of *ripping* with such an uncommon reflection on the materiality of writing and the explicit reference to the fragility of these illegible pages, intimates a destruction of the material, literary document as well. This tearing of pages is the analogue of the repeated splintering of wood—an intimately related material—in *Ein Landarzt*. If writing is meant to wound the reader, it too, it seems, can have wounds inflicted upon it by its audience—by the censor, by the careless critic. This thought becomes more morbid when one considers Kafka’s request to Max Brod to have his own unpublished writings burned after his death.

But flames were not the only fate with which Kafka threatened his literature—tearing it up was also a possibility. A 1913 fragment in his journal triumphantly lamented: “Die ungeheure Welt, die ich im Kopfe habe. Aber wie mich befreien und sie befreien ohne zu zerreißen. Und tausendmal lieber zerreißen, als sie in mir zurückhalten oder begraben. Dazu

bin ich ja hier, das ist mir ganz klar” (*T*, 562). As if in response, some years later, shortly after the composition of *Ein Landarzt* and the discovery of his own *Lungenwunde*,<sup>22</sup> he concludes, albeit less triumphantly: “Alles zerreißen” (*T*, 832). Ripping, wounding, for both the author and his audience, is the only strategy by which inner experience can be alchemized into art—but it is a strategy involving threats to the integrity of the writing subject and to the artwork as well.

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<sup>22</sup> Just a few days prior he had written to Max Brod of his broken engagement to Felice Bauer: ‘Allerdings ist hier noch die Wunde, deren Sinnbild nur die Lungenwunde ist’ (*Briefe 1914–1917*, 314).

Chapter 3  
**Georges Bataille's Bruise:**  
The Mutilated Writing of *Le Bleu du ciel* (1927/1935/1957)

George Bataille's *Le Bleu du ciel* represents both the beginning and the end his literary career. Completed in Tossa in 1935 but not printed until twenty-two years later, the book expands upon the fragments of the writer's first attempt at narrative—the only remaining vestiges of a 1927 work of fiction. “J'avais écrit, un an avant l'‘Histoire de l'œil’, un livre intitulé ‘W.-C.’ : un petit livre, assez littérature de fou” (*Œuvres complètes* III, 59), recalls Bataille in epilogue to another text. “Le manuscrit de ‘W.-C.’ a brûlé,” he further informs us, “ce n'est pas dommage” (*ŒC* III, 59). The author thus reduces his first novel to cinders; and only a single chapter (titled *Dirty*) of the burnt book will resurface phoenix-like from its own ashes at the outset of *Le Bleu du ciel*, his final novel to be published.

Through this literary autodafé Bataille places his work under the auspices of Franz Kafka—and consciously so, it would appear, as *Le Procès* is listed (in his preface to the 1957 publication of *Le Bleu du ciel*) among those books “auxquelles, sensiblement, l'auteur [a] été contraint” by a “*moment de rage*” (*ŒC* III, 381, original emphasis). Written in a fury and unhalting even by its own destruction, the narrative to become *Le Bleu du ciel* follows this same principle—for Bataille the book was unavoidable, and yet, no sooner was it written than it was in some sense forgotten:

*Mais je n'insinue pas qu'un sursaut de rage ou que l'épreuve de la souffrance assurent seuls aux récits leur pouvoir de révélation. J'en ai parlé ici pour arriver à dire qu'un tourment qui me ravageait est seul à l'origine des monstrueuses anomalies du Bleu du ciel. Ces anomalies fondent Le Bleu du ciel. Mais je suis si éloigné de penser que ce fondement suffit à la valeur que j'avais renoncé à publier ce livre (...) j'en avais même en quelque sorte oublié l'existence* (*ŒC* III, 382, original emphasis).

A monstrous anomaly of personal experience produces this similarly freakish, grotesque novel, but it is a torment that obliges the author both to the book's composition and to its suppression. "A certain excessively real suffering," write Ann Smock and Phyllis Zuckerman in explication of this cryptic comment, "demands that a book erases itself from the memory; a certain violence is such that it wounds leaving the absence of a trace" (57). It is Bataille's literary depiction of this *excessively real* suffering—emblemized by figures of physical injury—that is the subject of the present chapter.

Celebrating such violence, and remembering the earlier author's apparent desire to have his works posthumously consumed by flames, Bataille imagines Kafka writing *sous rature*: "Ces livres, tout d'abord, il les écrit; il faut imaginer du temps entre le jour où l'on écrit et celui où l'on décide de brûler" (*ŒC* IX, 271). And it is just this self-negating, self-effacing aspect of the Kafkan, in Bataille's view, that gives the author what Bataille calls *sovereignty*: "Sans doute est-ce la fatalité de tout ce qui est humainement souverain, ce qui est souverain ne peut durer, sinon dans la négation de soi-même" (*ŒC* IX, 279). *La souveraineté*—a key concept in Bataille's thought—is inherently self-destructive; and it is for this reason that the later author concurs with Kafka's implied opinion that his books, like Bataille's own *W.-C.*, "sont des livres pour le feu, des objets auxquels il manque à la vérité d'être en feu, ils sont là mais *pour disparaître*; déjà, comme s'ils étaient anéantis" (*ŒC* IX, 271, original emphasis). Kafka's books are brought into being only to undo themselves, to be destroyed.

These comments on Kafka are all taken from the penultimate chapter of Bataille's collection of critical essays, *La Littérature et le mal*, published the same year as *Le Bleu du ciel*; but the author's Kafka study was originally conceived as the conclusion to his book on sovereignty—which Bataille defines as a violence of excess, a kind of glorious waste, an "*au-delà de l'utilité*" (*ŒC* VIII, 248, original emphasis). Particularly in his work on Gilles de Rais—the

infamous fifteenth-century serial torturer and decapitator of children—this sovereignty qua excess is manifested by the horror of an inconceivable physical violence, the wasteful spilling of innocent blood: “il faisait ouvrir un corps, couper une gorge, dépecer les membres, il aimait voir le sang” (*ÆC* x, 278). To call Kafka sovereign in the Bataillian sense implies an uncomfortable affinity—a kind of blood relation—between the repugnant, purposeless but all too *real* violence of Gilles de Rais and the wastefulness of an author writing texts ultimately intended to be burned.

In this vein, Benjamin Noys outlines what might be a popular position—one which would explain away the obvious admiration for Gilles de Rais as but a graphic illustration of what is at base a more metaphorical violence against discourse:

Gilles de Rais’s violence is also a violence *against* language, a violence that does not resort to lofty justifications or rationalisations but instead is expressed in the immediacy of a *jouissance* that violates bodies and language. It is a traumatic experience, not only at the time of his crimes but also in the trauma it inflicts on language itself (68, original emphasis).

But such a view, as Noys so rightly warns, inevitably attempts to rehabilitate Bataille (if not Gilles himself) by recourse to precisely the variety of rationalization he has refused. Moreover, the chain of signification rapidly becomes convoluted—with the very real, historical violence enacted by the medieval murderer proffered as itself a signifier (as a metaphorical approximation) representing an underlying violence against language. And yet, the inverse view does not entirely obtain either: a more traditional understanding of linguistic violence as an illustration of the actual, physical variety is also revealed to be flawed, as signifier and signified continue to swap places. For if, as Susann Cokal has it in a study of wounds and ruptures in Bataille’s fiction, “the harm done to language mirrors the harm done to bodies” (92) and not vice versa, then this damage done to fictional bodies must itself be reproduced by an

actual, *literal* harm visited upon the language through which this violence is expressed. Like two sides of a single page, metaphorical wounding is inextricable from its real-life double.

In his own work, as well, Bataille will therefore elevate a Kafkan writing under erasure to the literary strategy and philosophical disposition of non-closure to be addressed here.<sup>1</sup> The present chapter illustrates and explores the author's advocacy of injury and aperture through careful attention to the key wounds of *Le Bleu du ciel* beside their philosophical counterparts in *L'Expérience intérieure*, a book that was composed in part in tandem with the novel. The greatest joy of Gilles de Rais, in Bataille's account, was the decapitation and the amputations to which his child victims were subjected: "à voir séparer leurs têtes et leurs membres," (quoted by Bataille, *ŒC* X, 310-311); and there is, to be sure, also an element of perverse pleasure to the textual dismemberment perpetually inflicted on books like *W.-C.* and *Le Bleu du ciel*. I therefore first reexamine the motif of headlessness central to the novel and to its critical reception in order to reveal decapitation as not only a thematic but also as a *structural* principle: an explicit inheritance of the formal decadence observed already in Baudelaire. Then turning to what I identify as the central epiphany of *Le Bleu du ciel* beside the author's notion of inner experience, an analogue to Kafka's estheticist *Sinnbild der Wunde*, I demonstrate that this esthetics of injury relies on an idiosyncratic relation to the real: the kind of tearing so essential to *l'expérience intérieure* must be manifested *concretely* as a formal tearing of the text—as a rupture in narrative—as it is only through this tear that the reader, so Bataille, can gain access to authentic experience.

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<sup>1</sup> As Cairtriona Leahy notes in her study of the 'formless' (see below) in the two authors, "Bataille identifies, in the question of burning Kafka, a core aspect of his texts, namely, their concern both with self-destruction and with the response to that concern. The proposal that because these texts burn with self-destruction, they should be burnt by the system highlights the difficulty of discerning what it is that Kafka stands for when, or if, he stands against system" (114).

Bataille's attempt at formless writing—what we can, borrowing a term from the author's own lexicon, call an *écriture 'informe'*<sup>2</sup>—involves a mutilation of the protagonist narrator (himself often a representative of the author), of the reader and, necessarily, of the text as well. Like so much of his writing (philosophical and literary works alike) Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* is a willfully self-mutilating text—a novel whose esthetic procedure is in fact none other than an artistry of (auto)injury. This injurious esthetic carries significant consequences for the relationship of the artwork to the real (events that it portrays) and for the heritage of narrative in the twentieth century.

1: *Ni queue ni tête* [2]: Headlessness as a Textual Strategy

*Le Bleu du ciel* recounts the narrator's relationship with three women: the decadent and apolitical Dorothea, nicknamed Dirty; the wealthy, clueless Xénie; and the repulsively unattractive Communist revolutionary, Lazare. It is the unconsummated erotic relationship with Dorothea that dominates and drives the text, although she is in fact absent for the better part of the story—perhaps an indication of the narrator's penchant for the apolitical which frames, in part, the current considerations: if the political events chronicled by the novel are presented as if they were mere background material to the erotic narrative, what I mean to make clear is that Bataille's peculiar reception of these events in literature has in fact *estheticized*

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<sup>2</sup> The author inserts this term as an ironic, self-subversive entry in the 'critical dictionary' published in *Documents* (*ŒC* 1, 217). The concept has enjoyed particular notoriety in academic and artistic circles following the publication of Yves-Alain Bois's and Rosalind Krauss's volume on the subject—itsself a critique of Georges Didi-Hubermann's book, which Bois and Krauss find too dialectical in its presentation of the formless. A good synthesis of the two divergent perspectives is offered by Patrick French as a set-up for his book on *Histoire de l'œil*. I will not have space here to engage in this debate more thoroughly. But by all accounts, as a perpetual operation resisting any final, fixed form, Bataille's *informe* can be considered an important variation of the kind of grotesque growth we have observed already in Baudelaire and Kafka.

and *eroticized* them to the point that their reality is entirely interiorized and ultimately only accessible as art. The reader follows the selectively impotent Troppmann (he is emasculated by the overwhelming sexuality of Dorothea and therefore unable to perform with the one woman whom he most desires) from London to Paris, where he is taken ill, and then on to Barcelona where he is reluctantly involved of an uprising of Catalan separatists led by Lazare. The text concludes in Germany, where Troppmann, a self-confessed latent necrophiliac, is finally able to make love to Dirty in a cemetery.

A torturously picaresque journey through a 1930s Europe on the verge collapse, the novel has for good reason predominantly been interpreted as a chronicle of the events leading up to the Second World War. But *Le Bleu du ciel* must also be regarded as an inventory and an examination of physical injuries—some having less to do with contemporary politics than with writing as an art form. This inventory would include not only the wounded hands<sup>3</sup> and repeated references to decapitation to be addressed presently, but also a good number of imagined amputations (mostly of legs) and a scene in which Troppmann idly, apparently erotically, stabs Xénie in the thigh with a fork.<sup>4</sup>

The emphasis on injury is important from the outset; and the opening chapter of *Le Bleu du ciel* itself carries many scars. A severed limb of sorts—inasmuch as it was initially part of another work entirely and had previously been published independently<sup>5</sup>—the chapter titled *Dirty* in the manuscript tellingly begins with an apparently incidental portrayal of a wounded

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Biles has an entire chapter on the subject of wounded hands in Bataille and Hans Bellmer. Tracing the influence of the Grünwald crucifixion scene that figures among the illustrations of Bataille's *Larmes d'Éros*, Biles reveals these wounded hands to be a guiding metaphor of Bataille's philosophical project. The monstrosity (the vision of the grotesque) that is central to Biles' excellent analysis is compared explicitly in his introduction to the *formless* esthetic to be discussed further on (4). In a similar vein, Sarah Wilson traces the relationship between Bataille's representations of the wound and the painting and sculpture of another of his illustrators, Jean Fautrier.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Collier interprets this stabbing as a compulsive repetition of Troppmann's childhood trauma of having punctured his own hand with a pen in a passage to figure centrally in the present analysis (86).

<sup>5</sup> As Francis Marmande, one of the editors of Bataille's *Œuvres complètes*, reminds us in a monograph on the novel, this is the portion of the text generally considered "le seul chapitre retrouvé de *W.C.*" (25). For a full publication history of this introduction (which is otherwise untitled in the *Œuvres complètes* edition) and the various other portions of the novel, see Marmande (especially 19-30).

extremity: a bandaged hand. The narrator establishes only the setting<sup>6</sup> (“un bouge de quartier de Londres” [ÆC III, 385]) and the cast of characters (himself and his drunken mistress, the eponymous Dirty) before turning (parenthetically) in the second sentence to his injury: “(ma main avait encore un pansement, suite d’une blessure de verre cassé)” (ÆC III, 385). Much like the quasi-independent chapter in which it is portrayed, this bandaged wound, which also chronologically precedes the rest of the narrative (“ma main *avait encore* un pansement”), takes on a life of its own, acting almost as another player in the drama. The repeated bleeding and rebandaging of Troppmann’s wounded hand becomes the telltale symptom of an alternating eruption of disorder and of an ensuing reordering that govern the action of the first chapter of *Le Bleu du ciel*.

The characters’ evolving moods—this fluctuation between an orgiastic frenzy and periods of relative calm—are represented implicitly in terms of the flow and the subsequent cessation of their blood. The wounded hand first reopens as if cut merely by the lexical and spatial proximity of the mention of a glass when Dirty and Troppmann have reentered their hotel room and resolved to resume drinking. Dirty “réussit à placer *par terre* à côté d’elle une bouteille et *un verre*” and Troppmann notes, as if in passing, that “je venais de rouvrir la blessure de ma main droite : le sang que j’essayais d’arrêter avec une serviette gouttait rapidement *par terre*” (ÆC III, 337-388, my emphasis). Freely flowing and beyond control, again the wound is oddly anterior to the action itself (“je *venais* de rouvrir...”) and signals the start of another episode of debauchery as Troppmann (“le visage barbouillé de sang” [ÆC III, 389])

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<sup>6</sup> In her spatially-inflected assessment of wounds and ruptures in Bataille’s fiction, Susann Cokal reads this bandaged hand as itself a zeroing-in of the geographical setting: “It is a move typical of Bataille’s fiction, in which characters are persistently troubled by the compartmentalization of external space and by the body’s separateness, wholeness, and (perhaps paradoxically) apparent permeability” (76). Closer to the concerns of the current chapter, Cokal connects this rupture to a fracturing of narrative, as implied by the parenthetical quality of the first mention of the wounded hand: “For Bataille, the body is at the same time ultimate measure of space and itself the space most fully occupied, and most desirably penetrated. It cries out for wounds, just as, in his writing, a fluid narrative line cries out for rupture, for a shocking revelation or event” (ibid.).

helplessly observes his mistress (“le sang lui mont[ant] au visage” [ÆC III, 388]) defecating wetly on the carpeting: “un bruit d’entrailles relâchées se produisait lourdement sous la robe de la jeune fille, révoltée, écarlate et tordue sur sa chaise comme un porc sous un couteau...” (ÆC III, 389, my emphasis). The depiction of the uncontrolled bleeding of Troppmann’s hand—its rapid *gouttes de sang*—flows (or slips) into a metaphorical depiction of the opening of Dirty’s body, where it is then echoed by the heavy flowing of her feces and an important ellipsis.

Dirty’s lewd display is both an image of fatality (insofar as she is compared explicitly to a slaughtered pig) but also of fecundity inasmuch as this sudden, heavy flow of liquid so vividly resembles the amniotomy of a pregnant woman about to give birth. Highlighting these references to blood that punctuate the outrageous episode reveals the scene to be a frenetic, gushing motion followed by a narrative break in the form of an ellipsis—itsself the trace of a textual cut.<sup>7</sup> One might be so bold as to compare these three spots of ink that follow Dirty’s bowel movement to three spots of feces or three dots of blood—the *gouttes de sang* again—flowing forward in an almost illustrative textual manifestation (in an attempted literalization) of the bleeding portrayed in the plot.

In the autograph manuscript of *Le Bleu du ciel* this ellipsis of three periods is an ellipsis of three full lines, the kind of interruption that, elsewhere in the novel, Allan Stoekl has called “rows of dots that represent a textual violence” (15). In terms of storytelling, it also represents a chronological pause during which this violence—textual and narrative—is remedied. Following Dirty’s incontinence, the unfortunate hotel employees are required to put things back in order, first cleaning the soiled woman (“qui parraissait redevenue calme et heureuse” [ÆC III, 389]) and the room, then rebandaging Troppmann’s hand: “Ensuite, il me fit un

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<sup>7</sup> It is in this context, in his work on *Histoire de l’œil*, that Patrick ffrench, as I have already hinted, defines “the operation of the *cut* in Bataille’s writing” as “part of a structural aggression against the coherence and security of the body of the spectator” but also against the structural coherence of the work itself (2).

pansement pour arrêter le sang” (*ÆC* III, 389). The bleeding has been temporarily quelled; the narrative is now put on pause. “De nouveau,” continues Troppmann in the very next line, “toutes choses étaient dans l’ordre” (*ÆC* III, 389). These ostensibly unimportant asides describing Troppmann’s wounded hand (mere digressions if the parentheses by which it is initially introduced are to be believed) are thus key indicators of the flow and forward motion of the action of the plot: the disintegration into chaos and its inevitable narrative reordering. Moreover, they are placed at the *head* of the narrator’s anecdote; and, like the chapter itself, it is a *wounded* head—indeed, figuratively at least, an amputated one.

That a kind of decapitation is at issue here cannot be doubted, at least not after the narrator is named: Troppmann, a name and *nom de plume* Bataille has borrowed from an infamously guillotined nineteenth-century spree killer, as many scholars have discussed.<sup>8</sup> And no sooner has Dirty introduced this name into the text than she is shown caressing Troppmann’s *tête de blessé*—both the head of someone wounded and, increasingly, through a Bataillian slippage or *glissement*, also a wounded head:

— Troppmann! cria-t-elle à nouveau.

Elle me regardait en ouvrant des yeux de plus en plus grands. De ses longues mains sales elle caressa *ma tête de blessé*. Mon front était humide de fièvre. Elle pleurait comme on vomit, avec une folle supplication. Sa chevelure, tant elle sanglotait, fut trempée de larmes (*ÆC* III, 385, my emphasis).

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<sup>8</sup> The origin of the name has never been at issue. The implicit debate is to whether it represents excess (*trop mann*) as Allan Stoekel argues (9) or impotence (*trop peu mann*) as Susan Suleiman contends (28). (My response to this later.) But there is another tension inherent to the pseudonym, as Alexander Irwin (89), following Francis Marmande (25-26) points out: Henri was the first name of one of Troppmann’s victims. “Henri Troppmann est symboliquement victime et bourreau: enfant martyr et coupable à la fois” (Marmande 26). I would offer another interpretation, namely that *Hen-ri* Troppmann is so named, in part, because he is capable of sovereign laughter in a Nietzschean vein, “*un homme qui en rié*” (*ÆC* III, 395, original italics but my emphasis), as the speaker—it is unclear here whether the speaker is Bataille, Troppmann or both—describes himself in the two-page *Première partie*.

The series of images is fetishistic, focusing on each part of the body independently from the rest: Dirty's eyes, hands, and hair but only Troppmann's head. Another kind of corporeal opening, Dirty's eyes grow ever wider while observing this *tête de blessé* and its feverish forehead, as if there were something shocking in the sight. Held in her hands, moreover, the reader is free to imagine the narrator's head without his (undepicted) body.

Bataille will render this implicit association with decapitation slightly more concrete just a few pages later. Having reopened his wound, Troppmann complains of a blinding light and his bloodied face: "J'essuyai ma figure; ainsi je me couvris de sang le front et le nez. La lumière électrique devenait aveuglante. C'était insupportable: cette lumière épuisait les yeux" (*ÆC* III, 388). The exhausting luminance connects this comment to the novel's epiphany, but for the moment let us focus on another slippage of which Bataille is enormously fond, namely the lexical similarity—a kind of family resemblance—between *supplication* and *supplice*. Sobbing over Troppmann's soon-to-be-bloody head, Dirty is, in her *folle supplication*, simultaneously supplicant and executioner, equal parts Pietà and Salomé.

The version of this passage found in the autograph manuscript may be even more revealing insofar as it is followed by another ellipsis of three lines that is itself elided from the printed version of the text:

— Troppmann! reprit-elle en me regardant avec ces yeux de plus en plus grands.  
Et elle caressa ma tête de blessé toute humide de fièvre avec ces longues mains sales. Elle pleurait ainsi comme on vomit, avec une supplication inouïe et la chevelure en partie trempée de larmes tellement elle sanglotait fort.....  
.....  
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Marmande, and Irwin after him, note that Bataille's emendations to the final version of the typed manuscript seem to indicate that he worked "to accentuate rather than diminish" (Irwin 91) the disorder of the book in part "par l'ajout de lignes blanches et la suppression de

transitions, les marques de ruptures et de dislocation” (Marmande 32). Here, however, in the autograph manuscript, we have a blank that is itself later erased. Nevertheless, this long ellipsis also marks a rupture in chronology (it directly precedes a flashback to an earlier scene) that might indicate a desire for more violent transition through its removal. Moreover, one can readily observe the types of changes Marmande dwells on in his study: Bataille’s attempts to make the text more brutal and *less* eloquent (“comme on vomit” rather than “ainsi comme on vomit”; “une folle supplication” instead of “une supplication inouïe”; or “tant elle sanglotait” to replace the arguably more poetic “tellement elle sanglotait fort”).

In any event the reader is confronted with a *textual* rupture that manifestly corresponds to a rupture in the characters’ bodies: Troppmann’s *tête de blessé* and the involuntary, inconsolable vomit-like sobbing (itself akin to bleeding) it inspires. From the very beginning then—one must remember that this passage was written two decades before the rest of the text—Troppmann is presented as an *already* injured personage, and as one whose ‘wounded head’, particularly, provokes a peculiar experience of pity. Dirty’s tear-drenched hair again recalls Mary Magdalene before the Christ;<sup>9</sup> her sullied hands will be echoed by the ink-stained wounds of Troppmann’s hands in an important childhood episode recounted later.

Speaking of the pseudonym Troppmann and the book attributed to it, the author calls *W.-C.* “un cri d’horreur (horreur de moi, non de ma débauche, mais de *la tête de philosophe* où depuis... comme c’est triste)” (*ÆC* III, 59, my emphasis). Another enigmatic ellipsis—and if this suggestive textual hole in conjunction with the mention of the name Troppmann is still insufficient to insinuate decapitation convincingly, Bataille allows for no doubt in his description of a drawing once included in this novel: “Un dessin de ‘W.-C.’ figurait un œil : celui

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<sup>9</sup> This “chevelure” (*ÆC* III, 385) also recalls Baudelaire’s poem by that title, where the woman’s hair is compared to both “un mouchoir” and an ocean opening onto *the blue of sky*: “l’azur du ciel immense et rond” (Baudelaire, *ÆC* I 26).

de l'échafaud. Solitaire, solaire, hérissé de cils, il s'ouvrait dans la lunette de la guillotine" (*ÆC* III, 59). Bound together here are two of Bataille's incessantly recurring leitmotifs: enucleation and the decapitating power of the sun—a nexus of interconnected signifiers that will reappear at the key moment of *Le Bleu du ciel* to be discussed further down. It is both the author's and the *thinker's* head ("la tête de philosophe") that has gone missing in an echo of Bataille's acephalic philosophical, political and (perhaps most importantly, I would contend) *esthetic* project. Susan Rubin Suleiman makes a similar observation, revealing how the metaphor moves increasingly toward the literal, noting that Bataille began exploring "the political and philosophical connotations of potency as headlessness the year after writing *Le bleu du ciel*, when he founded the secret society of *Acéphale*" (32)—among whose (ironic?) aims, as legend has it, may have been the staging of a human sacrifice by beheading.

"The expression *perdre la tête* recurs in the text with an almost slapstick frequency," notes Alexander Irwin in his chapter on the book; and the issue of decapitation has hardly gone unnoticed in the extensive secondary literature on *Bleu du ciel*,<sup>10</sup> where it is most often connected to the (uniformly politicized) question of castration. As Irwin has recently punned, "Headlessness becomes, as it were, a capital issue in *Le Bleu du ciel*, mingling desire for a surrender of rational control with images and anxieties of castration" (97). Bataille scholars are therefore more or less unanimous in their appraisal that castration qua decapitation—in this text in particular—is both feared and sought after. Even two of the work's earliest commentators, Ann Smock and Phyllis Zuckerman, conclude that "Troppmann flees and yet

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, it is perhaps *the most* commonly addressed aspect in readings of the text. Interpretations of the work focusing on this subject begin, to the best of my knowledge, with Smock and Zuckerman, who raise the issue of headlessness as a manner of interpreting the (in their view, profoundly gendered) politics of Bataille's novel. For Smock and Zuckerman, castration qua decapitation is also a potential explanation for the legless wax figurine and the mummy of one of Troppmann's dreams: taking a Cixousian approach to castration they contend that these are phallic (and more specifically Medusa-like) figures that represent "both the desired phallus and the threat of its disappearance" (69). Headlessness (or a desire for the same) as a kind of castration is also a key issue for Marmande, Hollier (especially in his chapter on the novel in *Les Dépossédés*), Suleiman, Alexander Irwin, Keith Reader, Sylvie Vanbaelen and Milo Sweedler, among others.

desires to experience castration” (69). At least from a literary-critical point of view, castration has become a signifier implying both itself and its own opposite.

Previous scholarship on *Le Bleu du ciel* has most often addressed this headlessness as a manner of interpreting the troubling political content of Bataille’s book—an approach perhaps epitomized by Susan Suleiman’s influential essay on the novel. Tracing the evolution of an inward turn in Bataille’s philosophical and political thought of the 1930s, Suleiman also concludes that Bataille *desires* castration—the *déchirement* of inner experience—as a paradoxical manner of achieving potency.<sup>11</sup> Losing his head is intended to restore Troppmann’s virility, aptly notes Suleiman, “according to that characteristically Bataillian equation which states that a violent loss of control is the precondition of *jouissance*, a radical letting go” (31). Suleiman’s aim, as I have hinted, is to reveal the *historical* implications of this *déchirement*: “My contention is that Bataille moved during the 1930s from an outward, action-oriented definition of virility to an inward one, and that this move was intimately related to the evolution of European politics during that decade” (33). Here I would like to employ her important observation to sketch a somewhat different history.

My purpose is to complement the many insightful readings of the politics of Bataille’s book by returning our attention to the esthetic implications of his inner tearing and of his desired headlessness, which are, I would contend, equally important as part of a *literary-historical* (as much as a political-historical) evolution—an inward turn intimately related to the ‘estheticism’ Bataille inherits from Baudelaire and Kafka. Which is to say that Bataille’s

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<sup>11</sup> This is in exact agreement, moreover, with Hollier’s position on castration in Bataille: “Castration qui n’est donc pas absence de virilité. Au contraire. Elle en est plutôt constitutive. Elle est virilisante (c’est en perdant le phallus qu’on le devient puisqu’on ne peut à la fois l’avoir et l’être)” (*La Prise de la Concorde*, 232).

wounds—both those that are the preferred rhetorical representation of his mystical and philosophical understanding of inner experience and those fictive wounds depicted by his novel—are not merely metaphorical but also, and more radically, *procedural*: if they are, on the one hand, an allegorical representation of an external political reality, they are also, on the other, a self-conscious depiction of the precarious (anti-)method by which this external reality is transposed into text.

This is not meant to imply that there *is* no political content to Bataille's book—such a claim would be an utter absurdity—or that its politics are unimportant, but rather to acknowledge that its potential political significations are inseparable from the novel's place in literary history. Indeed, its radical esthetic procedure is an important element of the author's acephalic anti-project outlined both in *L'Expérience intérieure* and in his founding of the secret society dedicated to the headless god—as Suleiman so rightly argues. For Bataille also explicitly conceives of *Le Bleu du ciel* as a revolutionary experiment in narrative form. “*Un peu plus, un peu moins,*” he writes in the very first lines of the avant-propos,

*tout homme est suspendu aux récits, aux romans, qui lui révèlent la vérité multiple de la vie. Seuls ces récits, lus parfois dans les transes, le situent devant le destin. Nous devons donc chercher passionnément ce que peuvent être des récits—comment orienter l'effort par lequel le roman se renouvelle, ou mieux se perpétue* (ŒC III, 381, original emphasis).

More explicitly than in Kafka or Baudelaire, it is the heritage of narrative—of novelistic storytelling—that is at stake here: this novel, Bataille's (first and) final foray into the genre, seeks to explore the limits of its own formal constraints, the ruptures at which it renews and perpetuates itself.

One such rupture is the violence by which the destruction of *W.-C.* permits the creation of the later *Bleu du ciel*—yet another example of the variety of self-negation that Bataille might term sovereignty. If Bataille's goal, as he claims, is to explore the *vérité multiple de la vie* through

storytelling, he does so in part through a *heterogeneous* writing strategy that allows the text to pursue many different avenues at once—but this process requires repeated violence against the text to open up its sometimes mutually contradictory possibilities. Francis Marmande, who takes this “violence faite au texte littéraire” (29) as the subject of his excellent analysis of the genesis and structure of the book, therefore concludes that the work is governed before all else by “la fragmentation et la transformation du fragment” (89). The result, particularly in the first half of the book, is a grotesque (or, again, as Bataille might have preferred to put it: *informe*) and jarringly inconsistent work of fiction, politics and philosophy—a truly *new* kind of novel.

“*Le souci de techniques différentes,*” Bataille therefore continues in his avant-propos, “*qui remédient à la satiété des formes connues, occupe en effet les esprits*” (*ŒC* III, 381, original emphasis); and his own book is a many-limbed monstrosity composed of an odd assemblage of incongruous parts of radically differing lengths, function and tone: some narrative or pseudo-autobiographical, some philosophical, some (like the avant-propos) expository, and many fragments that were also published elsewhere or included in other works such as *L’Expérience intérieure*. While *what* is represented by these various tonalities is by no means unimportant, one might, as Leo Bersani emphatically insists, be equally concerned by *how* they function formally: “We should be less interested in determining what these shifts of mood might *mean* (...) than in registering the effects of Bataille’s extraordinarily mobile juxtapositions” (111, my emphasis).<sup>12</sup> Like Baudelaire’s prose poems, the formal idiosyncrasy of the many moving parts that make up Bataille’s *Bleu du ciel* is their capacity to be removed, replaced and rearranged in order to produce a multiplicity of potential meaning(s).

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<sup>12</sup> Or, as Peter Colliers concludes in his psychoanalysis of the politics of the novel, one must acknowledge that the formal self-sabotage of the book is inherently manifold (*une vérité multiple*) as it refuses arrival at a single signified: “Bataille laisse la structure du roman sans cesse au bord de l’inertie et de l’autosabotage, et ne cesse de désavouer chaque signification éventuelle ébauchée” (92).

Marmande, certainly the novel's most thorough interpreter, has insightfully connected its textual fragmentation to the disintegrations to which Troppmann's physical and existential being are subjected over the course of the narrative. "Mon existence s'en allait en morceaux comme une matière pourrie" (quoted in Marmande, 51), laments Troppmann at a given moment. "Ces morceaux sont les fragments non choisis dont se compose le livre" (ibid.), concludes Marmande, attributing the text's final form more to aleatory than to exacting artistic choice. Again, Bersani would seem to agree: "He [Bataille] is arguing, from the very start, for an *abdication of the novelist's mastery over his material* (...) *Le Bleu du ciel* has trouble settling on its own sense, and this is largely how it revolutionizes the practice of writing novels" (113, original emphasis). The technical innovation of Bataille's book, from such a perspective, is its willingness to remain *formless*—and sometimes even at the expense of (definitive) 'meaning' insofar as the author declines, even refuses, to dominate his own subject matter with well-ordered discourse.<sup>13</sup>

This refusal of narrative domination is portrayed even within the confines of the plot of *Le Bleu du ciel*. There are but a select few moments in the novel where one witnesses Troppmann as a writer—an occupation of his that is never fully elucidated. One of these I shall examine in a moment, but another deserves brief mention in the context of headlessness. Early in the book the narrator returns from a night out in Paris nearing "quatre heures du matin, mais, au lieu de me coucher et de dormir, je tapai un rapport à la machine, toutes portes ouvertes" (*ŒC* III, 414). These open doorways associate writing with aperture, but they also cause the writing to be

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<sup>13</sup> Speaking of what might traditionally be understood as the feminine aspects of poetry, Suleiman also notes Bataille's "broken, fragmented style" in *Madame Edwarda* and the portion of *L'Expérience intérieure* titled 'Le Supplice'. To question such poetic fragmentation, she concludes "is to misunderstand Bataille profoundly—for the chief characteristic of the inner experience is not visible action, but *déchirement*, and inner sundering" (41). This choice of sundering would, as already stated, be poetic virility.

interrupted when, awoken by the noise, Troppmann's mother-in-law calls out "à travers sa porte" (*ŒC* III, 414) to tell him that his wife has telephoned during his absence. Immediately,

Troppmann recalls another written text, a forgotten letter from his estranged spouse:

J'avais en effet dans ma poche, depuis la veille, une lettre d'Édith. Elle me disait qu'elle téléphonerait ce soir-là après dix heures, et il fallait que je sois un lâche pour l'avoir oublié. Encore même étais-je reparti quand je m'étais trouvé devant ma porte! Je ne pouvais rien imaginer de plus odieux. Ma femme, que j'avais honteusement délaissée, me téléphonait d'Angleterre, par inquiétude; pendant ce temps, l'oubliant, *je traînais ma déchéance et mon hébétude* dans des endroits détestables. Tout était faux, jusqu'à ma souffrance. J'ai recommencé à pleurer tant que je pus : *mes sanglots n'avaient ni queue ni tête* (*ŒC* III, 414, my emphasis).

I quote this passage partly for its Baudelairean tone—the language used to describe Troppmann's nocturnal *flânerie* ("je traînais ma déchéance et mon hébétude") recalls the decadence of Baudelaire's *À Celle qui est trop gaie* ("je traînais mon atonie" [*ŒC* I 157])—but more important is the explicit allusion to Baudelaire's description of his collection of prose poems as having neither head nor tail. His writing giving way to guilty, muddled sobbing, Troppmann appears to abdicate to this formless esthetic. Like the book in which it is portrayed, it can be difficult to make heads or tails out of his sobbing.

This formlessness is, in fact, essential to the technical innovations of Bataille's work—the mix-and-match esthetic philosophy that brings together the book's many disparate and peripatetic fragments—and the author therefore concludes his musings on the novel, at the outset of *Le Bleu du ciel*, with the assertion that "*si nous voulons savoir ce qu'un roman peut être (...) Le récit qui révèle les possibilités de la vie (...) appelle un moment de rage, sans lequel son auteur serait aveugle à ces possibilités excessives*" (*ŒC* III, 381, original emphasis). The kind of texts *auxquelles l'auteur a été contraint* are thus marked by an inherent excess; and as far as the present novel is concerned, this excess is offered in part by the manifold possibility of its disjointed first chapter.

The radical *jouissance* of the kind of inner wound depicted in the novel involves a threat to the physical integrity not only of the personage but of the text as well: like Troppmann, who has been castrated and rendered *trop peu mann* (as Suleiman’s oft-cited observation has it) precisely *by the excess* of a second *p*,<sup>14</sup> *Le Bleu du ciel* is made monstrous, grotesque, by the inclusion of the rather supplemental chapter at its head. (In this context, we might recall the etymological proximity between *chapter* and *capital*, as evident in the German *Kapitel*.) Keith Reader’s interpretation of the name Troppmann is even more pertinent for the present purpose: with reference to the narrator’s impotence, Reader understands *Troppmann* not as *trop* (or *trop peu*) *mann*, but as a more obscene reference to manual stimulation—*trop main*, too much hand (71). The wounded extremity portrayed throughout the first chapter is thus once again a figure of excess issuing from an underlying lack.

This interpretation is equally relevant to the political and gender commentary offered by the novel. Part of Troppmann’s critique of the revolutionary Lazare, claim Smock and Zuckermann, is that as a woman she desires to lead: “It is significant that Troppmann finds this wish moving, not because of its boldness but on account of its absurdity. Lazare’s band of partisans attracts Troppmann inasmuch as its *head is out of place, is not really a head*” (61, my emphasis). One might, though, make the same claim about *Le Bleu du ciel* itself: its head (perhaps not really one at all) is out of place. Like Gilles de Rais, who kept and displayed the severed heads of his victims as souvenirs—revisiting them as they rotted—Bataille’s *Bleu du ciel*, through a kind of traumatic repetition compulsion, returns to the site of a previous crime and to the mutilated remains testifying to an earlier orgy: the vestiges of what was once *W.-C.* It is from this festering wound that the book is born.

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<sup>14</sup> Sylvie Vanbaelen also attempts to synthesize the two interpretations of Troppmann’s name, discussing not only Suleiman’s and Stoekl’s readings, but also referring to the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and Adorno’s discussion of the “he-man” and the “she-man” in *Minima Moralia* (83).

## 2: Inner Experience: Bataillian Estheticism

This observation offers new insight into *Le Bleu du ciel* not only as a self-conscious illustration of the author's notion of inner experience but also (and relatedly) as his own reception and reworking of the literary and philosophical standpoint suggested by the novel's initial chapter, its displaced head. Nearing the narrative climax, at what is perhaps the most indicative moment with regard to a Bataille's association of writing and the wound, the protagonist himself returns to the site of a previous trauma—a stabbing of his hand and an echo of the bandaged hand with which the text begins. Recalling this scarring incident from his childhood, Troppmann recounts:

Je passais les heures d'études à m'ennuyer, je restais là, presque immobile, souvent la bouche ouverte. Un soir, à la lumière du gaz, j'avais levé mon pupitre devant moi. Personne ne pouvait me voir. J'avais saisi mon porte-plume, le tenant, dans le poing droit fermé, comme un couteau, je me donnai de grands coups de plume d'acier sur le dos de la main gauche et sur l'avant-bras. Pour voir... Pour voir, et encore : *Je voulais m'endurcir contre la douleur*. Je m'étais fait un certain nombre de blessures sales, moins rouges que noirâtres (à cause de l'encre). Ces petites blessures avaient la forme d'un croissant, qui avait en coupe la forme de la plume (*ÆC* III, 454, original emphasis).

Writing here is patently figured as a wound—or perhaps, rather, inversely: a stabbing wound is figured as an inscription. But the injury of text is not inflicted, in this case, with the intention to cause pain, but rather to harden the writing subject against the threat of suffering. Or maybe Troppmann stabs himself merely as a remedy to those hours of ennui, purely out of curiosity: “Pour voir...” The ellipsis that then appears as the rhetorical object of this vision (to see *what*, exactly?) is a site (and sight) of scarring: the textual trace of a potential absence, of a rhetorical

or narrative omission.<sup>15</sup> But insofar as seeing the unseen<sup>16</sup> (in this case the lacuna of an ellipsis) is itself the aim of the injury, the desire for a wound is also *at the origin* of writing—an anteriority again made evident by the sustained pluperfect of the passage, situated twenty years before the rest of the narrative.

To put it more plainly: this ellipsis is the literal answer to its own suggested question. *Pour voir...* To see what? Just *that*: the points of ink about to decorate the narrator's hand—illustrated, once again, by these three black dots on paper. Clearly a self-conscious reflection on literary form, I would like to argue here for an interpretation of this particular wound as an eminently *literal* example of an automutilating text: of the variety of sadomasochistic sovereignty Bataille enthusiastically discovers in the works of Kafka. As Sylvie Vanbaelen has interpreted the passage: “In Troppmann's hand, the pen has become a mutilating knife, destroying his flesh while creating new signs (...) Writing thus becomes a (self)-destructive-constructive ‘dirty’ practice capable (...) of transforming, destroying and rebuilding” (84). It is my specific contention that the childhood stabbing of the author's hand depicted here can be understood as Bataille's own illustration of the self-mutilating writing (and unwriting by burning) by which *W.-C.* becomes *Le Bleu du ciel*. The later work is his revision—the renewal and perpetuation promised by the avant-propos—of the wounded text from which the novel emanates and the wounded hand with which its only remaining vestige begins. In short: *Le Bleu du ciel* is his reworking of the themes laid out already in the fragment *Dirty*. It is only through

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<sup>15</sup> Milo Sweedler provocatively argues, for instance, that *Le Bleu du ciel* (or at least the portion written in the 1930's) is in many ways a book inspired by Colette Peignot, but that after her death, this book like Bataille's others, is subjected to a “systematic elimination of virtually every trace of Laure” (76). I mention this in passing because a literary strategy of *omission* (and specifically the omitted mention of lost love ones) will inform my readings of Genet's *Pompes funèbres* and Cixous's *Souffles* in the coming chapters.

<sup>16</sup> This desire links such textual lacunae once again to questions of castration, inasmuch as in the Freudian account it is the vision of the mother's missing phallus (the sight of something *not* present) that first troubles the child subject. Along these same lines, Susan Bernstein has aptly defined the uncanny (a variant or cognitive registering of castration anxiety) as another experience under erasure, a “*vision of the invisible*, the autonomous ‘effect’ whose ground is simultaneously asserted and withdrawn” (1127, my emphasis). Returning to the text at hand, Vanbaelen also understands this “self-stabbing (...) as a castrating gesture, feminizing Troppmann by opening him” (84).

(and as) such injury that this perpetuation and renewal, that the writing of *Le Bleu du ciel*, is possible.<sup>17</sup>

The profound importance of images of physical injury to Bataille's philosophical, political and literary thought would be difficult to overstate. As Andrew Hussey has concluded in a study of Bataille's *Expérience intérieure*, the wound (for Bataille more often *la blessure* than *la plaie*<sup>18</sup>) becomes a kind of convenient shorthand for the experience of transgression that the thinker tries to capture and to advocate throughout his prolific œuvre, the guiding thread in a fundamentally heterogeneous career:

Bataille uses variously words such as 'communication', 'souveraineté', 'sacrifice' and 'nudité' to describe the experience of transgression (...) also sometimes described as a 'blessure', which indicates that [this experience of transgression] is a form of auto-mutilation, a self-inflicted wound, as much as it is a revelatory experience of external reality (19).

Hussey is referring specifically to the author's frequent description of inner experience as a kind of *déchirement*. The philosophical notion most relevant both chronologically and conceptually to the novel, inner experience is a quasi-mystical, ecstatic transcendence of the subject that (paradoxically, considering its name) allows contact with an *external* reality. But if this inner experience qua interior *tearing* is something that can happen to the individual, it is also something that happens to *paper*; and the literalization of such metaphors, I would contend, is equally important to Bataille's esthetic strategy.

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<sup>17</sup> Susann Cokal similarly contends that it is through this particularly writerly wound in *Le Bleu du ciel* that "Bataille and Troppmann open up not just the body but also the literary space, the space in which literature can take place and be written" (88); but she misunderstands the chronology of the passage as contemporaneous to the events of the story, therefore mistakenly conflating the political and esthetic-erotic drives far too reductively and wrongly concluding that "these punctures will be what finally get him out of the house and into the street" (ibid.).

<sup>18</sup> It can be surprising to admit that for an author as pyrotechnically provocative and brutally violent as Bataille, there is a relative rarity of *open* wounds described within his texts, as John Phillips notes of *Histoire de l'oil* in a book on pornography and censorship (67). Bataille's descriptions of wounds, as Cokal points out, are relatively sparse: "he keeps his wounds hidden, bandaged in a blankness of language. It seems that, as far as language is concerned, there is no interior to the body (...) language as he sees it has no interior, no meaning" (84).

Like Suleiman, whose work on another of Bataille's novels—his much more widely read *Histoire de l'œil* (1928)—successfully critiques and supplements overly 'textual' readings of Bataille's fiction,<sup>19</sup> Hussey therefore rightly and assertively insists on an interpretation of inner experience that would understand it not merely as a metaphor but rather also as a *real* experience grounded in *real* bodies.<sup>20</sup> But insofar as this transgressive experience is inherently at odds with written discourse itself, its 'reality' in writing is the source of a profound, paradoxical and unresolvable tension:

the obvious difficulty in fixing the relation between metaphorical terms used by Bataille, such as 'sacrifice', 'blessure', 'lacération' and 'cicatrice', and 'real' experience, that is to say experience which is felt and lived before it is codified in language. (...) Words such as 'sacrifice', 'blessure', and other terms which Bataille uses to transcribe the inner experience therefore necessarily function in part as metaphors (that they do so is a paradox as irreducible as it is inescapable). They also, within the framework of inner experience, have the status of liturgical language or prayer, that is to say language which escapes or exceeds a purely textual interpretation (21).

This peculiar metaphoricity requires—and it warrants repeating—that the text *actually* and actively perform the automutilation and dismemberment that it prescribes. If inner experience is indeed an attempt at a non-hierarchical (or again, in Bataille's own telling terminology: an *acéphalique*) anti-project, then this involves an assault on discourse best dramatized by the composition of his final novel to be published.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The aim is to find a middle ground between those feminist readings (particularly Andrea Dworkin's) that would understand *Histoire de l'œil* as 'mere' pornography and those (like Barthes's) that would reduce it to a play of signs with no significant semantic component. Equally critical of Barthes' overly textual interpretation, Michael Halley rightly concludes that for Bataille, "there does exist an erotic truth beyond the coded language of infinitely deferred referentiality. It is directly accessible in 'inner experience,' and Bataille's scriptural task is entirely dedicated to communicating it" (286).

<sup>20</sup> As Martin Crowley summarizes it, "Bataille's model of literature involves a *real* author, who has *really* undergone certain experiences, writing in such a way that the import of these experiences is *really* communicated to a *real* reader. (Does that grate? Does it *really*? Well, there you are, then—and here I am.) These emphases need qualification, of course: the experiences in question are of the nature of inner experience, namely the rending of the self; the author who communicates their effect to the reader is therefore no longer a figure of mastery, but communicates his ungraspable, unrepresentable dispersal" (770).

<sup>21</sup> Leslie Anne Boldt-Irons discovers this self-negation and refusal of discourse even on the level of the individual sign: "the mutilation and sacrifice effected by Bataille's imagery does not always operate *between* signs. It may also be directed from signifier to signified within the boundaries of a single sign. There is a question of Bataille setting a destructive reverberation in motion, a slippage by which the normally static objects of signifier and signified are

This autode(con)structive assault on discourse takes the (literary) wound as one of its fundamental metaphors; but this wounding, like Kafka's, both is and is not strictly speaking metaphorical—it is also intended as the intrusion of real experience into the experience of text, and therefore as a metaphor that transcends its own status as such.<sup>22</sup> Bataille gives philosophical weight to the sadomasochistic esthetics of injury (the desire to harm the reader, author and the text) we find in the earlier author. But like Kafka's *Sinnbild der Wunde*, Bataille has made even the real into a mental image. This is true not only of the actual political events represented and allegorized in *Le Bleu du ciel*<sup>23</sup> but also, for example, of the purportedly 'autobiographical' intrusions into *Histoire de l'œil* mapped out by the concluding "Coincidences"—which Bataille somewhat unconvincingly insists, in the same epilogue where he reveals the fate of *W.-C.*, are "d'une exactitude *littérale*" (*ÆC* III, 60, my emphasis).<sup>24</sup> Chief among these, tellingly, is another historical injury: the bullfighter Granero's enucleation, which Patrick French has aptly dubbed "that *punctum* of the real which tears a hole in the screen of

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disturbed into a movement upsetting their discursive equilibrium. This is the case of the slipping word, whose capacity for self-destruction or auto-mutilation (sacrifice) had been silenced by the straightjacket of discourse. The slipping word, the sign in reverberation, becomes, therefore, the site of a mutual antagonism, an antagonism between signifier and signified, which discursive language had silenced for the purposes and profit of project, and which Bataille sets off in a gesture of poetic violence" (97).

<sup>22</sup> Reading Bataille reading Kafka's *Die Verwandlung* (1912), Leahy also concludes that "metaphor has become physically real because it was already metaphysically true. Crossing over between the spheres of the metaphorical and the real, we are repeating the work of metaphor itself, which also functions as a transposition" (116)

<sup>23</sup> Which is to say that the very *real* events represented by the book become (in part, but importantly *only* in part) themselves the *signifiers* of the book's injurious esthetics, rather than the injuries documented in the plot remaining mere metaphors for the actual, political signifieds to which they explicitly refer. Themselves examples of the kind of *sursaut de rage* that makes novelistic innovation possible, these signifieds qua signifiers become part of the same variety of inescapable feedback loop we have already observed in Kafka's *Sinnbild*.

<sup>24</sup> In an enlightening study of this text, Jonathan Boulter contends that Bataille seeks to *enact* traumatic repetition through his writing and that this involves a necessary violence against the work itself. Commenting specifically on the supplemental nature of the concluding "Coincidences" he writes: "This notion of deformation, this transformation, or translation, of an occurrence from the past into the currency of present (inner) experience, is a perfect encapsulation of the method of *traumatizing the body of narrative through parody*. We may in fact see these moments in *Story of the Eye* as parodies of Bataille's own childhood experiences, as transgressions of ordinary experience in order to keep them current, or, perhaps, to supplement what is lacking in the memory" (171, my emphasis). From this perspective, the lacking reality (the trauma already overcome) of past experiences would be supplemented by parody not in order to narrativize away trauma but instead to keep it alive.

fiction” (146, original emphasis).<sup>25</sup> But the epitome of such an intrusion of the real is, of course, as French also notes, the lingchi torture victim, *le supplicié des cent morceaux*, whose photographic image (reproduced in 1961 in Bataille’s final book, *Les Larmes d’Éros*) serves as the key inspiration behind the notion of inner experience.<sup>26</sup>

Having been provided with this deeply unsettling photograph some years earlier while undergoing psychoanalysis with Adrien Borel, the author first introduces the image to his audience as an example of his own path toward enlightenment as inner experience late in his book on that subject. Revealing his personal method for achieving a kind of secular<sup>27</sup> ecstasy, “d’atteindre l’expérience *non discursive*” (*ÆC* V, 139, my emphasis), Bataille explains:

De toute façon, nous ne pouvons projeter le point-objet que par le drame. J’ai eu recours à des images bouleversantes. En particulier, je fixais l’image photographique—ou parfois le souvenir que j’en ai—d’un Chinois qui dut être supplicié de mon vivant. De ce supplice, j’avais eu, autrefois, une suite de

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<sup>25</sup> Hussey also concludes his study with a reference to this corrida as the model for Bataille’s artistic and philosophical exploration of inner experience as “a scar which will not heal” (167).

<sup>26</sup> It is interesting, if not particularly surprising, that Bataille’s efforts to capture an experience beyond language would lead him to take recourse to the visual—a trope that one could perhaps trace, space providing, from Baudelaire on Delacroix to Genet and Cixous on the wound in Rembrandt—and specifically to the photographic images of the *supplicié aux cent morceaux* that figures so prominently in *L’Expérience intérieure*, *Le Coupable* and especially in *Les Larmes d’Éros*, Bataille’s final book, where the images are actually reproduced. Susan Sontag discusses the image extensively in her *Regarding the Pain of Others*—a reading later to be critiqued by Louis Kaplan who claims that Sontag fails to recognize Bataille’s sovereign Nietzschean laughter in the face of death. In a book on Chinese torture, Timothy Brooks, Jérôme Bourignon and Gregory Blue correct the historical inaccuracies of Bataille’s account, tracing the treatment of the lingchi torture victim from *L’Expérience intérieure* and coming to the provocative hypothesis that *Les Larmes d’Éros* (especially the presentation of this photograph) may have been profoundly corrupted by an overly intrusive editorial hand.

<sup>27</sup> Although secular, the experience is explicitly compared to religious ecstasy. Both in *L’Expérience intérieure* and in *Le Coupable*, Bataille compares the lingchi victim to Christ, designating him as God Himself: “Je n’ai pas choisi Dieu comme objet, mais humainement, le jeune condamné chinois que des photographies me représentent ruisselant de sang, pendant que le bourreau le supplicie (la lame entrée dans les os du genou)” (*ÆC* V, 283). The identification goes so far as to reduce God to nothing other than a wound, as implied in a parenthesis of *L’Expérience intérieure*: “Dans l’abîme des possibilités, allant jetée toujours plus loin, précipitée vers un point où le possible est l’impossible même, extatique, haletante, ainsi l’expérience ouvre un peu plus chaque fois l’horizon de Dieu (la blessure), fait reculer un peu plus les bornes du cœur, le fond de l’être” (*ibid.*, 122, original emphasis). Hussey therefore insightfully understands the presentation of the divine in this book as a self-negating wound beyond the parameters of language: “At the end-point of inner experience, therefore, ‘Dieu’ is his [sic] own negation (...) God is (...) for Bataille, an impossibility who abolishes speech in the same way that his absence deprives the world of intelligibility” (45).

This understanding of divinity as a kind of wound also relates to the description, in the anti-novel *Madame Edwarda*, of eponymous prostitute’s genitalia both as “Dieu” and as a “plaie vive” (*ÆC* III, 21): “seul m’entend celui dont le cœur est blessé d’une incurable blessure,” writes Bataille, attempting to explain how the prostitute can be God, “telle que jamais nul n’en voulut guérir...; et quel homme, blessé, accepterait de ‘mourir’ d’une blessure autre que celle-là?” (*ibid.*, 26).

représentations successives. À la fin, le patient, la poitrine écorchée, se tordait, bras et jambes tranchés aux coudes et aux genoux. Les cheveux dressés sur la tête, hideux, hagard, zébré de sang, beau comme une guêpe (*ÆC* v, 139).

Both zebra-like and wasp-like by virtue of its stripes, this incongruous body-in-(un)becoming is the essence of the grotesque as I have been employing the term in previous chapters. This initial evocation of Bataille's beloved lingchi victim concludes with a brief textual break, a kind of gasp, and then a single-sentence fragment revealing this necessary *dramatization*—as Bataille himself designates it—to be a surprisingly *esthetic* one: “J'écris 'beau'!... quelque chose m'échappe, me fuit, la peur me dérobe à moi-même et, *comme si j'avais voulu fixer le soleil*, mes yeux glissent” (*ÆC* v, 139, my emphasis). Set apart by two small blanks this severed sentence is perhaps a textual manifestation of the amputations described here and at many points in *Le Bleu du ciel*. (One can deduce that these *jambes tranchées* of the *supplicié des cent morceaux* are a likely source of inspiration for the frequent loss of lower limbs in the dreamlike sequences composing the novel.) But the isolation of this sentence is also an example of a revolt against discourse, as Michèle Richman notes: “The break with linear narrative and the conventions of objectivity is evidenced in the tortured syntax and discontinuous fragments of *L'Expérience*” (112). I shall return to the attempt to stare directly at the sun—and the *glissement* it causes—in just an instant, but for the moment let us simply register that even this photographic documentation, proffered as the ostensible epitome of ‘real’ experience, has been abstracted, estheticized, made into art.

With this framework established, we can now turn finally, as promised, to what I consider the central epiphany of *Le Bleu du ciel* in order to reveal the novel to be a self-reflective performance of its own esthetic philosophy: a reversal of values that is of a piece with a decadent literary

procedure of decomposition. Having followed Lazare to Barcelona—a city ready to erupt with violence—Troppmann has summoned both Xénie and Dorothea, hereby bringing together the three competing erotic and narrative interests of the novel, its apparently mutually exclusive, excessive possibilities. Having just recalled the childhood incident of his wounded hand, Troppmann recounts,

Je descendis de la voiture et ainsi je vis le ciel étoilé pardessus ma tête. Après vingt années, l'enfant qui se frappait à coups de porte-plume attendait, debout sous le ciel, dans une rue étrangère, où jamais il n'était venu, il ne savait quoi d'impossible. Il y avait des étoiles, un nombre infini d'étoiles. C'était absurde, absurde à crier, mais d'une absurdité hostile. J'avais hâte que le jour, le soleil, se levât. Je pensais qu'au moment où les étoiles disparaîtraient, je serais certainement dans la rue. En principe, j'avais moins peur du ciel étoilé que de l'aube (*ÆC* III, 454).

If the starry sky portrayed here is also an important echo (this one in advance) of the cemetery scene where Dirty and Troppmann will fall into the astral candles burning atop tombstones, even more significant is the fearful reference to the sun that will dominate the rest of the passage. For this terror of the sun recalls—among many other moments from Bataille's work—the isolated sentence just quoted from his description of the lingchi torture victim in *L'Expérience intérieure*: “comme si j'avais voulu fixer le soleil, mes yeux glissent.” Instigating another gliding chain of associations and recollections, the sun about to dawn is both blinding and decapitating—the two injuries that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, serve traditionally as displaced literary surrogates for the imagined wound of castration.

The passage that then follows, from which the title of the book is drawn, is worth quoting at some length as the rest of my analysis of *Le Bleu du ciel* will focus predominantly on unpacking this single paragraph. Troppmann continues with his recollections, now relating a series of injuries—some physical, some metaphorical, some existential—all leading to the essential conclusion that his purpose in life is a reversal of all values.

Je me rappelai avoir vu passer, vers deux heures de l'après-midi, sous un beau soleil, à Paris—j'étais sur le pont du Carrousel—une camionnette de boucherie : les cous sans tête de moutons écorchés dépassaient des toiles et les blouses rayées bleu et blanc des bouchers éclataient de propreté : la camionnette allait lentement, en plein soleil. Quand j'étais enfant, j'aimais le soleil : je fermais les yeux et, à travers les paupières, il était rouge. Le soleil était terrible, il fallait songer à une explosion : était-il rein de plus solaire que le sang rouge coulant sur le pavé, comme si la lumière éclatait et tuait ? (...) Mes yeux ne se perdaient plus dans les étoiles qui luisaient au-dessus de moi réellement, mais dans le bleu du ciel de midi. Je les fermais pour me perdre dans ce bleu brillant : de gros insectes noirs en surgissaient comme des trombes en bourdonnant. De la même façon que surgirait, le lendemain, à l'heure éclatante du jour, tout d'abord point imperceptible, l'avion qui porterait Dorothea...J'ouvris les yeux, je revis les étoiles sur ma tête, mais je devenais fou de soleil et j'avais envie de rire : le lendemain, l'avion, si petit et si loin qu'il n'atténuerait en rien l'éclat du ciel m'apparaîtrait semblable à un insecte bruyant et, comme il serait chargé, dans la cage vitrée, des rêves démesurés de Dirty, il serait dans les aires, à ma tête d'homme minuscule, debout sur le sol—au moment où en elle la douleur déchirerait plus profondément que d'habitude—ce qu'est une impossible, une adorable “mouche des cabinets”. J'avais ri et ce n'était pas seulement l'enfant triste aux coups de porte-plume, qui allait, dans cette nuit, le long des murs : j'avais ri *de la même façon* quand j'étais petit et que j'étais certain qu'un jour, *moi*, parce qu'une insolence heureuse me portait, je devrais tout renverser, de toute nécessité tout renverser (*ŒC* III, 454-455, my emphasis).

A sovereign laughter explicitly associated with this image of writing as an act of (auto)injury, not only is this passage, to my mind, the central moment of *Le Bleu du ciel*, it is, moreover, an essential quilting point binding together much of Bataille's œuvre. The decapitating power of the sun connects the passage implicitly to Bataille's reflections on automutilation in his oft-cited essay on Van Gogh's ear and contemporary *faits divers* recounting the torments of self-mutilators: Bataille understands the painter's mythical severing his own ear (and similar self-mutilations) as the corporeal manifestation or literalization of an identical “déchirure intérieure” (*ŒC* I, 262) resulting from a self-sacrificial desire to stare directly at the sun, to “fixer de sa fenêtre cette sphere éblouissante” (*ŒC* I, 260).<sup>28</sup> More explicitly, the passage cited

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<sup>28</sup> This essay has been extensively discussed in the vast scholarship on Bataille. Claire Lozier, for instance, rightly understands the view of automutilation it presents as a model for Bataillan writing: “L'écriture, en ce qu'elle est projetée hors du moi par un sujet qui se débarrasse d'une partie de son être, relève du sacrifice au même titre que l'automutilation que Bataille associe directement à la mise à mort du moi dans ‘La Mutilation sacrificielle et l'oreille coupée de Vincent Van Gogh’ (89). Hussey comments on the automutilation essay as an example of how

here quotes extensively and directly from Bataille's dossier on what he calls the pineal eye—a similar kind of aperture, emptiness and *déchirement* to the one described above.

But most important, perhaps, are the allusions and citations from *L'Expérience intérieure* and the somewhat more surprising borrowings of images already employed years earlier in what was to become the novel's own first chapter. The blinding light, for instance, echoes the “lumière électrique (...) aveuglante” (*ÆC* III, 388) associated with Troppmann's bloodied face in the portion of the text once titled *Dirty*. And if the decapitated lambs reflect his own *acéphalité* which is so obviously at issue there, they also recall the earlier description of *Dirty* as a slaughtered pig—“écarlate et tordue sur sa chaise comme un porc sous un couteau...” (*ÆC* III, 389).<sup>29</sup> (This association is again emphasized just a few pages later as Troppmann anxiously awaits the arrival of *Dirty* and *Xénie*: “Je regardai [...] par la fenêtre [...] une partie de ciel brillant. [...] J'éprouvai la fraîcheur du matin, en plein soleil [...] Je pensai aux bulles de sang qui se forment à l'issue d'un trou ouvert par un boucher dans la gorge d'un cochon” [*ÆC* III, 463].)<sup>30</sup> Swarmed by black insects, Troppmann seems to be a kind of corpse, the presence of death in life, but the description of a “mouche de cabinet” also recalls the scatological nature of the title *W.-C.* Whether these allusions and correspondences are intentional or entirely unconscious, the surfeit of shared motifs can hardly be purely coincidental: these commonalities at the very least imply the underlying philosophical and esthetic affinity linking the two disjointed but nevertheless amalgamated texts.

This shared philosophy is none other than the paradigm of inner experience as an ecstatic wound. At the conclusion of the few pages of *L'Expérience intérieure* themselves titled

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Bataille (following Kojève) comes to understand Hegel as a self-deconstructive thinker (90-96) whereas Irwin sees it as a rejection of Durkheim (8). Stoekl uses the essay as a lens for interpreting the politics of *Le Bleu du ciel* (3-21). Most pertinently, Biles compares the diurnal self-mutilation of the essay explicitly to this particular passage from the novel (139-140).

<sup>29</sup> Irwin also relates these two passages (100).

<sup>30</sup> For Brian Fitch, these *bulles de sang* recall the spherical forms of the eye and the egg central to *Histoire de l'œil* and the window is an echo of the “trou éclairé de la fenêtre vide” from that text. (*ÆC* I, 87).

“Le bleu du ciel”, in a passage dated August 1934, Bataille once more employs many of the same motifs:

A la lueur éclatante du Ciel, aujourd’hui, la justice écartée, cette existence malade, proche de la mort, et cependant réelle, s’abandonne au “manque” que révèle sa venue au monde.

L’ “être” accompli, de rupture en rupture, après qu’une nausée grandissante l’eut livré au vide du ciel, est devenu non plus “être” mais blessure et même “agonie” de tout ce qui est (*ÆC* v, 95).<sup>31</sup>

Inner experience is lauded as the repeated ruptures by which the completed being, like the completed work of art, like the lingchi torture victim, becomes nothing other than a self-negating wound: “non plus ‘être’ mais blessure” (*ÆC* v, 95). That these same themes and motifs (wounding, a proximity to death, the emptiness of sky) are equally at issue in *Le Bleu du ciel* is beyond all doubt, especially when one compares this passage to an explanatory *prière d’insérer* included in the original edition of the novel but nowhere in the *Œuvres complètes*:

Le verbe vivre n’est pas tellement bien vu, puisque les mots *viveur* et *faire la vie* sont péjoratifs. Si l’on veut être moral, il vaut mieux éviter tout ce qui est vif, car choisir la vie au lieu de se contenter de rester en vie n’est que débauche et gaspillage.

A son niveau le plus simple, *Le bleu du ciel* inverse cette morale prudente en décrivant un personnage qui se dépense jusqu’à toucher la mort à force de beuveries, de nuits blanches, et de coucheries. Cette dépense, volontaire et systématique, est une méthode qui transforme la perte en connaissance et découvre le ciel dans le bas.

Face à la mort, en sachant que rien ne lui échappe, il ne saurait être question de “salut”, aussi la volonté de se perdre est-elle la seule éclairante—la seule d’où puisse surgir une nouvelle souveraineté (quoted in *Marmande*, 50).

It is part on the basis of this insert that I consider the passage discussed above to be an epiphany anchoring Bataille’s text: the vocation of a neo-Nietzschean reversal of values with which Troppmann’s childhood recollection concludes is isolated here as *the* key message of his novel. As a fundamental subversion of any ‘prudent’ morality that would value death over life,

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<sup>31</sup> These pages were initially printed in the publication *Minotaure* where they accompanied a poem by Masson inspired partly by his own ecstatic epiphany resulting from a war wound (see *ÆC* v, 438–439).

Bataille's injurious *esthetic* of automutilating authorship—like Baudelaire's purportedly *amoral* art-for-art estheticism before it—is endowed with an unexpected *ethical* importance.

Moreover, this *prière d'insérer* explicitly identifies Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* (and apparently Troppmann's profoundly decadent behavior therein) as an act of *sovereignty* in the same sense attributed to the sovereignty of Kafka, Nietzsche and Gilles de Rais: an erotic attachment to libidinal urges that affirm life, according to Bataille's familiar formula, even unto death. But it is the final paragraph of the insert that is the most revealing:

*Le bleu du ciel* en décrit l'apprentissage en dénudant au fond de chacun de nous cette fente, qui est la présence toujours latente de notre propre mort. Et ce qui apparaît à travers la fente, c'est le bleu d'un ciel dont la profondeur "impossible" nous appelle et nous refuse aussi vertigineusement que notre vie appelle et refuse sa mort (ibid.).

Clear from this description is that the blue of sky Troppmann encounters at the moment of his greatest recognition is itself a kind of wound or cleft (*une fente*) into which he is drawn: an inner tearing that simultaneously attracts and repels, the latent but inevitable presence of death in life. Understood in this way, as an inner hemorrhaging, ultimately it becomes apparent that this *bleu* of sky is not so much a color—but a bruise.

### 3: Communication: Bataille's Literary History

If this momentous anti-morality most explicitly recalls Nietzsche's, the self-negation it involves is also part of Bataille's literary and philosophical contribution to an ethical-esthetic development beginning, by his own account, with Baudelaire—"un problème qui met en question les fondements de la poésie et de la morale" (*ŒC* IX,191). It is the suppression of the individual will (*la volonté*) with its inevitable desire for the Good that permits a Baudelairean

esthetics of Evil through what Bataille, again in *La Littérature et le Mal*, calls *communication*: “*La littérature est communication. (...) la morale rigoureuse est donné dans cette vue à partir de complicités dans la connaissance du Mal, qui fondent la communication intense*” (ÆC IX, 172, original emphasis). Communication in this specific sense (shared complicity in the knowledge of Evil, writ large, “fusion du sujet et de l’objet, de l’homme et du monde” [ÆC IX, 196]) is paramount to Bataille’s literary-philosophical aims and perspectives. In his historicized interpretation of Baudelaire, Bataille implicitly discovers a precursor to his own violent eroticism, a longing for the ‘impossible’, a gloriously wasteful writing of excess and a fascination with Evil. But the tension between a refusal of the Good and the desire to produce a lasting oeuvre necessarily “engage la poésie sur une voie de décomposition rapide” (ÆC IX, 209). Bataille thus places Baudelaire under the sign of a (not entirely unambivalent) literary decadence; and through his comments on Baudelaire and Kafka, the author of *Le Bleu du ciel* has positioned himself squarely in the literary history of modernity suggested by this dissertation.

The *decomposition* at issue here, as in Paul Bourget’s account of Baudelairean decadence as a breakdown into ever smaller poetic unities, involves subjecting the literary body to violent and sometimes destructively painful permutations; and, accordingly, Bataille describes the composition of *L’Expérience intérieure* as an anguished amputation:

Je traîne en moi comme un fardeau le souci d’écrire ce livre. En vérité je suis *agi*. Même si rien, absolument, ne répondait à l’idée que j’ai d’interlocuteurs (ou de lecteurs) nécessaires, l’idée seule agirait en moi. Je compose avec elle à tel point qu’on m’enlèverait un membre plus facilement (ÆC V, 75, original emphasis).

This work, like its novelistic counterpart, seems then to be one of those *livres auxquelles l’auteur a été contraint*: “En vérité je suis *agi*.” And, importantly, it is only through such brutal dismemberment that its content can be communicated to its imagined reader. This cliché of

artistic suffering offers some explanation (if not, perhaps, a convincing justification) for Bataille's disturbing fascination with the lingchi victim:

Le jeune et séduisant Chinois dont j'ai parlé, livré au travail du bourreau, je l'aimais d'un amour ou l'instinct sadique n'avait pas de part : il me communiquait sa douleur ou plutôt l'excès de sa douleur et c'était ce que justement je cherchais, non pour en jouir, mais *pour ruiner en moi ce qui s'oppose à la ruine* (*ŒC* v, 140, my emphasis).

Communication, in Bataille's specific sense, the ultimate aim of all literature, is only rendered possible through profound self-ruin.<sup>32</sup> This view is repeatedly reaffirmed in *Le Coupable*, the philosophical work intended to follow *L'Expérience* as the second volume of Bataille's appropriately uncompleted magnum opus, *La Somme athéologique*: "L'inachèvement, la blessure, la douleur nécessaire à la communication. L'achèvement en est le contraire" (*ŒC* v, 266). It is, in Bataille's view, only through its own destruction that discourse, that language, can be opened up to an experience of the *real* that would exceed it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As an anti-discursive opening onto non-knowledge (*le non savoir*), for François Bizet, "plus encore que l'acéphalité, la 'communication' désigne l'instant propre de la décapitation" (72).

<sup>33</sup> This phenomenon has not gone unnoticed. Hussey once again argues that "self-mutilation is not only a version of suicide, but also (...) the establishment of a symbolic language which not only functions beyond the metaphorical limits of discourse, but also reintroduces the possibility of communication" (94). Benjamin Noys agrees: "It is an experience of ecstasy as *ekstasis* (standing-outside) that leaves one undone (...) Bataille is not a sadist, nor is he celebrating death, but for him this image of pain makes a *communication* possible" (29, original emphasis). Jean Dragon speaks of this in terms of an "autocastrative refusal" that inscribes an "impossible real" into language. Dragon contends that the "body of the author is (...) under the authority of a hand that erases it, and disappears toward an impossible sovereignty, in an operation not different from what Bataille calls communication" (34).

Louis Kibler, however, in his reading of *Le Bleu du ciel*, might well object to the notion that this kind of transcendent communication is present in Bataille's fiction, praising the author instead for literary communication of a more profane variety: "Literature can express the mystic experience only incompletely: it can perhaps impart a perception or an appreciation of the mystic states, but not participation in them. Certainly this is communication, but without pretensions to spiritual rapture. It is communication on an esthetic—not mystic—level; and Bataille is at his finest when he purposefully communicates on this level, as he does in (...) *Le Bleu du ciel* (...) Here Bataille's artistic use of imagery succeeds in transforming the erotic and almost mystic ecstasy of the protagonist into an esthetic experience" (209). While I agree that Bataille profoundly *estheticizes* the experience of the real, I believe that Kibler fundamentally misrepresents the notion of communication (which is always participatory in the Bataillian sense) in his attempt to divorce the two—the mystical and esthetic aspects of inner experience are inextricable.

“La littérature,” repeats Bataille in the concluding chapter of *La Littérature et le Mal*, “est communication. Elle part d’un auteur souverain, par-delà les servitudes d’un lecteur isolé, elle s’adresse à l’humanité souveraine” (*ŒC* IX, 300). The subject of this essay is, however, none other than Jean Genet, to whom my own next chapter is dedicated and who, for Bataille, “n’a ni le pouvoir ni l’intention de *communiquer* avec ses lecteurs. L’élaboration de son œuvre a le sens d’une négation de ceux qui la lisent” (*ŒC* IX, original emphasis). Essentially, so the argument goes, Genet cannot truly subvert and reverse values in the same manner as an individual such as Troppmann would desire, because the author, underneath it all, accepts the established ethical hierarchy imposed upon him, with the only revision being that he embraces Evil instead of its opposite.<sup>34</sup> Genet, in Bataille’s account, merely supplants morality—Bataille repeatedly employs the term *ersatz* in his brief essay—with a search for *beauty*, thereby mistakenly replacing ethical concerns with esthetic ones.

In short, Genet is too radically estheticist to be considered sovereign in the strict Bataillean sense—the ultimate *esthete* of Evil, an all-too-eager aficionado of those Baudelairean flowers, Genet *too readily* recognizes his own sovereignty and is therefore incapable of the self-negation of the sovereign *operation* (*ŒC* IX, 300, 303) that communication requires (*ŒC* III, esp. 295-296). “Dans un texte de fiction,” explains Claire Lozier, “pour que la communication soit souveraine et authentique, le sacrifice du *je* qui écrit touche narrateur et écrivain (...) ils pratiquent le sacrifice tout autant qu’ils en sont l’objet” (89, original emphasis). Genet, in Bataille’s view, has not opened himself to the same threat of violence to which his reader is subjected and therefore has not opened up the possibilities of authentic sovereign communication. The following chapter seeks, in part, to correct this misunderstanding—to

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<sup>34</sup> Or as Claire Lozier has summarized it in her work on abjection in Bataille, Genet and Beckett: “Il y a, pour Bataille, une *bonne* et une *mauvaise* abjection: celle qui peut renverser les interdits et affirmer la souveraineté humaine, celle qui les respecte et est un signe d’asservissement” (30).

show how Genet's writing turns destructively against itself through a self-censorship qua automutilation of which Bataille might indeed approve: the ultimate slippage of the real-life author into a purely textual phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> Genet's estheticism would in fact be of the same variety as Bataille's estheticization of the 'real' in his "Coincidences" or his treatment of the lingchi torture victim—with his factual autobiography eventually disappearing entirely into an artwork.

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<sup>35</sup> This relationship is also discussed by Bizet, whose remarkably thorough book on Bataille's reception of Genet, *Une Communication sans échange*, has similar aims in reconciling the two authors (esp. 302-305). In Bizet's account the failure of communication is not a result of Genet's writing but rather of Bataille's reading: his overdependence on Sartre's understanding of Genet and his sudden willingness to turn the flexible category of *communication* into a rigid doctrine and measure of literary and ethical merit.

**Part 2**  
The Textual Orifice

Chapter 4  
**The Textual Orifice:**  
Holes in Jean Genet's *Pompes funèbres* (1947)

In early 2010, during one of her marathon six-hour seminars at the Maison Heinrich Heine of the Cité Université in the south of Paris, Hélène Cixous provided a provocative reading of a seemingly innocuous passage from a late essay of Jean Genet's in which he describes all artistic or poetic masterpieces made possible "par un coup de pot" (*ÆC* VI, 213), and specifically Dostoyevsky's *Les Frères Karamazov*, as

une farce, une bouffonnerie à la fois énorme et mesquine, puisqu'elle s'exerce sur tout ce qui faisait de [Dostoïevski] un romancier possédé, elle s'exerce contre lui-même, et avec des moyens astucieux et enfantins, dont il use avec la mauvaise foi têtue de saint Paul.

Il est possible, s'il portait en lui ce roman depuis plus de trente ans, il est possible qu'il ait voulu l'écrire sérieusement (...) mais en cours d'écriture il a dû sourire, peut-être à propos d'un de ses procédés (...) et enfin se laisser emporter par la jubilation. Il se jouait un bon tour (*ÆC* VI, 213-14).

With the assertion that *pot*, in such idiomatic expressions as the one just quoted—*coup de pot*—etymologically refers to the buttocks, and that Proust's expression for sodomy (for instance) was *casser le pot*, Cixous concluded that Genet here, as always, is determined to sodomize his reader. (If memory serves, she put it just this way: *Il est bien décidé d'enculer son lecteur.*) And with this simple observation she performed a surprising little trick, instantly transforming the passage above into the following:

un romancier **possédé** (...) avec la mauvaise foi têtue de saint **Paul** (...) Il est **possible**, s'il **portait** en lui ce roman (...) il est **possible** qu'il ait voulu l'écrire sérieusement (...) mais en cours d'écriture il a dû sourire, peut-être à propos d'un de ses procédés (...) et enfin se laisser **emporter** par la jubilation.

The phoneme-finding game continued. In a single sentence Cixous had unearthed five full [po]s and a fair number of near-misses. It was an interpretation dignified of Genet's

description of the book itself: a farce, a buffoonery at once enormous and petty, executed “avec des moyens astucieux et enfantins” (*ŒC* VI, 214). Genet as well had *joué un bon tour*, putting one over on his reader, insistently showing an ass to an audience perhaps unwilling to accept it.

The following chapters will, in their own way, also be a farce—hopefully as shrewd as it is childish. Cixous’s ludic but important reading will be my model in an attempt to locate and explore the *hidden holes* in texts. What follows will be an investigation of two apparently fragmentary novels—Genet’s *Pompes funèbres* (1947) and, in the subsequent chapter, Cixous’s reception<sup>1</sup> of it in her ‘fiction’ *Souffles* (1975)—with an eye to their presentation of the holes in human bodies, specifically: the cunt, the asshole and the wound.<sup>2</sup> These orifices are not mere signifiers, but rather rhizomatic loci serving as the centers of gravity for a nexus of interconnected motifs, esthetic elements and gestures toward a multiplicity of meaning. As such they are also the site of both the breakdown of meaning and of its possible reconfiguration—deconstructing and restructuring the artwork according to their own peculiar esthetic logic.

I will begin with an enquiry into the role played by the *sexe* (to employ a Cixousian term to be defined momentarily) in each work: Cixous’s *con* in *Souffles* and, especially, Genet’s anus in his *Pompes funèbres*. It is around the erotic orifice that the allegorical content of each book orbits; Cixous’s *con* and Genet’s *pot* or *cul* operate both metaphorically (by condensation of various concurrent allegorical valences) and metonymically (by associative slippage and willful

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<sup>1</sup> Mairéad Hanrahan, for instance, identifies *Souffles* as “the fictional text by Cixous where the intertext with Genet is perhaps the most important” (724) and looks to Cixous’s use of alliteration in this work and passages of *Le Rire* or *Sorties* as evidence of a “privileging of the play of the signifier” (“InterSext” 724) she sees as an inheritance from Genet.

<sup>2</sup> Considering the subject matter it would, for better or for worse, prove impractical to mince words here; moreover it might do a disservice to the provocation intended by these books by subsuming them into a discourse they explicitly resist. Hence I use the most direct and idiomatically appropriate translations of those words chosen by Genet (*cul*) and Cixous (*con*). In a 1975 interview with Christiane Makward, Cixous herself speaks of her difficulties writing academically, through “obligation to the law of legibility,” during her days as a student: “I didn’t write my papers as *writing*, first of all that would never have occurred to me; but certainly, in order to get to the point of writing a paper, I had to combat the writing in me. Obviously, what I was doing was not academic, I could not bend myself to that sort of work ordered in a certain manner; I already had to do something very explosive. You know, I invested very little in the academic type of production, it was very constraining...I don’t have good memories of it” (31, original emphasis).

displacement) to produce the peculiar variety of polysemy that Genet observes in Dostoyevsky: “Tout acte a donc une signification et la signification inverse” (*ÆC* VI, 214). There is a certain violence inherent to this strategy of signification; and, accordingly, I subsequently demonstrate how Genet’s treatment renders the anus analogous to the bullet holes—the mortal wounds—that inspire his novel. Both Genet and Cixous, at various moments, explicitly designate the wound as the sole source of beauty and the origin of all art. An attention to the genetic (in both the metaphorically biological and the more concretely textual sense) evolution of each book will allow us to determine how this literary approach comes to affect the very structure of the artwork, fragmenting the text in order to allow it to reform with even greater potential to make meaning. These orifices, as it turns out, are an ideal case study to expose the idiosyncratic functioning of language and the heritage of linear narrative in two of the most important—and, each in their own way, most provocative—French-language writers of the twentieth century.

### 1: The Erotic Orifice: The Sex(te)

Genet’s aggressive and subversive comportment toward his readership recalls Cixous’s own early essays—the feminist manifestos for which she is perhaps still best known—and particularly the central proclamation of *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1975): “on va leur *montrer* nos sextes!” (*Rire* 54, original emphasis). Both text and vagina, Cixous’s portmanteau is part of a larger political agenda attempting to rehabilitate a ‘feminine’ writing of the body hitherto oppressed by the domination of another neologism of the day: phallogocentrism or, more broadly, phallogocentrism. Of course, Cixous’s laughing Medusa herself is also a *sexte*: a brutal parody of Freud’s interpretation of the gorgon as a terrifying ‘castrated’ mother, whose coiffe of snakes is

a compensatory multiplication of the absent penis. For the father of psychoanalysis, “[d]er Schreck der Meduse ist (...) Kastrationsschreck, der an einen Anblick geknüpft ist (...) er ergibt sich, wenn der Knabe, der bisher nicht an die Drohung glauben wollte, ein weibliches Genitale erblickt” (Freud 47). Never one to pass up a possible literalization of an intriguing allegory, Cixous will teasingly terrorize a phallogocentric society hooked on its castration complex with a new Medusa, with a vagina that is *not* a wound, *not* a scar testifying to castration. As Frédéric Regard describes it in his introduction to the recent reëdition of the essay, the aim of showing the *sexe* is to “mettre l’ordre établie sens dessus dessous en affichant une volonté proprement carnavalesque de brouiller le jeu de la bienséance” (*Rire* 13). Whatever it may be more concretely or more metaphorically, the *sexe* is certainly subversive.

And indeed, if Genet appears to command his reader to bend over, Cixous’s early poetic writings seem almost to be spreading their legs. Early on in *Souffles* she offers what might as well be an ode to the vagina, delivered in an almost incomprehensibly dense “langue du con” that comes from far away to “enculer” the eardrum (*Souffles* 17):

L’air résonne des *ondes* émises par un **con** de *bronze*<sup>3</sup> (...) le grand battant horizontal a frappé *son gong*. Longtemps, longtemps *gronde*, et **gonfle** l’air immense de ses *ondes*, le **con** du *monde*. Nous pelotonnés au sein de sa voix géante. Le dais céleste est dilaté, ses quatre colonnes **consonnent**. Un *son* ne succède pas à un *son* mais le doublant, l’étoffé et le porte plus loin, *onde* sur *onde* chante le grand **con conquérant**.

Je sens **qu’on** vient de s’éveiller dans l’autre vie jumelle (*Souffles* 17, my emphasis).

This is one of many imaginative erotic encounters chronicled by *Souffles*—meant perhaps as an illustration of the very type of *écriture féminine* Cixous will come to advocate in essays such as *Rire de la Méduse* and *La venue à l’écriture* (1976). To the extent that the book can be said to have a plot, characters or any other features of traditional fiction, it must be described as an extended

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<sup>3</sup> Note that *œil de bronze*, to be discussed in a moment, figures chiefly among the many slang appellations for the anus catalogued in *Pompes funèbres*.

apostrophe recounting fantasies of such erotic scenes.<sup>4</sup> In a demonstration of “l’autre bisexualité” (*Rire* 52, original emphasis) central to Cixous’s notion of feminine writing,<sup>5</sup> the addressee of the text is constantly changing: sometimes mother, sometimes lover, often Jean Genet (or simply *J* or, less simply, *Jenais*) himself—but insofar as the effusion of poetic language is addressed to a *toi*, it is always and inevitably the *reader* who fills this role.

As is made apparent by the transformation of Genet into Jenais, on a metaphorical level the *con* above simultaneously performs an erotic and a generative function—an essential hesitation also demonstrated by the recurring reference to Botticelli’s allegorical painting *Primavera* (1482), wherein the pregnant central figure is both the incarnation of virginal motherhood (as the Madonna) and of the erotic (as Venus).<sup>6</sup> The *con*, then, is the setting of a drama of both sex and birth, with the sky opening up into a gaping hole: “Le dais céleste est dilaté, ses quatre colonnes **con**sonnent.” The same phoneme, [kɔ̃], in its iterations as *qu’on* is, of course, also representative of the players in this drama. In a single passage, then, *con* is the

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<sup>4</sup> In an interview with Christiane Makward, Cixous notes that this is the first of her writings to attempt a narrative but acknowledges that the stories and scenes contained in the book are ultimately “false narratives, they are pseudo-stories which simply follow a course. It is a passage through a night, if you like, but really it is the passage through a body” (34). Focusing on the metaphor of birth, Susan Rubin Suleiman provides an admirably lucid summary of the elusive narrative arch of Cixous’s text: “The primary voice who speaks (...) and who says ‘I’ fantasizes several violent scenes of birth, both by herself and by another—perhaps her own—mother. She herself harbors a number of mothers within her, and eventually gives birth to a young woman who is perhaps another version of herself. She also gives birth to this text, which is ‘delivered’ from her body” (53).

<sup>5</sup> As Martineau Masters notes, “dans un de ces premiers textes de fiction, *Souffles*, elle [Cixous] se met en position masculine, ou plutôt dans une posture presque hermaphrodite. Son intention est de faire fusionner l’homme et la femme, leurs deux corps se rejoignant, mais chacun gardant ses caractéristiques propres. Cette union se fait surtout dans la description de l’acte sexuel, de la naissance et d’un voyage de la femme à travers le corps de l’homme. Le narrateur n’a pas réellement de sexe puisque pronoms féminin et masculin sont utilisés, indifféremment semble-t-il en première lecture” (17). Anu Aneja makes a similar observation in an article on Cixous’s *Vivre l’Orange* (1979): “In her *Souffles* (...) Hélène Cixous establishes a dialectic with Jean Genet, whose text becomes the metaphor of the engendering mother. The unstable and constantly shifting genders of the narrator and her interlocutor become a means of bringing together intertextuality and literary bisexuality” (200, fn1). Cixous’s notion of bisexuality—which has been a source of great controversy—was an attempt to allow sexual difference within a single individual. In 1975, Cixous proposes a primary bisexuality that is a universal condition suppressed by a phallogocentric culture that posits feminine alterity as a foil for the masculine. Cixous’s *autre bisexualité* is a response to Freud’s, which frames the distinction between heterosexual and homosexual from an exclusively masculine perspective, not allowing for real difference between the masculine and the feminine.

<sup>6</sup> In her original placement in Medici’s villa de Castello, this Venus faced her double in the painting *La Nascita di Venere*—a bit of trivia Cixous seems to reference in an earlier version of *Souffles* where the character called Primavère more clearly plays erotic double to the narrator.

origin of writing, the setting of its birth and, finally, as a “langue du con”, language itself— language of the heralded ‘feminine’ variety. The *con* thus hesitates between the loosely allegorical and the literal: the omnipresent *sexe* in this passage is inescapably both an image of a corporeal orifice and (through playful phonetic repetition) as an essential element of the *textual* body as well.

In *two* senses, then, over the course of a few pages the phoneme [kɔ̃] will become the center of a textual game that brings together bodies hitherto held in an implied binary: (1) on a narrative plane it is the site of a union between lovers of uncertain or unstable gender; (2) on another level it is precisely what recuperates the physical body into text. Cixous begins: “Je sens **qu’on** vient nous voir de très loin. J’arrive à nous **contempler** de très loin” (16, my emphasis). Through assonance the author has transformed her characters into a *con*, albeit still concealed, textually encoded. This coming-together is then phonetically fragmented and recombined,<sup>7</sup> producing different possibilities (if not always entirely coherent ones) for novel constellations of meaning: “De très loin, je, sans, **con**, vienne, ou voir” (17, my emphasis). Isolated in this way, the *con*, like Genet’s *pot*, is revealed as both esthetic-linguistic building block (the again-assonant [kɔ̃]) and *sexe* (a sex that is both body part and text) itself.<sup>8</sup> But the fragmentation occasioned in order to make this isolation possible also fragments the production of meaning: with almost every phoneme separated by a comma, the sentence loses coherence; it is both supersaturated with meaningful potential and incapable of making any definitive

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<sup>7</sup> Regard describes this process as the gothic aspect of Cixousian writing: “les lettres du texte, ces lettres qui échappant aux organes de contrôle, arrivent au texte du texte, à la valeur d’une dissémination de l’herméneutique, par quoi chaque mot, chaque lettre se ‘gothise’, s’ombre, se dédouble, s’homonymise, s’hybridise, s’androgynise, et sollicite au final moins une herméneutique qu’une hermétique, une science du décryptage” (*Rire* 19). Regard cites the neologism *sexe* as itself an example of this phenomenon.

<sup>8</sup> This transmutation is also allusive. Genet plays the same game (with the same words) in *Pompes funèbres* when considering an epitaph for Jean D.: “I-ci, I-ci, I-ci, I-ci, I-ci. Qu’on l’a tué, qu’on l’a tué, qu’on l’a tué, con l’a tué, con l’a tué...’ et je fis mentalement cette épitaphe : ‘Ici con l’a tué.’” (*ŒC* III, 31-2).

meaning at all.<sup>9</sup> Finally—the *con* being restored to the *qu'on* that it originally represented—one arrives at (we arrive, we *come* to) the transcendent encounter quoted above: “Je sens **qu'on** vient de s'éveiller dans l'autre vie jumelle.” The elements of the sentence have been reassembled and reconfigured in an orgasmic awakening into what is described as a parallel existence—perhaps an indication of an absolute estheticism by which the body, or the *sexe* at least, has become pure textual play.

However, as insightful as it is—and as amusing as it is—I feel obligated to take offense to Cixous's reading of Genet's reading of Dostoyevsky. For while I largely agree with her claim that Genet desires to fuck his reader, the context in which she presented the argument, upon closer consideration, seems tacitly (almost casually) to equate anal sex with sexual sadism, with violence, with rape. Read more literally, Genet's emphatic insertion of his hidden [po] rather *offers* his reader an (his?) anus; he too is displaying, even flaunting, a subversive *sexe*, but (here at least) it is *not* a phallus but instead an orifice which he equates “au tombeau, au **poteau** d'exécution, à l'œil” and of which he speaks tenderly, often entirely without violence<sup>10</sup>: “La

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<sup>9</sup> As Nadia Setti notes in a close reading of the first page of *Souffles*: “Si l'inertitude de sens fait partie de la lecture, elle est due moins à l'ambiguïté qu'à la transformation et au mouvement de sens. Il y a 'promesse' de sens qui en partie se développe et se réalise tandis que d'autres éléments surgissent et nous lancent plus loin, il s'agit seulement d'en suivre la croissance organique dans le texte. C'est vrai que toutes les données qui devraient orienter le lecteur sont davantage désorientantes, et produisent un effet de bousculement plutôt que d'assise. Mais cette instabilité est le signe même du faire du texte, ce que nous lisons est *en trait de*: il s'agit d'un mouvement du sens” (192, original emphasis). What Benjamin had dubbed the allegorical in Baudelaire has now been executed on the level of the phoneme, but while I would like to read this as an historical progression and evolving radicalization of the same procedure, one must note that it is possible to discover the same phenomenon even in the nineteenth century. In her *Défigurations du langage poétique* (1979), Barbara Johnson concludes a chapter on an account of decapitation in *Spleen de Paris* with a similar phonetic game, rereading a Baudelarean verse in all of its possible phonetic rearrangements:

Tu es ma muse  
 Tuer ma muse  
 Tu hais ma muse  
 Tuer m'amuse  
 Tue est ma muse  
 Tue, M amuse (92).

<sup>10</sup> This I note in emphatic opposition to Hanrahan, whose essay on “Genet and Cixous: the InterSext” insists on the inherent(ly male, it is implied) violence of Genet's libido: “This is not to reproach Genet for the fantasies expressed in his writing, but to stress that the ploys of the text only work for those who are excited by violence. It is possible to be left cold by them not because the reader will not acknowledge the pleasure he or she is feeling, but because he or she does not feel any pleasure. Perhaps the only way in which Genet's writing has a universalizing

vénération que je porte à cet endroit du corps et l'immense tendresse que j'ai accordé aux enfants qui me permirent d'y pénétrer, la grâce et la gentillesse du don de ces gosses, m'obligent à parler de tout cela avec respect" (*ŒC* III, 15). Careful attention to the nexus of meanings surrounding the anus at the beginning of *Pompes funèbres* will reveal it as a central figure—similar to Cixous's [kō̃]/*con*—at the very origin of the text.<sup>11</sup>

In contrast to Cixous's *Souffles*, Genet's novel—in its similarly indiscriminate mélange of fantasy with a fiction approaching autobiographical fact—has if anything a superabundance of personages, plots and subplots, but is nonetheless nearly impossible to summarize. The main narrative arch is an act of mourning: an homage to the author's lover, Jean Decarnin, a member of the Resistance killed in combat shortly before the end of the Second World War. Cognizant that his account will inevitably distort—that, in writing, Jean G. will cannibalize the corpse of his beloved double, Jean D.—the narrator veers quickly into the imaginary, fantasizing (like Cixous) a series of erotic scenes in ever-shifting arrangements. The key players—for the current analysis at least—are the Nazi soldier Erik, whom the narrator first encounters at Jean D.'s funeral and the collaborator Riton, whom Genet chooses to fantasize as the murderer of both Jean Decarnin and (escaping entirely into an acknowledged fiction) ultimately of Erik as well. If the text has any coherence whatsoever, it is *esthetically*; and only through a careful mapping of its motifs and verbal games can one begin to give some sense to the muddled mess of its supposed plot.<sup>12</sup> In any event, the novel repeatedly returns to the anus and to sodomy as

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effect is in its foreclosure of any other libido; the possibility of an eroticism which is *not* based on violence is never inscribed" ("InterSext" 723). Elsewhere, she contends, in reference to Genet and the question of castration, that "L'art masculin dépend d'une blessure féminine" ("Exhibition" 14). Hanrahan (mis)attributes this (mis)interpretation to Cixous and to the possible resemblance between Derrida's particular circumcision complex and Genet's: "Genet is 'wounded': castration, or the need to defend himself against it, plays a structuring role in his relations, precluding the possibility of a non-violent relation" ("InterSext" 725).

<sup>11</sup> In his brief biography of Genet, Stephen Barber describes the author's obsession with the anus in similar terms: "the presence of the anus—as a transparent medium, a fragile screen, or an eye to be violently pierced—is highlighted as magisterial in its glory and its determining" (83).

<sup>12</sup> Joseph McMahon chooses to regard this estheticism not as a technical deficiency but rather as the technical accomplishment of the novel: "Symbol, for Genet, is not a highly charged metaphor, but is rather a method of

allegorical quilting points for its chief concerns: evil, betrayal, mourning and vengeance. As Camille Naish puts it: “the work seems conceived as a metaphor for sodomy, a slow penetration into blackness corresponding to the narrator’s defloration of his friend [Jean D.]” (115). Running parallel to this interest in sodomy is an admiration for the wound, which also denies the body its stability; as David Houston Jones notes: “*Pompes Funèbres* (...) radically contests the ‘making’ of the body a stable unit as it does the ‘making’ of narrative sense” (156).

I would like to concentrate here on one of the book’s initial scenes—one which relates in counterpoint both the narrator’s early conversation with the Nazi soldier, Erik, and his (the character named Jean Genet’s) encounter, at the funeral, with his dead lover’s corpse. With regard to Erik, the narrator’s meandering reflections quickly lead him to the inexplicable worry that the wicker chair on which the soldier is sitting might irritate his anus: “Je ne sais quoi provoqua en moi l’éclosion de cette idée qu’il gênait, d’être assis sur une chaise de paille, son ‘œil de Gabès” (*ÆC* III, 14).<sup>13</sup> What is, for the average reader, almost certainly an unknown slang term for the anus then provokes a two-page meditation on the same—a highly associative chain of signifiers that I will attempt to follow through the subsequent paragraphs.

Without pause, the thought of Erik’s anus precipitates a recollection of three boys and a member of the African Battalion (or *Bat-d’Af*) walking down the rue des Martyrs. As the memory begins, the passing *bataillonnaire* (known as a *Joyeux* in coeval slang) is midsentence, recounting a sexual experience of his own: “...et moi j’demandais pas mieux, alors j’y foutu le doigt dans l’œil” (*ÆC* III, 14). Even encoded in this way—displacing one part of the body onto

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proposing accommodations between events and their meaning in which the event will be effaced by the power of the meaning. (...) This is the vast task which is at the heart of *Pompes funèbres*, surely one of the most dazzling technical works produced in this century, all the more dazzling when one remembers that it predates the various *anti-romans* and, in the sheer audacity of its technique, makes them appear quite pale and wan. This is something of an accomplishment, when one realizes how singular its subject matter is” (65).

<sup>13</sup> Genet appears to make an odd allusion to this passage in a 1981 interview with Antoine Bourseiller when asked if he remembers Giacometti: “Oui, parce que j’ai encore dans les fesses la paille de la chaise de cuisine sur laquelle il m’a fait asseoir pendant quarante et quelques jours pour faire mon portrait.” In this scenario, Genet himself has taken the place of Erik as the model—penetrated in some small way, perhaps by the artist’s gaze—to be molded into art.

another—the story takes on “une présence de chair” (ibid), itself becoming the fleshy orifice which dilates in order to birth the text. Just as the idea of Erik’s irritated anus is spontaneously hatched (Genet calls it an *éclosion*) a few lines above, here too, the *œil de Gabès* opens up, potent and productive, for the three boys who form the *Joyeux’s* audience: “En eux *éclot un œuf*(...) Il eût fallu peu de chose pour que s’échappât de leur bouche *sous l’apparence* (...) *d’un poème* (...) ces amours qui se développaient en eux” (*ÆC* III, 14, my emphasis).<sup>14</sup> And—transferred to Genet’s audience—this second *éclosion* prefigures the birth of the author’s text, almost verbatim, a page later, in his continued elegy to Jean D.’s anus:

Ce n’est pas profaner le mort le mieux aimé que dire, *sous l’apparence d’un poème* encore imprévisible de ton, le bonheur qu’il m’offrit quand mon visage était enfoui dans une toison que ma sueur et ma salive rendait moite, se collant en de petites mèches qui séchaient après l’amour et restaient rigide (*ÆC* III, 15, my emphasis).

The [po] discussed above has become a *poème* and finally the *pompes funèbres*, the funeral rites, themselves; I will return to this elegy (or eulogy) to the anus in a moment. For the time being, however, I would like to concentrate on its parallel in the embedded account of the *Joyeux* bragging of his sexual escapades.

In order to impress the youngest of his companions—coded as a violable virgin, “l’*œil pur, la bouche légèrement ouverte*” (*ÆC* III, 14, my emphasis)—he repeats the phrase, with ever greater emphasis, subjecting it in Cixousian fashion to slight phonetic modifications that allow for new constellations of meaning to come into being. He climactically concludes with an almost nonsensical cumulation: “—...de Gabès ! Dans l’œil deug Habès ! Et toc !” (*ÆC* III, 15) Like the *Joyeux’s* other lines of dialogue, this one begins with an ellipsis, to wit: it issues from a textual lacuna. Unsurprisingly, then, it provokes a full paragraph on the origins of the *Joyeux*—

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<sup>14</sup> Playing with this passage from *Pompes funèbres* in her own book, Cixous—who calls her predecessor “un père maternel” (220)—imagines Genet (with his own anus) as a type of mother hen to the young boys whom he desires and fictionalizes: “Et je devine comment son bon œil les couve, et les encourage” (92).

redeployed military criminals and infantry. Genet himself cryptically highlights the central importance of his use of this historical figure: “Il n’est pas indifférent que parte mon livre, peuplé des soldats les plus vrais, sur l’expression la plus rare qui marque le soldat puni [which is to say: *le Joyeux*], l’être le plus travaillé confondant le guerrier avec le voleur, la guerre et le vol” (*ŒC* III, 15).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Genet’s considerations of the *Joyeux* are intricately interwoven with his meditations on the anus, and the thought of the former provokes a similarly cumulative list of their own expressions for the anus: “Les Joyeux appellent encore ‘œil de bronze’ ce que l’on nomme aussi ‘la pastille’, ‘la rondelle’, ‘l’oignon’, le ‘derch’, ‘le derjeau’, ‘la lune’, ‘son panier à crottes’” (*ŒC* III, 15). Speaking of the nostalgia experienced by a retired *bataillonnaire* for his days in the *Bat-d’Af*, Genet implicitly identifies the anus as an origin, reinforced by the sentiment that the infantryman’s anecdote about the asshole “devint la relation d’un fait relevé chez les dieux, à Gabès, ou à Gabès dans la brûlante et fastueuse contrée d’une maladie hautaine, d’une fièvre sacrée” (*ŒC* III, 14). Gabès, a city in southern Tunisia, then figures as geographical origin but simultaneously, through the argotic geography of the *œil*, as the locus of the anus as well.<sup>16</sup>

Of course the actual impetus for the text, as Genet himself insists, is the death of Jean Decarnin, and more specifically, his *corpse*, its chest “trouée en trois endroits” (*ŒC* III, 138)—a phrase that seems also to perform this perforation with its three near-*o*-assonant *o*’s: *trouée en trois endroits*. And the wounded cadaver is intimately linked to these reflections on the anus, as through subtle verbal play, it is the *anus* (or the penetration thereof) that will be isolated as the

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<sup>15</sup> Tom Conley, in a perspicacious and exuberant reading of this passage to which I am enormously indebted, reveals yet another possible association with the word when he mistranslates *Joyeux* as “gay kid” (61).

<sup>16</sup> In his biography of Genet, Edmund White posits one possible etymology for the slang: “Another working title Genet used, ‘*L’œil de Gabès*’, is similarly obscene and complicated. In the town of Gabès in Tunisia, apparently, Muslim women cover one eye with a veil, leaving the other one exposed. ‘The Gabès eye’ thus became slang in the French African Battalion for the single nether eye, or anus” (287). Bataille also associates the anus with they eye, theorizing what he dubs the *solar anus* as another wound-like orifice allowing an ecstatic experience *beyond* the body and beyond reason.

cause of these bullet holes. During the *bataillonairé's* account of fingering an asshole, his innocent interlocutor's "bouche entrouverte était déjà une fissure par où (...) le monde entrait *pour le posséder*" (*ÆC* III, 14, my emphasis). The *Joyeux's* anecdote takes on illocutionary force: the narration of penetration becomes itself an *act* penetration. The *Joyeux* is said to pronounce "œil comme ail", an idiosyncrasy which becomes increasingly accentuated in its repetition: "...Dans l'ail, que j'vous dis ! dans l'aveuil !" (*ÆC* III, 14). To this the narrator provides yet another mutation, clarifying that the infantryman "traîna lourdement sur l'a pour laisser fuser l'euil" (*ÆC* III, 14). Restored via multiple mutations to its original phonetic form (*euil* being a perfect homonym for *œil* and retaining only a *textual* difference), the mispronounced word has become a weapon, a phallic *fusil*—and it has, at last, discharged.

To return, then, to my analysis of the anal elegy quoted above—Genet's own boastful analogue to the *Joyeux's* bragging—at the conclusion of which the narrator relates Jean D.'s funeral: yet more evidence that this passage is a eulogy constituting the funeral rites themselves.<sup>17</sup> Continuing his remembrance of Jean's anus— "le trésor ultime et ténébreux, l'oeil de bronze', qu'il ne m'accorda que très tard, un mois avant sa mort environ" (*ÆC* III, 15)—Genet reveals another [po], this time the "**porte de l'église**" which opens "sur un trou noir où je m'avançai solennellement plutôt **porté** par la puissance des hautes funérailles" (*ÆC* III, 15-16). In the Gallimard edition of 1953, a paragraph break separates the church from Jean D.'s anus; in the 1947 original, however, there is no such typographical indication that these spaces are meant to be considered separately: entering into Jean D.'s anus the narrator continues without pause into the church.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> T. Conley seems to understand the same when he finds another *œil* in *deuil* (61).

<sup>18</sup> Naish sees this as a decisive moment in the text and its key concern with the anus: "Dominating the entire work is the narrator's vision of the 'oeil de bronze,' that ultimate male favour with which the narrator, in his memories of Jean, seems obsessed. Even as he enters the church for his lover's funeral, the 'oeil' presents itself to 'Genet' as a natural simile for the edifice's orificial darkness" (121).

But the narrator has already presented this church on the very first page of the novel and then again in a type of traumatic flashback, explicitly recalling Freud's mythic account of the primal scene: "j'ai revécu les trois secondes où je fus comme *médusé*, effroyablement attiré par ces pierres dont j'éprouvais l'horreur, mais qu'englué mon regard ne pouvait quitter" (*ÆC* III, 10, my emphasis). That this Medusa, too, is an orifice—a *sexe*—is confirmed by the similar nature of the flashback to the *Joyeux's* anus-oriented anecdote ("en quelques secondes je le revécus" [*ÆC* III, 14])<sup>19</sup> and later by the sexualized description of the interior of the church:

"Il y fait noir comme dans le trou du cul d'un nègre."

Il y faisait aussi noir et j'y pénétrai avec la même lente solennité. Au fond scintillait l'iris tabac de l'œil de Gabès, et dans son centre auréolé, sauvage, muet, vachement pâle, ce tankiste enculé, dieu de ma nuit, Erik Seiler.

De la porte de l'église tendue de noir, sur la poitrine d'Erik dressé au sommet d'un autel supportant toutes les fleurs d'un jardin coupé malgré le tremblement des cierges on pouvait distinguer l'emplacement du trou mortel qu'y fera une balle tirée par un Français (*ÆC* III, 16, my emphasis).

This is the first mention of the wound in Erik's chest—a wound entirely imagined, prefiguring the conclusion to the novel, where Genet fantasizes the soldier's senseless murder at the hands of the (equally imaginary) collaborator Riton. Genet's central act of literary vengeance, executed not without a certain tenderness, his masterpiece of self-destruction à la Dostoyevsky, will be to penetrate such perpetrator-penetrators: both Erik (who through synecdochal shorthand will become the godly representation of the desirable but culpable—or desirable *because* culpable—German army on the whole) and also the French society to whom the hateful novel is addressed. This punitive penetration is an underlying process which takes place from the beginning to the end of the book, but can also be observed quite neatly on the example of the single passage discussed above.

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<sup>19</sup> Another parallel between the two passages is provided by the repeated detail that the boys and the *Joyeux* are walking with their hands in their *poches* (another [po]) and the box of matches (imagined as Jean's casket) in the narrator's. T. Conley also connects the *poches* to eyes (and therefore anuses) as well as to the contemporary slur for Germans, *Boches*, hence Erik (62).

Already here, just a few pages into the book, Genet has brought together all of its key holes (also the keyholes to this *roman à clef*): the anus (*pot*) which is both the entrance (*porte*) to the church and the “trou mortel” in Erik’s chest (*poitrine*)—itself an intended echo of Jean D.’s bullet wounds, the holes that began it all. The profusion of holes observed above is an esthetic principle, the *mise-en-pratique* of the view Genet expresses in his essay on Dostoyevsky that “Tout acte a donc une signification et la signification inverse” (*ÆC* VI, 214). If the passage of *Pompes funèbres* examined here violates its reader, it is through an entirely other kind of anal rape, for here it is the hole—the anus—that has created other holes in slippery metonymic fashion: the thought of Erik’s anus opens up into the *Joyeux’s* story of another, fired like a gun, which in turn leads to the memory of Jean D.’s anus, which becomes the entrance to the church where the narrator discovers both the bullet hole-to-be in Erik’s (here himself “enculé” [*ÆC* III, 16]) chest.

Moreover, it through this constellation of motifs that the estheticized fiction of Genet’s writerly invention achieves its domination over the autobiographical matter it ostensibly represents—that the weight of the imaginary comes to conquer its real-life antecedent. Not unlike the fantastic conclusion to *Miracle de la Rose*—where the judge, lawyer, chaplain and executioner enter into the condemned man’s ear and mouth to exit out his anus (“ce trou noir et profond comme un œil” [*ÆC* II, 464])—, it is within the anus that the narrator of *Pompes funèbres* discovers imaginary landscapes

de la même substance que les personnages de ce livre, que les visions que je découvre quand ma bouche et ma langue sont occupées dans les poils d’un œil de bronze où je crois reconnaître un rappel des goûts de mon enfance pour les tunnels. J’encule le monde (*ÆC* III, 140).

And, to return one final time to the poetic eulogy to Jean D.'s anus, it is here that Genet gives clearest expression and the most moving illustration of the kind of dialectical deconstruction<sup>20</sup> he observes in Dostoyevsky:

Mes dents, désespérément, y allaient parfois, et mes prunelles étaient pleines d'images qui s'organisent aujourd'hui, où au fond d'une chapelle funéraire, ange de la résurrection de la mort de Jean, que fier, hissé sur des nuages, dominait dans sa férocité le plus beau des soldats du Reich. *Car c'est quelquefois l'opposé de ce qu'il fut qu'évoque l'enfant merveilleux fauché par les balles d'août, dont la pureté et la glace m'épouvantent, car ils le font plus grand que moi. Pourtant, sous l'égide de ce mort, je place mon histoire* (*ÆC* III, 15, my emphasis).

This aegis (*égide*) is, in part, a *sexe*: the bullet holes in Jean D.'s corpse or, perhaps more poignantly, his lamented anus. It is also, by cute coincidence, again a Medusa inasmuch as the aegis (the ancient Greek garment of protection) is traditionally portrayed with the *gorgoneion*—the Medusa's severed head—in its center.<sup>21</sup>

## 2: The Textual Orifice: Genet's Wounded Works

If the allusion to decapitation above is not, perhaps, explicitly intended, it is nevertheless not only incidental that the anus will become equivalent to a sort of *wound*. After all, if *Pompes funèbres* can indeed be understood as a descent into darkness for which sodomy and anilingus serve as alternating or simultaneous master conceits, then this moment at which Jean Genet

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<sup>20</sup> It is for this reason that Derrida discovers a kind of violent Hegelian *Aufhebung* in Genet, as it is explicated in *Glas* (especially 15, left column).

<sup>21</sup> As I mentioned in my introduction, castration also comes up explicitly in *Pompes funèbres*. Obscurely central to the novel, although apparently unrelated to the rest, is the account of Joan of Arc's saintly menstruation (61) and its comparison to Hitler's imagined castration by bullet wound (71): "A la même hauteur que Jeanne sur sa robe de suppliciée, il porte une plaie sanglante" (101). Of course, through Jeanne d'Arc's initials, she is also a double to Jean D.'s, and her 'wound' a reflection of his own. Laura Frost also discusses this strange symmetry in a chapter on *Pompes funèbres* (73-4).

first fucks his double (in some ways a prefiguration of Jean D.'s imminent demise)<sup>22</sup> would be a central passage in the text.<sup>23</sup> It is paradoxical, then, that it is almost entirely cut from the definitive edition. All that remains in the text of the *Oeuvres complètes* is the prelude to the act and the elliptical description that Genet offers. What is missing is, quite tellingly, the copious bleeding which resulted:

Ma main en cherchant ses cheveux pour les caresser frôla son visage et c'est la joue que je caressai. Pendant que je me tournais pour allumer, il dut faire le geste de repousser les draps (nous étions mouillés par la sueur) car à la lumière, je vis qui [sic] considérait, loin de lui, à bout de bras, ses bras, ses mains tendues dont les ongles et les extrémités étaient rouges. Son visage où la sueur perlait avait de longues marques de sang. Je regardai mes mains. Elles étaient tachées de sang (1947, 71).

This passage is particularly significant for the present purposes as it makes of the anus a variety of open wound—transforming the sweat repeatedly associated with the former into the blood that characterizes the latter:

— Qu'est-ce qu'il y a ? On saigne ?  
Il tenait toujours ses mains en avant, semblant les chauffer à des roses, mais il inspectait posément les draps. Ma verge saignait. Je compris avant lui. Parce que j'y avais été trop dur, sans souci de ses plaintes j'avais écorché son cul, et ma queue, prise dans un cheveu ou un poil s'était coupée légèrement. Ainsi nous avons mêlé notre sang (1947, 71-72).

More than the sodomy itself, then, it is this bleeding of the anus that allows the two Jeans to melt together in this expurgated passage of *Pompes funèbres*:

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<sup>22</sup> Naish, for instance, contends that “[b]eyond the thematic equivalence of love and death, a somewhat gruesome metaphorical identification of anus and extinction is established” (126).

<sup>23</sup> There is considerable speculation as to whether Jeans Genet and Decarnin were in fact lovers. In an interview with Gregory Rowe in 1987, the writer François Sentein insists that Decarnin was not homosexual in the least and that the account of sodomy in *Pompes funèbres* was in fact an experience he himself (Sentein) had with Genet (quoted in White, 188-9). Stephen Barber writes that “[a]lthough Genet would write in his fiction of having sodomized Decarnin in his hotel room, Decarnin’s friends and Genet’s associates maintained that this was not the case and that Decarnin was a devoted political activist and heterosexual (and, in any case, Genet habitually preferred at this time to be a passive sexual recipient)” (45). If the strangely Sartrean notion of a “passive sexual recipient” can be forgiven as conventional shorthand, the passing equation between “devoted political activist” and “heterosexual” is nevertheless bothersome coming from the pen of an avant-garde intellectual and author whom *The Independent* once proposed as a candidate for the most dangerous man in Europe. For a counterargument to this understanding of anal passivity in Genet, see Pascale Gaitet’s *Queens and Revolutionaries* (2003).

The confusion of the blended blood accompanies a bevy of related conflations. For Genet, *la blessure* is the singular marker of an artist's necessary solitude and suffering. As he puts it, for example, in an open essay addressed to his lover Abdallah, titled *Le Funambule* (1958):

*Je me demande où réside, où se cache la blessure secrète où tout homme court se réfugier si l'on attende à son orgueil, quand on le blesse ? Cette blessure — qui devient ainsi le for intérieur —, c'est elle qu'il va gonfler, emplir. Tout homme sait la rejoindre, au point de devenir cette blessure elle-même, une sorte de cœur secret et douloureux (ŒC V, 12-13, original emphasis).*

The wound is then the site of precisely what is *not* communicable in an individual or an object and—somewhat paradoxically—also the threshold between self and other and thus the process by which this secret inner solitude is nonetheless expressed and staged:

*Si nous regardons, d'un œil vite et avide, l'homme ou la femme qui passent — le chien aussi, l'oiseau, une casserole — cette vitesse même de notre regard nous révélera, d'une façon nette, quelle est cette blessure où ils vont se replier lorsqu'il y a danger. Que dis-je ? Ils y sont déjà, gagnant par elle — dont ils ont pris la forme — et pour elle, la solitude (...) cette solitude absolue, incommunicable — ce château de l'âme — afin d'être cette solitude elle-même (ŒC V, 13, original emphasis).*

In an essay on Rembrandt, it is by this same *regard* “*vif ou lent*” (ŒC IV, 21, original emphasis) that Genet becomes aware of the shared solitude of all beings, again represented by the wound: “On se souviendra que j'avais dit plus haut, que mes amis les plus chers se réfugiaient, j'en étais sûr, tout entiers dans une blessure secrète” (ŒC IV, 25). Despite Bataille's ambivalence vis-à-vis Genet, then, the wound in the latter is revealed to involve the same kind of *communication* via injury as *l'expérience intérieure*: precisely the manner of communication that Bataille finds lacking in the author's work. The wound is both the site of the most secret self and the orifice by which it is opened to alterity. This, in part, is the *ontological* aspect of Genet's poetics of the wound.

Moreover, on the level of formal functioning, the reference to roses in this scene of ‘defloration’ both reinforces and profanes the traditional association between wounds and

flowers noted by Cixous in her collection *Stigmata* (1998): “I don’t know if it’s the flowers that make the blood beautiful or the blood that makes the flowers beautiful, but one can’t be without the other. As in the *Song of Roland*. As soon as there are flowers there’s blood” (*Stigmata* 52). Like the *saxte*, the wound seems to be the kind of sign that challenges any steady relation between its signifier and its signified: it remains uncertain whether flowers are a metaphor for wounds or vice versa. In Genet, the choice of the verb *écorcher* definitively transforms this injury into a linguistic phenomenon: in reference to a body, *écorcher* means to graze, but it can also mean to mispronounce a word or, in a more argotic register, to butcher a language.

It is this deliberate deconstruction (or Dostoyevskyan self-destruction) that typifies Genet’s particular esthetics of injury: in his sketches and essays on Rembrandt (1957 and 1958) and Giacometti (1958) and—most poignantly—in his open letters to a fatally tubercular Roman prostitute (entitled *Fragments* [1954]) and to Abdallah, the famous *funambule* mentioned above. Taken together, these willfully fragmentary writings outline an esthetic philosophy for which the wound is an apt central metaphor. In a footnote—further fragmentation permitting the text to move in multiple directions simultaneously— of *Fragments*, Genet regards this writing strategy as violence *of* and *against* language: “Avec mon froid ciseau, détachés du langage les mots, blocs nets, sont aussi des tombeaux. Ils retiennent prisonnière la confuse nostalgie d’une action que des hommes accomplirent et que les mots, alors sanglants, nommeraient” (*Fragments* 82). These bleeding words are necessarily involved in a threatening tension with their subject and their audience—both of whom are given life through writing but also threatened with death.

To communicate and thus transcend the common isolation represented by the wound, Genet advises his *funambule* to allow the tightrope itself to ‘sing’, bringing to life what was previously mute; the tightrope walker and his tool (Genet himself plays on the phallic quality of

the *fil de fer*) are thus involved in a dangerous and sadomasochistic dance by which both are brought to life.<sup>24</sup> The poet thus speaks of an allegorical Death (la *Mort* with a capital M) akin to the solitude evoked above that, when properly performed, will vanquish the very real death that is risked during the course of the performance. Comparing the Circus (again allegorically writ large, itself an admitted metaphor for literature) to a bullfight, Genet, recalling Bataille's bullfight, contends that

*Entre autres moments la foule espagnole attend celui où le taureau, d'un coup de corne, va découdre la culotte du torero : par la déchirure, le sang et le sexe. Sottise de la nudité qui ne s'efforce pas à montrer puis à exalter une blessure ! C'est donc un maillot que devra porter le funambule, car il doit être vêtu. (...) Un maillot pour protéger l'acrobate contre la dureté des regards, et afin qu'un accident soit possible, qu'un soir le maillot cède, se déchire (ÆC V, 19-20, original emphasis).*

Injury—understood as an essential decoration—thus operates in a gesture simultaneously concealing and revealing. By an odd estheticism, Genet insists that Abdallah's intimate and public persona both be staged with as much attention to *artifice* as possible, until reality is entirely indistinguishable from the fantasy that will be performed. And if the audience secretly desires the death of the performer, it is also the performer's purpose to injure his audience. It is only via this paradoxical complicity that each party is allowed the experience of solitude that is the primary aim of art. The essay on Giacometti concludes with the accord between the two artists that “ma solitude connaît la vôtre” (ÆC V, 73) and this shared aloneness is also the point of *Le Funambule*: “Le public — qui te permet d'exister, sans lui tu n'aurais jamais cette solitude dont je t'ai parlé, — le public est la bête que finalement tu viens poignarder” (ÆC V, 24).

Genet's letter to Abdallah is unique among his writings in its concern for its intended audience. At various points he demands patience of his reader or openly wonders how he might express himself more clearly. Nevertheless, Genet inserts a number of italicized fragments

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Coe calls this technique of extracting song from mute objects (and the potential for the object to avenge itself against its animator) Genet's “choisme” (141). For concrete illustrations by example of penises, roses and tubes of Vaseline, see John Plotz's article on “Objects of Abjection”.

seemingly from elsewhere—speaking of Abdallah in the third person, sometimes quoting conversations with him. For whom, then, is the essay actually intended? Genet concludes the sketch with an avowal of its purported purpose:

Ce sont de vains, de maladroits conseils que je t'adresse. Personne ne saurait les suivre. Mais je ne voulais pas autre chose : qu'écrire à propos de cet art un poème dont la chaleur montera à tes joues. Il s'agissait de t'enflammer, non de t'enseigner (*ŒC* v, 27).

Thus, the essay itself is less an explication of an esthetic-literary philosophy than its performance; and indeed, one might compare the type of life-threateningly sadomasochistic procedure by which the wire is forced to voice its death to the literary alchemy by which Genet himself (in his open letter) brings Abdallah to death in life or, inversely, brings his Jean to life after his death.

Performative to the same extent as the letter to Abdallah are the *Fragments* which Genet introduces with the disclaimer: “Les pages qui vont suivre ne sont pas extraites d'un poème : elles devraient y conduire” (*Fragments* 74). As his career progresses, the author is increasingly given to such fecund fragmentation (his final text, the posthumous *Captif amoureux*, was originally conceived of as a primary text surrounded by glosses and marginalia) perhaps epitomized by his *Ce qui reste d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers et foutu aux chiottes*: true to its title, *Ce qui reste* consists of the remnants of what was once a book-length study on the painter, presented in two obliquely dialoguing columns—famously the inspiration for the structure of Derrida's mammoth study of Genet (and Hegel), *Glas*. Cixous—whom Derrida repeatedly refers to as “the greatest writer in the French language” (for instance, in his preface to the author's *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*, ix)—also often turns to Rembrandt as an example of the central position of the *wound* to artwork, as an example of an artist who seeks in some way to injure his audience. And in her introductory chapter to *Stigmata*, Cixous takes the painter's relation to the wound as an example of an essential polysemy: “If only we listen, a

language always speaks several languages at once, and runs with a single word in opposite directions” (*Stigmata* xii). Through his almost vengeful fragmentation of his own work on Rembrandt, Genet allows such polyvalence to become a *structural* phenomenon as well as a linguistic one.

Like *Ce qui reste*, but victim to a more conventional variety of censorship, *Pompes funèbres* is also a wounded text. As Gene Plunka points out (59), it was begun late in 1943 as a different book entirely and only became the funeral rites that it is following the death of Jean Decarnin; as such, *Pompes funèbres* on the whole constitutes a scar denoting absence. Moreover, the version of the novel widely read today itself carries a number of scars. Fifteen hundred uncut copies were anonymously published in 1947 and four hundred and seventy hardback copies in 1948, but it was only five years later that the novel—with *Querelle de Brest* (also 1947)—would be added to the Gallimard edition of Genet’s *Œuvres complètes*, in a significantly abridged version.

There is some mystery surrounding these cuts, although the enigma almost universally remains unmentioned. Plunka erroneously attributes the 1948 edition to Marc Barbezat<sup>25</sup> (whose L’Arablète had previously published Genet’s *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and *Miracle de la Rose*) but as Barbezat himself regretfully acknowledges:

En 1945, un jour de l’été, par un beau soleil, il [Genet] apporta à Décines, Pompes Funèbres. Il en voulait, si j’ai bon souvenir, 500 000 F de l’époque (anciens francs). Je n’arrivais pas à trouver cette somme. J’étais triste et c’est la rage au cœur que j’ai renoncé à cette œuvre que j’aurais publiée sous mon nom, alors que Pompes Funèbres parut sous le manteau, en livre de luxe, à Bikini (Gallimard) et en livre ordinaire sans nom d’éditeur (Morihién) (*Lettres à Olga et Marc Barbezat*, 246-247).

Even before the text is subjected to a single cut, *Pompes funèbres* is thus published as two distinct books, both anonymous: the large-format *de luxe* edition with scarlet font highlights

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<sup>25</sup> To my mind, the most extensive (and the only particularly persuasive) summary of the genesis and publication of *Pompes funèbres* is in White’s biography (320-325).

and the inexpensive black and white paperback edition with an illustration by Cocteau on the title page. If the one edition represents the work as high literature, the other markets it as smut. Yet at this point—save for the circumflex added to Genet’s name in the ostentatious edition and more accurately absent from the other—the text of these two editions is still identical. It would only be altered when Gallimard took official responsibility for the novel, adding it to Genet’s *Œuvres complètes*.

Camille Naish—one of few scholars working on the book to acknowledge its apparent censorship history at all—summarizes the official position: “Apparently appalled by Genet’s treatment of the theme of treason, Gallimard has excised from the 1947 version a variety of passages amounting to at least thirty pages [a conservative estimate; more than fifty full pages are cut from the original edition]” (115). But even a cursory glance at the two versions one beside the other seems to contradict this reductive account of the events: Gallimard’s definitive version of the text is scarcely less scandalous than the first, and the passages excised seem to be cut almost indiscriminately, at times as if with an errant jigsaw file: while some changes do indeed temper very slightly the treasonous aspect of the original, others instead seem aimed at the suppression of passages too intimate to their author to be published and others still seem made almost with the very aim of rendering the work *less* readable.

In any event, as Naish argues: “In addition to peculiarities of content, *Pompes funèbres* is extremely hard to read, at least in the commercial edition of 1953 (...) The structure of the novel is such that these cuts constitute a severe menace to its continuity and comprehensibility” (ibid). One such threat to the novel’s coherence can be readily observed in the passage treated above. In the 1947/1948 editions, at the outset of the anecdote describing the boys on the Rue des Martyrs, the narrator invents a name for the youngest among them:

Le plus jeune des trois, *Pierrot*, marchait la tête droite, l’œil pur, la bouche légèrement ouverte. Il grignotait ses ongles (...) *Pierrot* tourna un peu la tête.

Sa bouche entr'ouverte était déjà une fissure par où passait toute sa tendresse et par où le monde entrait pour le posséder [sic] (...) **Pierrot** buta contre une pierre (1947, 14, my emphasis).

But in the *Œuvres complètes* version—and for no easily discernible reason—this name is intriguingly and inconsistently removed:

Le plus jeune des trois marchait la tête droite, l'œil pur, la bouche légèrement ouverte. Il grignotait ses ongles (...) **II** tourna un peu la tête. Sa bouche entrouverte était déjà une fissure par où passait toute sa tendresse et par où le monde entrait pour le posséder (...) **Pierrot** buta contre une pierre (*ŒC* III, 14, my emphasis).

What I have quoted here may, as a block, seem comprehensible. In the actual text, however, the Joyeux's entire anecdote is to be found contained in my second ellipsis. The effect that this has, in the 1953 edition (where the character has so far only been referred to by the third-person pronoun) is to leave the reader entirely bewildered as to who this Pierrot might be when he is finally mentioned by name: "Pierrot buta contre une pierre." The omission of this name being the only change to the passage—apart from orthographical corrections—, the sentence calls attention to its own indecipherability: all that remains in the definitive edition is the wordplay between Pierrot and *pierre*. Moreover, when the character (without transition, explanation, or context) appears again, on occasion, in phantasmagoric fragments much later in the book; the reader of the 1953 text has no way of understanding that this is the same boy as before. If, as Camille Naish contends, an overarching allegory of sodomy is the marker of the novel's admirable "absorption of plot into metaphor" (121), then this perplexing suppression of the name Pierrot might indicate an estheticism by which the shifting fantasies of Genet's plot are subjugated to a more pressing interest in pure verbal play.<sup>26</sup> While there is no obvious

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<sup>26</sup> In her strangely speculative monograph on Genet, Bettina Knapp designates *Pompes funèbres* as Genet's definitive turn toward estheticism: "Genet now saw the world within the framework of the work of art. Writing had become something 'sacred' for him. It had taken on an *aura* and though it was fraught with agony—the agony every artist knows only too well—Genet pursued it almost compulsively. The creative act, he was now coming to realize, fulfilled both an emotional and esthetic need for him. The latter gave him an urge to create something of beauty, the former, to seek a way of life" (58-59, original emphasis).

explanation for this particular change and little vestigial evidence of the omission in the final text, other, more intimate emendations are hinted at by the author even in the *Œuvres complètes* edition. The same process, notably, takes place with Jean Decarnin's name throughout: present in the dedication, it is nevertheless elided in the text itself, reduced simply to Jean D.

At one moment, the 1947/1948 text even appears to foreshadow a future excision. In the *Œuvres complètes* edition, Genet declines to quote Decarnin's poetry, explaining that to "prononcer son nom dans la solitude est déjà mieux. Si j'essayais de redire à haute voix les mots qu'il prononçait, ses phrases, les poèmes maladroits qu'il écrivit, risqueraient de lui donner corps en mon corps" (*ŒC* III, 41). This omission, then, is part of a strategy of suppression by which the deceased—once conjured—is simultaneously repressed. However, Jean's Jean must first be given form before being subjected to such *Verdrängung*; and, accordingly, in the original edition, this passage (1947, 73) in fact follows directly after one such awkward page-length pseudo-prose-poem attributed to Decarnin and ostensibly written soon after he allowed himself to be sodomized. Also omitted, at the precise same moment, is the tender but discomfiting conclusion to this account of sodomy and its resultant bleeding. In the original edition, the narrator will bring this wounding even farther into *text*, writing both *on* his beloved's body and *with* his blood:

— Tu as mal ?

— Non c'est rien. Et toi ?

Il haussa une épaule et sauta du lit jusqu'au lavabo. Quand il se recoucha il avait les mains glacées. Il me parla avec tant de calme qu'afin de ramener un peu d'émotion parmi nous, ou peut-être par cruauté, pour me venger de sa lucidité, je passai mon index entre ses fesses, le retirai sanglant et traçai en souriant, sur sa joue droite une faucille avec un marteau rudimentaire, et sur sa joue gauche une croix gammée (1947, 72).

It is a poignant, if playfully over-determined, image traced in blood: the shorthand of the hammer and sickle beside the swastika.<sup>27</sup> Thus repeating the caress with which the passage begins—the narrator had brushed Jean D’s cheek while reaching for his hair—with this blood Genet inscribes the central conflict of the book onto his lover’s body and both are denied coherence. But what appears a perfect (if unsubtle) distillation of the novel into a single image will be censored soon after it is given body, with this entire passage excised from the Gallimard *Œuvres complètes* edition. The impetus of the entire novel is, in fact, omitted—attested to only by an almost imperceptible textual scar.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> As Patrice Bougon summarizes the (a)political implications of this passage: “Les signes qui trace le narrateur sur les joues du *communiste* Jean Decarnin produisent une relation d’équivalence symbolique entre deux régimes politiques ennemis. Cette relation, en 1947, est une provocation, mais elle suggère également une vérité historique dans la mesure où elle fait aussi référence au pacte germano-soviétique et au caractère totalitaire des régimes politiques de Hitler et de Staline. Quant à la couleur rouge du sang, elle surdétermine la relation à ces deux emblèmes nationaux : ‘l’étendard *rouge* à croix *gammée*’” (75).

<sup>28</sup> This exhibition of an absence is in keeping with the thematic aim of Genet’s texts. As Hanrahan has insightfully put it in an essay on the wound in the author’s works: “l’écriture de Genet exhibe sans arrêt le vide. Ses textes tournent avec insistance autour d’une absence, s’acharnent à rendre visible, sensible, un manque justement au niveau du sensible. Montrer que toute forme—quelque noble ou divine qu’elle soit—renferme un trou, s’érige autour d’un trou ; exhiber le trou dont, y compris littéralement, tout tour se compose : voilà ce à quoi les divers tours et truquages de l’écriture de Genet seront employés” (“Exhibition” 113).

Chapter 5  
“**Ce qui est coupé repousse**”:  
Hélène Cixous’s *Souffles* (1975) and the Poetics of Omission

“All literature,” contends Hélène Cixous, “is scary. It celebrates the wound and repeats the lesion” (*Stigmata* xii). The wound is an inscription that both adds and subtracts, reveals as it conceals—and Cixous’s titles from *Sorties* (her portion of *La Jeune née*, 1975) through *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (1998) signal that her texts are meant to break away, overflowing their containers like Genet’s fragments. But if Genet’s narratives are violently broken up post facto, Cixous’s texts are, to an extent, born this way. It is precisely for this reason—an avowed aversion to narrative as such—that Cixous refuses to consider either herself or Genet *novelists* in the habitual sense. In an illuminating conversation with the author, Cixous confessed to me that

l’œuvre elle-même, elle est constituée comme ça, de morceaux, de fragments. Seuls, justement—et c’est pour ça que vraiment le roman est autre... on ne peut pas se servir de cette terminologie pour moi—seuls les romanciers et les nouvellistes ont comme programme quelque chose de constitué, avec un commencement et une fin. Et vraiment ils se posent la question de commencement et de fin, parce qu’ils veulent une structure avec une idée de récit (personal discussion, 12 April 2011).

Speaking of her process of composition in a series of interviews with Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, the author describes her first writings as equally automatic and fragmentary: “je ne les ai pas écrits (...) ils sont arrivés et en outre, *en morceaux*. Ce sont *des fragments*, parce que je ne pensais pas que j’écrivais un livre. J’écrivais des choses, *ce que j’écrivais c’étaient des lambeaux mais des lambeaux de ma propre chair*” (*Rencontre terrestre*, 20, my emphasis). It seems, then, that writing from the body—as Cixous repeatedly advocates, especially at the beginning of her career—is a

strategy that necessarily entails writing out of injury and in a way that allows for such ‘wounded’ texts to come into being.

To an even greater degree than *Pompes funèbres*, Cixous’s *Souffles* is, in fact, not one work but many. The definitive text printed by the feminist publisher *des femmes* is an amalgam, primarily of two interrelated but entirely distinct unpublished manuscripts (the first of which is tellingly labeled “Omis”), which are then further jumbled with the addition of an assortment of other fragments, drafts and proofs. One explanation for this surfeit of loosely related drafts might be the difficulty in finding an appropriate publisher. (In the final version, Cixous wonders: “*On aura commandé que Souffles soit coupé?*” [*Souffles* 198, original emphasis].) In her 1975 interview with Christiane Makward, the author announces that the work is forthcoming under the title *Vol/e* with Seuil, but this version never appeared; the final *des femmes* edition (Cixous’s first collaboration with this publishing house) is most likely a much different work than was intended for Seuil, compiled as it is from a certain number of previously unpublished (or only partially published) texts.<sup>1</sup>

Near the conclusion of the *des femmes* edition, Cixous cites a familiar Baudelairean textual strategy, exclaiming that her work has neither head nor tail: “*Pas de tête ! Pas de queue !*” (*Souffles* 200, original emphasis). If, for the architect of literary modernity, the appropriate response to this formlessness was the fragmentation of the volume of prose poems—“Hachez-la

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<sup>1</sup> Cixous seems to have a certain mnemonic block regarding *Souffles* on the whole—easily among her most understudied texts—and its publication history in particular. When I asked the author about her drafts for the book, she simply told me that it had once been twice as long and referred me to her discussion of the same in *Rencontre terrestre* (personal discussion, 12 April 2011). But in these interviews with Jeannet she merely proclaims (seemingly unprompted): “*P.-S. Souffles je ne m’en souviens pas du tout*” (*Rencontre* 58). When pressed to elaborate she simply insists: “*Souffles: aucun souvenir. Sauf global: je me souviens que c’est un livre de désir, de l’acharnement, de la faim, du cri — oui. Mais les pages, les organes, rien. Et comme tous ces livres sont chaque fois animés par des Souffles que la mort (une mort ou une autre) a coupés, je n’ai pas envie d’y retourner*” (*Rencontre* 59). The significance of this oblique assertion (more revealing than it might appear at first blush) and the willful amnesia it implies will be explored presently. The author very rapidly glosses the publication history and her move to *des femmes* in these interviews, but declines to fully divulge her reasons for leaving Seuil (*Rencontre* 63-4). In any event, an earlier version of a very small portion of the text was published in *La Nouvelle Critique* in 1975 under the title “La Noire Vole”.

en nombreux fragments, et vous verrez que chacun peut exister à part” (*ÆC* I 275)—then Cixous, as always, will literalize this metaphor to the greatest possible extent: chopping up her previous drafts with a scissors and stapling the fragments back together in seemingly haphazard order. The most recent extant manuscript, housed at the Richelieu location of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, very close to the definitive text, can only be described as *grotesque*: it is a chimera of competing fonts and formats, mutilated photocopies on paper of various caliper and color, annotated and revised by hand, renumbered and reordered and rearranged, with passages struck and added, overlapping, at some points stapled three or even four sheets thick. The *des femmes* text is then composed of these *épaves*<sup>2</sup> (to continue the comparison to Baudelaire) that Cixous has recollected, magpie-like, in a kind of literary *bricolage*.

The originals of what was once called *Vol/e* or *Femme vole*—dreamlike, sometimes undeniably surrealist—are scarcely more linear than the final version of *Souffles*, and it would not be worthwhile to summarize them extensively here. I would nevertheless like to trace, from one text to the next, the evolution of a certain nexus of key themes and recurring motifs in order to reveal the implications of and motivations for Cixous’s deconstruction and reconstruction of her work—a textual practice resembling Genet’s fragments on Rembrandt—by concentrating on questions of omission and (self-)censorship: the gesture by which Cixous increasingly conceals or encrypts the heartbreakingly intimate impetus for her writing as the

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<sup>2</sup> In my discussion with the author on 12 April 2011, she attested to the Baudelarian aspect of her literary strategy of fragmentation: “Je pense que pratiquer les fragments est très important; je ne suis évidemment pas du tout la première à le faire. Disons que—puisque vous avez parlé de Baudelaire—finalement, on pourrait considérer tous ses poèmes comme des fragments, parce que c’est une œuvre... Il faut pouvoir penser en termes d’œuvre, c’est-à-dire que c’est un tout.” In keeping with Genet’s self-definition via Dostoyevsky, Cixous similarly describes the master’s notebooks for *The Idiot* in her Welleck lectures: “*The Idiot* is the book that survived many other books. The book that will be published is the strongest, the one that mysteriously survived all the others. Beneath this book there are hundreds of books that weren’t written, that were gradually pushed aside. In *The Notebooks for the Idiot* hundreds of books that were proposed, erased, and, at the same time, reproduced so that *The Idiot* could exist, lie helplessly in ruins” (*Three Steps* 15).

work progresses. When I asked the author if she ever regretted the unpublished portions, she responded that she never thought of them again, having other things to write (personal discussion, 5 March 2011). Both confirming and challenging this claim, the guiding principle of my analysis of *Souffles* will be the notion, expressed near the beginning of the work, that “Ce qui est coupé repousse” (*Souffles* 15). Taking this ambivalent assertion as my point of departure, I will focus on images of injury and (more pointedly) of *amputation* in the work in order to reveal omission in Cixous’s work as a productive textual strategy.

### 1: The Cut: Omission and Suppression

Just as Genet’s text is born of a wound (the bullet holes in Jean D.’s body), Cixous’s *Souffles*, with its fantasies of birth, similarly seems (somewhat secretively) inspired by the loss of a loved one: the death of her infant son from health conditions relating to Down syndrome—which she will only more fully recount nearly three decades later in *Le Jour où je n’étais pas là* (2000). In an early manuscript for *Souffles*, the author makes the comparison between her own experience and Genet’s loss of Decarnin manifest, imagining her predecessor in a maternal role vis-à-vis his lost love:

J’adore que Jean des *Pompes Funèbres* non seulement ne permette pas à son enfant homonyme de s’aller mourir seul mais que librement, avec une très puissante tendresse il l’adopte tel qu’il devient, jusqu’au bout l’accueillant, le gardant l’élevant mort, comme une mère épouse le sort de son enfant, quel qu’il soit, et rien, aucun geste, aucune parole, si étranges qu’ils puissent être ne lui arrive que moi voyant apparaître, sur ma peau de nouvelles taches de rousseur [quoted from manuscript; cf. *Souffles* 122].

If the reference to Genet is somewhat obscured in this passage of the published text, he nevertheless becomes a paternal mother—to borrow the expression that Cixous employs

repeatedly—adopting his dead lover as one would a child. And, in a syntactic misstep, Cixous slips into her own experience, representing her complicity through a variety of corporeal inscription: “que moi voyant apparaître, sur ma peau de nouvelles taches de rousseur” [quoted from manuscript]. Even if an oversight, the construction of this sentence—either concluding a comparison not present at the outset or abruptly changing the subject of the subordinate clause—nevertheless obliges us to numerous competing but equally valid interpretations. (Tellingly, it is just at this moment in the definitive text of *Souffles* that the line breaks midsentence; eliding the remainder of the passage quoted above [*Souffles* 122].) The text then continues, rendering Genet *pregnant* with his lover’s corpse: “Jean lui reste, se transformant pour le suivre ; et cependant que pour l’enfant bercer après sa mort son sein naturellement s’érige en cercueil” [quoted from manuscript].

Later, in this same draft, confronted with her double, who has also lost a child—the personage she playfully dubs Primavère—Cixous qua narrator makes more explicit reference to the autobiographical inspiration of her work:

Ce n’était pas mon fils : quoiqu’également égaré, le sien était encore vivant (le mien avait disparu depuis longtemps), mais elle était sans aucun rapport avec lui, ou presque. Elle n’était pas mère, me confirma-t-elle. Sa mère à elle tenait lieu de mère à cet enfant qu’elle n’avait jamais songé à se donner. Elle ne le pensait jamais. Il aurait pu, il pouvait, n’avoir jamais été [quoted from manuscript].

Yet, if this narrative is a familiar one to the reader of Cixous’s *Le Jour où je n’étais pas là*—one of her more widely known literary works—the link between the two books is, as far as I am aware, one that has never been acknowledged, and unsurprisingly so. This is, for the author, a fertile wound that is first alluded to and then obscured—becoming increasingly cryptic and concealed as the book is prepared for publication.

The difficulty of writing this loss had already been performed, but every bit as obliquely, three years earlier in a text called *Neutre* (1972): “J’ai déjà perdu mon fils, il est déjà

revenu” (*Neutre* 108). But in this text as well—if possible, a more experimental and challenging piece of writing than even *Souffles*—the narrative recounting the loss of the author’s child will be so thoroughly absorbed into the allegorical as to be entirely unrecognizable as factually autobiographical. References to the son (with all of his potential signifiers) are most often executed by an operation of explicit omission, again revealing by the very gesture that conceals, ultimately leaving merely “f...” (*Neutre* 20, 33, 56, 60, 61, 64, 65, 70, 71, 72, 85, 87, 90, 93, 101, 116,163), “f ” (*Neutre* 59) or one occasion the staged suppression of “~~fil~~” (*Neutre* 63). In the same manner, all explicit references to the birth and death of her first child are entirely removed (or sufficiently muddled to be uninterpretable) from the *des femmes* edition of *Souffles*; and, by the same token, there is a systematic suppression or encryption of Jean Genet’s *nom propre* that takes place until, in the final text, it is only rarely present in its actual orthography.

Cixous herself thematizes this variety of omission: the mysterious power of names and naming is a recurring motif; very early in the first manuscript she writes that

le nom résonne à l’intérieur (...) et je ne pourrais le répéter, il est entendu, mais gardé, comme arrêté entre ma gorge et ma mémoire (...) je suis privée du nom qui pourtant m’a sommée de vivre. Il me semble si proche, nouvellement *omis*, partie de moi, mais distinct, inséparable mais insaisissable (...) je me demandai *pourquoi cette omission*, s’il me fallait en tirer profit ou inquiétude, et *quelle part exactement j’avais à l’omission*, ou si le nom n’était pas silencieusement demeuré dans mon âme [quoted from manuscript, my emphasis].

The search for an unspoken (perhaps unspeakable) name thus occupies a good portion of this initial text—setting its potential reader, also, looking for a name whose significance we do not understand. It is in this passage that one also discovers the origin of Cixous’s designation “Omis”:

Pour des raisons d’une parfaite précision, le nom ne m’était qu’apparemment confisqué mais il demeurait à sa place par présence, puissance, et insistance, et par *l’énergie qui découle du lieu de l’omission* [quoted from manuscript, my emphasis].

The “lieu de l’omission” (a gap, a *hole*) is seen to be the secret origin of the text insofar as it is the missing name “qui pourtant m’a sommée de vivre.” The word *Omis* with which some of the omitted manuscripts and editors’ proofs are marked thus turns out not to be a note-to-self but rather a *title*: signaling the centrality of the notion of omission to the first version of what would eventually become a part of *Souffles*.

By the same act of “précision”, Cixous herself explains some of the reasons for this gradual suppression—itsself embedded in the significance of the very name of Jean Genet:

Je vais essayer d’expliquer avec précision cette expérience bouleversante: Pupille de l’Assistance Publique (...) Enfant abandonné, mais non sans nom : autre miracle ! J’aurais un nom-sans-famille, un nom plus que propre, pur, absolu. Un nom coupé [quoted from manuscript].

Even in its very presence, Jean Genet’s name is considered a *nom coupé*—not unlike Pierrot’s, Jean D.’s or the omitted name of Cixous’s son, which even in *Le Jour où je n’étais pas là* is replaced with her father’s. And it is through his status as an abandoned child that Jean Genet comes to stand in as a surrogate, a *lieu-tenant* (Cixous’s playful reference to Seblon in *Querelle de Brest*) for her own child, whom she had already long ago given up to the care of her mother in Algeria:

De Jean Genêt j’admire qu’abandonné un tel nom lui soit revenue à la place de père et mère. Quel homme, s’il s’aime, ne voudrait pas répondre à l’appel de si vifs signifiants? Ce qu’un nom fait d’homme, comment l’évaluer? De son nom d’une certaine manière Jean Genêt [sic] est le rejeton [quoted from manuscript].

Genet’s surname—which signals his belonging to a family that *does not* exist—will make of him a *rejeton*: both in its primary sense of ‘offspring’ or ‘progeny’ and (by the term’s own obvious etymological kinship with the verb *rejeter*) a rejected or abandoned child. In a certain manner, then, it is precisely the name Genet itself that calls for the variety of suppression to which it will ultimately be subjected in *Souffles*.

## 2: Regrowth: Graft and Amputation

If Cixous's loss of her son is eventually, and increasingly obliquely, encrypted entirely into the unsteady allegory of the imagined loss of Jean Genet (itself apparently written in disappearing ink), it is by the selfsame operation that the Cixousian text will be constructed; it is, in fact, of a piece with an absolute estheticism privedging the written word over lived experience. As Claudine Fisher distrustfully notes: "in giving herself the stylistic freedom that she desires, Cixous seems to refuse too vehemently any real value to autobiography, or to minimize the power of the genre to such an extent that it arouses suspicion" (61). And If the movements of Genet's reflections on the anus are governed by a ceaseless metonymic slippage, an unending chain of signifiers, Cixous's intimate and idiosyncratic images are also fundamentally interconnected, but in a somewhat different way: occurring not in isolation but in an exemplary illustration of Freudian (or more acutely: Lacanian) *Verdichtung*. To put it as plainly as possible: in the supersaturation of significations (what the author calls "Une hémorragie de Sens" [*Neutre* 58]) by which the artwork operates, Cixous makes an equation between three terms: (1) the story of her son, (2) the myth of Jean Genet and (3) the genesis of the text itself.

It is not, however, determinable which of these three valences allegorizes which—what is signifier and what is signified—which is to say that each allegorizes the others in an incessantly recursive gesture. To take an example from the definitive text, early on Cixous explains:

Lorsqu'il eut atteint une vingtaine de pages (ce gosse était un texte) il devint incontrôlable (...) en tant qu'auteur d'enfant (...) j'étais pris dans un mouvement d'ente (...) au corps taillé pour s'ajuster à l'entaille qui en moi depuis toujours s'était fendue pour lui. Alors par ce vaurien, cet enfant coupé, se fichant dans mon entaille, devenir mère (*Souffles* 33-4).

If designations such as “vaurien” and “enfant coupé” recall Genet, they also—as Cixous insists—refer to the text itself. Moreover, the reference to grafting (“ente”) exposes a literary strategy dating back to *Neutre*. As Cixous hints in a footnote on “l’accident chromosomique” and “les observations sur le mongolisme” (*Neutre* 69, fn. 9), the genetic defect of this now-fictionalized child becomes a key metaphor for the text’s own grotesque production of meaning, by which established ‘chromosomal’ pairs of signifiers and their signifieds will be exploded and then recoupled.<sup>3</sup> In the context of *Neutre*, Verena Andermatt Conley—borrowing the metaphor of which Cixous herself is fond—refers to this as “a practice of *greffe* (grafting)”: “Parts are severed from the body which, no longer whole and identical to itself, neither castrating nor castrated, neither one sex nor the other, continually engenders itself” (37).<sup>4</sup> As such, continues Conley, “*Neutre* is a bloody text, *sanglant* and *sans gland*, without genealogy or tree but one in which each graft, each cut, leads to another graft” (38).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lorene Birden makes a similar observation in the introduction to her translation of *Neutre*, reading genetics as the master metaphor that brings together the book’s two key concerns: “the creation and exposure of metaphors and the play of Hazard” (19). As Birden summarizes it: “Cixous refers to her narrative as a ‘mutant story, ergo mutating’ and illustrates this in the numerous births or nasciences (*naissances* or *nessances*) that occur throughout the narrative. None of these children are healthy; one is born badly deformed, another is born blind, two identical ones are on their death-beds (...) The first child mentioned is in particular the victim of an extreme chromosomal malfunction. Genetics, with its eerie combination of logic and hazard with its construction from separate elements (...) is used here as an exact comparison, a perfect natural metaphor for both language and narration (...) Indeed, the instance of a deformed child’s birth in *Neuter* is an example both of genetics gone awry and of literature gone awry; the baby was intended to be introduced as a metaphor for a language structure that has been tampered with, that has the ‘chromosomes’ of its signifiers and its phonemes altered” (19–20). While possibly aware of the autobiographical origin of this metaphor, Birden is discreet enough to allow it to remain unmentioned, focusing instead on its ambivalent textual implications.

<sup>4</sup> Following the same metaphorical constellation, V. Conley offers a convincing interpretation of the confusing allusions to the biblical figure Samson in both *Neutre* and *Souffles*: “In this delirious procession, words are bent backwards at an angle, myths and their allegorical messages exploded, castration mocked through a rewriting of the mythological couple Samson and Delilah (...) who—paradoxically—binds while she unbinds. She effracts Samson’s identity as his noun is cut into: *sans, sans*: dividing himself from himself; *sans sang*: without blood, the bloodless cut; *sans son*; without sound, without voice but with phantom sounds; *son son: cent sangs, cent cent*” (37–38).

<sup>5</sup> In an interview with the author on 12 April 2011, Cixous spoke of grafting as the operation by which *all* language—all language being metaphorical—functions, elaborating that the *greffe* is always both an addition and a scar. Genetics and botany are also key metaphors for both Sartre’s and Derrida’s imposing studies of Genet. As Robert Harvey neatly summarizes it: “By envisioning Genet as a mad botanist, Derrida is not far at all from Sartre who, in crediting Genet with creating himself from nothingness, reconstructs him as something of a do-it-yourself geneticist” (110). It is also interesting to note that this reliance on botanical metaphors is in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the rhizome.

Thus, by yet another Dostoyevskyan reversal, the notion of the graft inevitably involves its opposite: an amputation. And like Kafka's ax, this amputation constitutes a textual strategy that severs while it binds. Accordingly, images of amputated limbs are ubiquitous in Cixous's work—beginning with *Neutre*, throughout the various versions of *Souffles* and as recently as the opening of *Le Jour où je n'étais pas là*, where a “moignon (...) mignon” is taken for “un petit abricot rosé (...) un fruit flétri” (*Jour* 14) and the wastepaper basket is filled to brimming with “[d]es millions de photos de moignons” (*Jour* 15).<sup>6</sup> As Cixous intimates in *Le Jour où je n'étais pas là* (15) this is a kind of surgical operation which simultaneously diminishes and augments; elsewhere, Cixous expresses this as a binary between stigmata and the scar: “scar adds something: a visible or invisible fibrous tissue that really or allegorically replaces a loss of substance which is therefore not lost but added to, augmentation of memory by a small mnesic growth. Unlike scar, *stigmata takes away*, removes substance, carves out a place for itself” (*Stigmata* xii-xiii, original emphasis). We can see the same dialectal relationship in the passage from *Souffles* quoted just above: “j'étais pris dans un mouvement d'ente (...) au corps taillé pour s'ajuster à l'entaille qui en moi depuis toujours s'était fendue pour lui.” The graft (here: “ente”) thus

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<sup>6</sup> A scene of amputation recounted first in *Neutre* (47) is also central to the initial manuscript for *Souffles*—the narrative of an encounter with a figure based on Saint Theresa, who gives up her own leg for her *maître* (Saint Jean of the Cross, mirroring Cixous's self-proclaimed apprenticeship to Jean Genet). This amputation and the limp that results are equally important to *Le Jour où je n'étais pas là*, where they are displaced onto a three-legged dog. Mairéad Hanrahan goes so far as to identify this as one of the keys to Cixous's entire oeuvre: “For Cixous, writing itself may thus be said to be three-legged in that, offering her a way to step out of herself, come at herself from another angle, it enables her to mediate—that is, *re-mediate*, work through again-for-the-first-time—the relationships that make her who she is. *Le jour où je n'étais pas là* brings into focus the process of rereading key relationships that in retrospect has dominated the recent ‘autobiographical’ texts the author has produced over the last few years. Moreover, it may provide a model to approach Cixous's work as a whole, even her earliest, most intensely lyrical texts, where it could be argued that her systematic concern is to displace her reading of herself” (“Three-Legged”, 111). Throughout *Souffles* (even in the definitive text) Genet is described as limping—a detail recalling his own penchant for this affliction. He confesses in *Le Funambule* that this should be part of the artist's self-decoration: “*J'irais même jusqu'à lui conseiller de boiter*” (*ŒC* V, 14). And Giacometti puts this into practice: “Il reprend la marche en boitant. Il me dit qu'il a été très heureux quand il a su que son opération – après un accident le laisserait boiteux. Voilà pourquoi je vais hasarder ceci : ses statues me donnent encore l'impression qu'elle se réfugient, en dernier lieu, dans je ne sais quelle infirmité secrète qui leur accorde la solitude.” (*ŒC* V, 54).

occasions an “entaille”: a *wound* provoking, as if simply by semantic proximity, further pruning: *la taille*.

In *Souffles* (a book that with its various pages stacked was at one point easily twice as long as the version ultimately published) this pruning is referred to as a type of censorship, and while the word *censure* could refer to many things (and many things at once)—difficulties in publishing,<sup>7</sup> the institutions of good taste,<sup>8</sup> the variety of censorship the conscious mind exerts against the logic of the dream,<sup>9</sup> and perhaps most importantly the censorship of the female body<sup>10</sup>—the effect it has on the text is understood as a wounding one:

un coup d’ongles me râpe le flanc (...) c’est la vieille Censure (...) la vieille flique ne me lâche pas, mais odieusement touche à cette peau duveteuse ! (...) Je me tourne, fonds sur elle, — besoin d’arracher le bras qui a osé — en moi c’est lui, gonfle mes muscles de notre énergie on lui attrape le poignet et on le tord, jusqu’à, le plier, le nouer sur lui-même. La vue du bras maintenant grotesque me fait bien rire, on sent à peine la plaie que la Censure a ouverte à la hanche et le long de la cuisse ensanglantée. On se taille, on tourne cette page (*Souffles* 127).

Whatever this censorship might represent allegorically, it operates by means of a violence that in turn provokes a counter-violence, and doubly so: not only does the censored subject react by twisting the arm of “la vieille flique” into a grotesque figure; (s)he also, on the same occasion,

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<sup>7</sup> In an early interview that first appeared in *Le Monde* the year following the publication of *Souffles*, Cixous asserts that “there is, on the part of the classical editorial houses, a little operation of indirect censorship that consists of leaving manuscripts lying around for two, three, four years. And then suddenly, something unblocks itself. So people are amazed: once again two books by Hélène Cixous coming out at the same time” (*White Ink*, 51).

<sup>8</sup> In a 1984 interview with *Hors Cadre*, Cixous speaks of the effect of censorship and interdiction in her fiction: “When I write a fictional text, who is my interlocutor? To whom do I write? I cannot name the instance which then works on the unconscious of my language. It must be a mixture of myself, of God, of the absolute, etc.—since the public has neither a face nor a presence. There is also a part of censorship of which I am conscious. I felt over the years that I was threatened inside by effects of censorship (...) Of course, I resist it with all my strength, but I know that when I started to write, I ignored the drama of reception. I was in a kind of primitive freedom; afterward, the world—never work done at the university but all that pertains to mass media—sent me back the image of interdiction. I feel that I vibrate and that sometimes in my own text I inscribe a protest against interdiction (...) Always the same accusation: hermeticism, unreadability, incomprehensibility, difficulty; this kind of ‘critical vocabulary’ has been resonating for twenty-five years, I hear it all the time, sometimes even with an intimidated, non-hostile connotation” (quoted in V. Conley, 167).

<sup>9</sup> In the 1975 Makward interview, Cixous speaks of the censorship that time can impose on the signifiers of a dream: “but the more you take it on the level of the pre-conscious, the closer it still is to the period of production in the unconscious, the lighter the censorship is, that’s certain. Censorship is a very clear-cut thing, it’s like a bar: it comes down, like that, and then — bang! it falls!” (31).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, a resistance to this kind of censorship is the central aim of *Rire de la Méduse*: “À censurer le corps, on censure du même coup le souffle, la parole (...) *Écris-toi: il faut que ton corps se fasse entendre*” (*Rire* 45).

executes the type of pruning alluded to above: “On se taille, on tourne cette page.” This *taille* is then performed by a conspicuous textual break—a blank amounting to three full lines of text. What the reader of *Souffles* cannot know is that this is indeed the site of an actual suppression. Yet again literalizing the allegorical to the greatest possible extent, the author has omitted a single sentence, which had hitherto confessed: “Se tailler est une expression qui à plus d’un titre allume une curiosité: je ne sais pourquoi, je me sentis toujours tenue de le prendre à la lettre” [quoted from manuscript]. Accordingly, then, in the printed version of *Souffles* this self-pruning is executed *to the letter*—with this very sentence excised, giving way to a textual gap, a self-conscious lacuna, performing its content through its very absence.

After this performative break, the text resumes its considerations on the nature of self-pruning, connecting it to amputation and revealing the wounds it leaves to be productive and indeed desirable:

Qu’est-ce qu’on se taille ? Quand il se taille laisse-t-il aux mains des poursuivants un morceau de lui-même ? Il fallait, s’il s’était taillé à temps, qu’il ait laissé au moins une trace, une image, — cette queue de l’animal pris au piège et qu’il fallut couper ? Se tailler pour se récupérer (*Souffles* 127).

For this unidentified *il*—the reference could plausibly be to be to Jean Genet, to his lost Jean, to Cixous’s lost son—self-pruning appears to be a necessary endeavor, a manner of escape but also of recuperation, perhaps the very strategy by which what has been lost can be recovered.

Nevertheless, Cixous expresses disgust for these severed portions of the (textual) body:

Ainsi vagabondé-je autour du mot. Moi aussi je me suis taillée tout à l’heure, je me suis laissée tomber, pâmée, pour ne pas voir la balafre que la dingue [la Censure] m’avait ouverte. J’avais tout plaqué — pouvais pas encaisser ce genre de bobo. Un trou de balle propre et petit, oui, mais cette plaie lippue et saignante, impossible (*Souffles* 127).

Paradoxically, *la taille* appears to be a method of evading injury, or at least the sight of it. Thus Cixous wanders *around* the wound (full-lipped, as if prepared to speak)—avoiding it—just as she admits to wandering around the word *se tailler*. She goes on to explain somewhat more

precisely that it is not the injury itself that she finds bothersome, but rather the remnant of what was:

Un moignon ne me gêne pas ; mais la main séparée me fait horreur : si je le dis c'est qu'il ne s'agit pas ici de castration. Je me fous des menaces symboliques. C'est la chose morte qui me dégoûte ; pas l'amputation, le morceau. Si l'on me coupait la jambe, j'aimerais mon genou. Je m'étais donc taillé, par peur de me voir remorquer un cadavre de jambe (*Souffles* 127).

Again writing the wound while insistently rejecting the symbolic menace of castration, this passage reveals both the impetus for the type of suppression (once more coded as an amputation) described above, and the primary meaning of the key assertion, “Ce qui est coupé repousse” (*Souffles* 15). Here, the verb *repousser* appears to indicate repulsion—the repugnance felt not for the site of the injury but for what has been removed. Itself an injury, *la taille* is nevertheless intended to excise deceased limbs, to lose dead weight. This aspect of writing, it would seem, is thus meant not to immortalize what has been lost but rather to rid one of its ballast.

In the following paragraph, Cixous goes on to explain the ambivalently volitional and productive aspect of this pseudo-censorship. Again, the cuts made to the text between the final extant proof and the definitive *des femmes* edition are enlightening, and I will indicate the most significant in brackets:

On me rapproche des gestes contradictoires : “Tu fous le camp pour t'épargner la traversée de la boucherie; mais tu te gêne pas pour détailler ton texte. Tu coupes, si ça te chante.” Je l'affirme, je fais tout ce que je peux pour éviter des coupures irréparables. Mon gosse, mon texte [**souffre d'une hyperlaxité musculaire, mais**] je le relie scrupuleusement : je cherche, s'il lui advient une déchirure à le recoudre bord à bord. Ou à le déchirer, pour me donner le plaisir de le régénérer. Je soupçonne d'ailleurs les flics, la censure et tous les mecs de ce genre d'intervenir parfois dans nos affaires les plus intimes [**les miennes et celles de Jean**] point nommé pour qu'on se taille (*Souffles* 128).

Once more we are confronted with what Genet might call an act having both its own “signification et la signification inverse” (*ŒC* VI, 214)—in this case: a *taille*, a textual cutting,

intended to “éviter des coupures irréparables.” This is an esthetics of injury that suppresses “nos affaires les plus intimes”—here the reference to Genet and the potential reference to her son I have kept in bolded brackets above—in order to protect them from harm precisely by inflicting it. But *ce qui est coupé repousse*: what has been cut repulses and by the same token *regrows* as the author tears up her text—like Genet, quite literally—“pour me donner le plaisir de le régénérer.” Without direct reference to *Souffles*, the author redeploys the larger constellation of metaphors and motifs discussed above in her *Rencontre terrestre* with Jeannet when she admits that certain of her texts “repousseront en rejetons” (*Rencontre* 59). But this literary strategy is expressed perhaps most lucidly in the collection *Stigmata*: “When I write I do nothing on purpose, except stop. My only voluntary intervention is interruption. Breaking. Cutting. Letting go. Cutting is an art I have acquired. Nothing is more natural and more necessary. All living beings, mammal or vegetable, know that one must cut and trim to relaunch life. Nip the quick. Harm to help” (*Stigmata* 191).<sup>11</sup>

### 3: *Ni queue ni tête* [3]: Textual Reconstitution

In *Pompes funèbres* and *Souffles*, corporeal orifices—both erotic and inflicted—are the key loci (and media) of such a benevolent esthetics of injury. If these potent and provocative images may initially appear to represent the immediacy of the body above all else (the political and physiological sexuality of the author recuperated into text), ultimately they are paradoxically

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<sup>11</sup> A similar description of the writing process is put forward in her interviews with Jeannet: “Ce que je me sais faire exprès, c’est parfois une fragmentation, un tranchement, mais la plupart du temps la respiration du texte s’impose à moi, pendant que je rêve-écris” (45). Cixous’s notion of pruning resembles Derrida’s description of Genet in *Glas* (1974)—published just one year before *Souffles* although likely written slightly later than Cixous’s autobiographical fiction. Musing on the role of flowers in the novels, this second amorous J.D. contends: “Tenez compte des effets de recoupe et vous verrez que le tissu se reforme sans cesse autour de l’entaille” (33, right column).

the most aestheticist, radically experimental and self-referentially mediated of textual figures—particularly when it comes to the wound, which is always inevitably a kind of corporeal inscription. It is nevertheless these orifices and *openings* that determine the relationship between text and reader—which Nadia Setti, speaking directly of *Souffles* and of Cixous’s seminar more generally, has celebrated as a readerly “lutte amoureuse” (181): “certaines écritures me prennent au corps” (182)—as well as between the authors’ most intimate affairs or private traumas and their definitive fictionalized form.

Predicting in advance the variety of impending (self-)censorship and readerly resistance to result from their willful (or inadvertent but resigned<sup>12</sup>) provocation, it is through these polyvalent, grotesque figures that the fragmented artwork continues to make meaning. This procedure is not necessarily readily apparent. No one until now—not even Cixous herself—has ever examined all the wounded drafts of *Souffles* that are recombined to create the published text; we are left with only traces: scars testifying to an aesthetics of injury that has been concealed. *Pompes funèbres* also constitutes a return of the repressed insofar as Gallimard’s reédition in their Imaginaire series curiously takes up the text of the 1947/1948 original (although the copyright is erroneously given as 1953) rather than the text of the *Œuvres Complètes*: without any mention whatsoever, the censored text, like Baudelaire’s, has been rehabilitated.

A *hole*, as such, is present in its very absence; and, accordingly, the holes in human bodies that I have been examining (simultaneously subject and object of sometimes violent

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<sup>12</sup> When I asked the author if she sought to wound her audience while writing, she responded: “Pas du tout, parce que je ne vise rien. Ce que je vise c’est l’écriture. Je dirais que de toute manière quel que soit le texte il est probablement toujours blessant. Et ce n’est évidemment pas un désir de ma part. Il l’est parce qu’il fracasse les idées reçues, les petits souhaits justement, les notions de genre, les repérages, donc évidemment qu’il est blessant. Mais ce n’est évidemment pas de ma part, quelque chose qui est décidé. Je ne suis pas du côté de la provocation. Mais quand on lit *Souffles* je comprends très bien qu’il y a les gens qui se disent : mais c’est quoi... ?” (personal discussion, 12 April 2011). Moreover, she insisted that the same is true of Genet: “La violence chez Genet n’est pas costumée. Il est de son monde à lui. Le monde de sa sexualité ou de *ses sexualités*, puisqu’il n’y en a pas qu’une. Et bien-sûr que c’est violent. C’est violent, je dirais, pour le Français moyen, quoi” (ibid.).

sexual desire) are the illustration par excellence of the Genetian-Dostoyevskyan reversal by which every sign is doubled by its negative: revealing while concealing, adding while subtracting, healing through injury. As such, these signifiers seem to eschew definitive arrival at meaning, never settling on any given signified—always growing, deforming, reforming and beginning once again. Cixous, returning to her central concern with birth, gives a perfectly succinct illustration of this procedure on the last page of *Souffles* in her description of the work itself: “*Sur la table ce livre aux mille feuilles enceintes entre lesquelles il a pu se glisser: lacune. Il n’est*” (*Souffles* 223, original emphasis). Born of its own negation, the artwork issues from its holes.

**Part 3**  
The Filmic Cut

Chapter 6  
**The Woman on the Wall:**  
Ingeborg Bachmann's *Malina* (1971)  
Elfriede Jelinek's and Werner Schroeter's *Malina* (1991)

“Je ne supporte pas les murs blessés,” cries an ever more hysterical Isabelle Huppert near the conclusion of Werner Schroeter's 1991 French-language adaptation of Austrian author Ingeborg Bachmann's only completed novel, *Malina* (1971). Surrounded by piles of burning pages, soon hereafter the actress vanishes into what is described in the book as a *Riß* in the wall: a *tear*, like pages torn (*TP* III.1, 693).<sup>1</sup> The (mis)translation is fortuitous (in the film's original script, penned by Elfriede Jelinek after Bachmann's novel, the line reads, “Ich kann keine Umtriebe in der Wand brauchen!” [*Malina* 147]); with its description of this enigmatic rip as a *wound*, the film reveals the underlying importance of injury to the esthetics and thematics of Bachmann's text. Here I will contend that this ‘wounded’ wall can also be linked to writing and specifically to the reworking of Bachmann's narrative for the screen: the disappearance of the woman writer, the unnamed narrator of *Malina*, into the torn wall is, in part, an illustration of the living author's metaphorical disappearance into the torn and burning pages of her unfinished manuscripts. That these manuscripts are themselves identified by the appellation *Todesarten* (the intended title of the uncompleted series of novels of which *Malina* is only the first installment) reveals that the author in question is both a literary invention, the fictive narrator of the novel and protagonist of the film, and a textual representative of the *extratextual* author, Ingeborg Bachmann herself.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Bachmann are to the critical edition of her *Todesarten* project, edited by Robert Pichl.

Both Jelinek's script and Schroeter's film emphasize this connection to the autobiographical, elevating the recurring burning motif in Bachmann's text to a prophetic principle heralding the author's painfully veritable wounds, the largely unexplained death by fire that continues to confer a morbid mystique on Bachmann's person and her literary legacy. As Georg Huemer summarizes the journalistic fixation on this tragedy at the time:

Am 17. Oktober 1973 erlag Ingeborg Bachmann den Brandverletzungen, die sie sich in Rom zugezogen hatte. Ein mehr als drei Wochen dauerndes Martyrium, das von der internationalen Presse mitverfolgt worden war, hatte damit sein Ende gefunden. (...) Rund eine Woche nach dem Brandunfall Ingeborg Bachmanns in Rom häuften sich die Mitteilungen in den Zeitungen. Sie gleichen einander größtenteils im Wortlaut (...) Bachmann sei mit Brandwunden am ganzen Körper in ihrer Wohnung aufgefunden worden, sie habe noch versucht, den Brand selbst zu löschen und ihre Schmerzen in der Badewanne zu lindern. (...) In einigen Zeitungsberichten finden sich auch nähere Angaben über das Ausmaß ihrer Verbrennungen (...) Immer wieder gibt es aber auch Verweise auf *Malina* (170).

The author's work and death are thus perceived as of a piece, largely through an uncomfortably erotic obsession with her lethal wounds, and it is this seeming similarity between the demise of the narrator of *Malina* and that of her creator that the film chooses to highlight. "In der Verfilmung ihres Romans (...) durch Werner Schröter [sic]," explains Gudrun Kohn-Waechter, "gewinnt die Flammenfaszination erneut Aktualität" (220). As a commentary on Bachmann's text, Schroeter's film therefore exposes these injuries to be the essential link between artwork and autobiography—profoundly unsteading the established hierarchy between the real and its supposed *re*-presentation, the relationship between signifier and signified.

Which is to say that Jelinek and Schroeter cast the author's death as a *reification* not only of these motifs—tearing, wounding, burning—but also of the procedure of narrative fragmentation they perform. As Hermann Weber has it, "Bachmanns Tod durch einen Brandunfall erscheint wie ein schrecklicher Hinweis darauf, daß hier nicht nur ein metaphorisches 'Spiel mit dem Feuer' betrieben wird. Der Anspruch und der Sinnindruck, unter

denen ihre Poetologie steht, belegen den Ernst dieser Gedanken des Selbstopfers—als eines Flammenschlags in der ‘Nacht’” (220, also quoted in Kohn-Waechter 220). Once again, the wound exists in an uncertain space between the literal and the metaphorical. In this vein, in what follows I will first read the *Riß* at the conclusion of *Malina* within the context of the *Todesarten* series—and especially alongside the fragmentary novel *Das Buch Franza* (abandoned in 1966)—as part of just such a nexus of interconnected motifs, in order to confirm its function as a productive corporeal and textual wound. Turning then to Schroeter’s controversial adaptation of the novel, I will examine his reception and revision of this *Riß* as the heritage of what I’ve dubbed *estheticism* in Kafka, Bataille, Genet and Cixous: the peculiar semiotic procedure (in part, this literalization of the metaphorical) through which the purported *immediacy* of injury as a textual model is in fact *mediated*—through which actual experience is recuperated into text, transformed into an artwork.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1: ‘Mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand’: The Literalization of the Idiomatic

Of all the authors treated in this dissertation, Bachmann is perhaps the least explicitly violent. Nevertheless, as its title would imply, her *Todesarten* cycle contains a certain measure of brutality: Bachmann conceived of it—seemingly without irony—as a “Kompendium” of “aller möglichen Todesarten” (*Gul* 66). In *Malina*, some of these ways of dying are represented throughout the second chapter, which documents the narrator’s nightmares of her father;<sup>3</sup> as

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<sup>2</sup> Annette Meyhöfer also intimates an association between the inheritance of Bachmann’s *Riß*-metaphor and Schroeter’s blending of realism with an abstract, intellectual montage: “Alles wird zum Spiegel einer unbedingten Leidenschaft, die doch den Riß, der durch die Welt, durch die Frau selber geht, nicht mehr kitten kann—diese Grenze zwischen Wahrhaftigkeit und Spiel” (quoted in Kretschmer and Schardt, 102).

<sup>3</sup> As Iris Radisch points out in her review of Schroeter’s film, the father in *Malina* is also something in between an actual character and a purely allegorical figure: “Ihr Vater ist ein mörderisches Prinzip. Eine Metapher aus Fleisch

Sara Lennox summarizes it, the daughter “is gassed in a gas chamber; later she is transported to Siberia with other Jews (...) She is frozen in ice and plunged into fire, subjected to electroshock, buried under an avalanche, electrocuted, and eaten by a crocodile” (111)—this final death recalling Maria Malina, sister to the titular figure of the novel presently under consideration, who perishes in a shark attack on the fringes of the unfinished *Requiem für Fanny Goldmann* (1965–1966). To the extent that *Malina* relates a coherent plot, it recounts the narrator’s love affair with the Hungarian Ivan and her cohabitation with the shadowy eponymous figure, who exists in some suspended status between being, on the one hand, a character in his own right and, on the other, merely the masculine aspect of the narrator’s split psyche—a condition tellingly described in the novel’s final chapter as itself a constant *tearing*: “eine dauernede Zerreiprobe (...) Der Zerrissene, die Zerissene, nicht wahr?” (*TP* III.1, 580).<sup>4</sup>

Nearing the end of the novel—as the narrator’s relationships with Ivan and with Malina, her other half, begin to sour—she is increasingly given to such violent fantasies of self-destruction: first imagining her severed head served up on a platter in the Hotel Sacher (“Das ist der Tisch, an dem es geschieht und später geschehen wird. Man darf noch einmal essen zuvor. Mein Kopf rollt im Restaurant Sacher auf den Teller, das Blut spritzt über das blütenweie Damastischtuch, mein Kopf ist gefallen und wird den Gästen gezeigt.” [*TP* III.1, 649]) and soon thereafter hallucinating a pool of blood beneath her on the sidewalk (“Heute bleibe ich an der Ecke Beatrixgasse-Ungargasse stehen und ich kann nicht weiter. Ich sehe auf

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und Papier. Wie Kafkas Mordbeamte ist er kaum zu fassen. Das macht ihn so gefhrlich” (18, also quoted in Kretschmer and Schardt 104).

<sup>4</sup> This “Zerreiprobe” comes up again in Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*, specifically in Walter Klemmer’s mind as he attempts to write a response to Erika Kohut (*KS* 240). Michle Pomm, who traces the varied usages of intertext from Bachmann to Jelinek, demonstrates how this cloven identity morphs throughout the novel in order ultimately to manifest itself as the *Sinnbild* of the tear in the wall: “Die durch das Ich und Malina figurierte Teilung der Psyche wird im Roman immer wieder durch die Blider der Spaltung und des Risses evoziert. (...) Das ich verschwindet am Ende ausgerechnet in einem Spalt. Der Sprung in der Wand spiegelt ‘das Schizoind der Welt, ihr[en] wahnsinnige[n], sich weitende[n] Spalt’. Die ‘Schizothymie’ findet jedoch nicht mehr nur auerhalb statt; getreu Bachmanns Vorstellung von der Geschichte *im* Ich, geht der Riss nicht mehr nur durch die Welt, sondern auch durch das Ich. Die fissur in der Wand fungiert als Metapher fr die psychische Spaltung, deren letaler Ausgang durch den Gang in die Wand *versinnbildlicht* wir” (119, my emphasis).

meine Füße nieder, die ich nicht mehr bewegen kann, dann rundum auf das Trottoir und auf die Straßenkreuzung, wo sich alles verfärbt hat. Ich weiß genau, das wird diese wichtige Stelle sein, aus der braunen Verfärbung quillt es schon feucht hervor, ich stehe in einer Blutlache, es ist ganz deutlich Blut, ich kann nicht ewig hier so stehenbleiben und mir an den Nacken greifen, ich kann es nicht sehen, was ich sehe" [*TP* III.1, 649-650]). And it is in this context—within an extended catalogue of illusory wounds—that the rip begins to open in the wall: "Am frühen Morgen bin ich im Schaukelstuhl zusammengesunken, ich starre die Wand an, die einen Sprung bekommen hat, es muß ein alter Sprung sein, der sich jetzt leicht weitet, weil ich ihn immerzu anstarre" (*TP* III.1, 669). The story then ends with yet another *Todesart*, another way of dying: after the narrator has definitively disappeared into her crack in the wall, an unidentified voice informs the reader, "Es war Mord" (*TP* III.1, 695).

Bachmann's narratives, specifically those that constitute the interwoven components of the *Todesarten* project, quite frequently conclude with such inscrutable wounds—and with head wounds proving particularly common. Her short story *Alles*, for instance, from the collection *Das dreißigste Jahr* (1961), ends with a fatal accident, the death of the narrator's young child ("wurde unser einziges Kind...durch ein Unglücksfall *entrisen*" [*DJ* 98, my emphasis]): "Und es hatte mit Blut geendet, mit seinem schallend leuchtenden Kinderblut, das aus der Kopfwunde geflossen ist" (*DJ* 100). The short, satirical *Ihr glücklichen Augen*, from Bachmann's final published volume, *Simultan* (1972), the only finished portion of her *Todesarten* texts other than *Malina*, closes with a more playful but nonetheless analagous scenario when its protagonist crashes head first into a glass door: "und sie denkt zuletzt, während es sie hinschleudert unter einem Hagel aus Glasscherben, und während ihr noch wärmer wird vom Aufschlagen und dem

Blut, das ihr aus dem Mund und aus der Nase schießt" (*TP IV*, 273-274).<sup>5</sup> And in the haunting final lines of the novella *Drei Wege zum See*, the conclusion to the same collection, another of Bachmann's female protagonists, Elisabeth Matrei, a war photograph and literary stand-in for the author, falls asleep,

schon am Schlafrand getroffen von einem Traum, und sich an den Kopf griff und an ihr Herz, weil sie nicht wußte, woher das viele Blut kam. Sie dachte trotzdem noch: Es ist nichts, es ist nichts, es kann mir doch gar nichts mehr geschehen. Es kann mir etwas geschehen, aber es muß mir nichts geschehen (*TP IV*, 471).

Whether real, imagined or a premonition of the outcome of the suicidal assignment she has just accepted in Saigon, it is with Elisabeth's bleeding that Bachmann's oeuvre ends.<sup>6</sup>

While the author's writing doesn't problematize violence with quite the same ferocity as, for instance, Bataille's or Jelinek's,<sup>7</sup> careful attention *does* reveal this recurrent bleeding in her work as the marker of a hemorrhaging of meaning, a textual overflow: her tendency, especially, to place these often inexplicable injuries just at the moment where her storytelling breaks off suggests that whatever the wound is intended to represent exists *beyond* the limits of language, as a rupture in discourse. Most revealing for the present purposes, then, is the rape scene and resulting head wound—"das Hirndrucksyndrom (...) eine Ventrikelblutung (...) arteria cerebialis media, die Hauptarterie des Hirns, die Blutung" (*TP II*, 326)—that usher in the ending of *Das Buch Franza*, the most substantial extant draft of the handful of unfinished novels and narratives surrounding the *Todesarten* project. A close inspection of this passage with an eye to the aforementioned injuries and the cryptic conclusion of *Malina* will allow us to

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<sup>5</sup> This image is familiar from Bachmann's early poem, *Betrunkener Abend*, which concludes with the titular evening entering through a broken window: "Die Scheiben brechen. Blutend im Gesicht / dringt er herein, mit meinem Graun zu ringen" (*SG* 24).

<sup>6</sup> The final example I have listed, from the novella *Drei Wege zum See*, is particularly pertinent because of its affinity with the conclusion of a fairytale, called "Die Geheimnisse der Prinzessin von Kagran," woven through *Malina* as a kind of leitmotif. Here the heroine has her heart penetrated by a thorn and falls "blutend" from her horse (*TP III.1*, 357)—a *Herzwunde* evoked by the narrator of *Malina* immediately preceding her death. For more on this fairytale and the blood-flower-flame motif it establishes, see Kohn-Waechter's article on the intertextual connections between *Malina* and Paul Celan's *Gespräch im Gebirg*.

<sup>7</sup> In one interview Jelinek even expresses her astonishment, "daß die Frauenliteratur nicht gewalttätiger ist. Diese Demütigung, ein Werk zu schreiben, das von vornherein verachtet wird" (Winter 14–15, also quoted in Strigl 82).

interpret these key wounds in Bachmann's work as variations on a theme—in part, a quasi-Kafkan literalization of the idiomatic: in this case of the common expression, *mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand rennen*.

The passage is, tellingly enough, preceded by another in which the intertext with Kafka is undeniable. Franza, the eponymous protagonist whose very name might constitute an allusion, has travelled with her brother to Egypt, where she encounters an American tourist and his obnoxious mother with her “rosa Kleid” and “rosa Schminke” (*TP II*, 294). Various called “die rosa Hexe”, “die rosa Mutter”, “dieses Rosa”, “[d]as Rosa” and “die rosa Frau” (*TP II*, 295-296), the woman is associated with the adjective no fewer than eight times in the few pages where she appears. Moreover, it is this ‘Rosa’ who refers Franza to the “**Wunderdokter**” (*TP II*, 295, my emphasis)—an ironic allusion, I would argue, to Kafka's surgeon, or *Wundarzt*: the narrator of *Ein Landarzt*. This *Wunde(r)dokter* is, as it turns out, a former Nazi researcher who conducted experiments in euthanasia; Franza, not entirely unlike the young patient in *Ein Landarzt*, begs him for death.<sup>8</sup>

It is after he refuses and even flees his home in order to avoid her that Franza finds herself in the desert with her brother on a visit to the pyramids. There, while left alone, she is assaulted by a man holding “einen Stock in der Hand, er war stehen geblieben und hatte sich gegen sie gewandt, sie stand erstarrt da, erhielt den leichten Schlag, als hätte er sie *mit einer Axt getroffen*” (*TP II*, 320). Kafka's ax, the emblem of his esthetics of injury, is thus recast in a context of sexual aggression. To this image, Bachmann adds her own central motif of literary violence: the wall. At first, Franza “ging weiter und zog sich an der *Wand entlang*” (*TP II*, 320, my emphasis) but

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew Webber also discovers an extended allusion to Kafka's *Landarzt* “understood here as a satirical treatment of the therapeutic project” as one of the “satirical intertexts” (120) of Bachmann's *Büchnerpreisrede, Ein Ort für Zufälle*—also part of the *Todesarten* project.

Der Mann packte sie von hinten, fast sanft, wie sie noch merkte, sie fiel *gegen die Steinwand*, er hielt sie mit schwachen Armen umklammert, dann *stieß er ihr noch einmal den Kopf gegen das Grab*, und sie hörte keinen Laut aus sich kommen, aber etwas in sich sagen: Nein. Nein. Die Wiederholung. Die Stellvertretung. *Sie blieb so an dem Stein hängen, mit seitlich hingelegtem Kopf* (TP II, 322, my emphasis).

In the telling, this rape blends together with the trauma of another: a flashback to her husband violating her against the bookshelves of their home library. (Continuing the list of likely references to Kafka's *Landarzt*, Franza hopes to be interrupted by their own *Dienstmädchen*, named Rosi [TP II, 321].) If Kafka's ax is literature, then the wall against which Ingeborg Bachmann's female characters repeatedly strike their skulls is also literature: locating this scene of sexual aggression in the library, the author intimates a fundamental kinship between this variety of gender violence and an exclusion of women from literary discourse.

This is made particularly evident in the description of Franza's first rape, as largely the same language as before is employed to describe the victim's positioning vis-à-vis the bookshelf while she is abused:

sie machte die Zeitschriften und Nachschlagwerke in Wien auf und ging *an der Bibliothek entlang* und blätterte in den Büchern, sie *zog sich an der Bibliothek hoch* (...) damals hätte sie schon nachsehen und denken sollen, *sie war aber nur an der Bibliothek kleben geblieben mit abgewendetem Kopf* und hatte zu ihm gesagt, nein. Nein. (...) und er hatte sie, als sie sich lösen wollte, *wieder an die Bibliothek mit den harten Kanten gestoßen* (TP II, 321, my emphasis).

Moreover—following the seemingly ceaseless chain of associations this image sets in motion—this passage parallels another of the nightmares from the second chapter of *Malina*, during which the narrator's tyrannical father, with a gang of men, ravages his daughter's book collection, leaving her curled up and bleeding on the floor beside her tattered volumes:

mein Vater ordnet an, *daß meine Büchergestelle abgerissen werden sollen, ja er sagt "abreißen"*, und ich will mich vor die Bücher stellen, aber die Männer stellen sich grinsend davor, ich werfe mich vor ihnen auf den Boden und sage: Nur meine Bücher laßt in Ruhe, nur diese Bücher (...) Aber mein Vater (...) beginnt, fünf, sechs Bücher auf einmal zu nehmen, *wie einen Paken Ziegelsteine*, und er wirft sie, *so daß sie auf den Kopf fallen* (...) und ich hocke betäubt und blutend inmitten der Bücher (...) Ich lege mich zwischen die Bücher, ich streichle sie wieder, eines

nach dem anderen (...) ich versuche ihnen vom Leib zu bleiben, damit sie keine Blutflecken bekommen. Gute Nacht, sagt Josef K. zu mir (*TP* III.1, 510-512, my emphasis).

The violence inflicted against the female body is—in Bachmann’s account—then also perpetrated against the textual one, which is torn, dropped on its head and dismantled brick by brick, just like a wall. Yet the injury that proves fatal for Franza is not part of the violation proper but occurs, instead, post-facto and is self-inflicted with a poignant blend of rebellion and resignation, another ripping, prefiguring the conclusion to *Drei Wege zum See* almost word for word: “Es ist nichts, nichts ist geschehen, und wenn auch. Es ist gleichgültig. Ihr Denken *riß* ab, und dann schlug sie, schlug mit ganzer Kraft, ihren *Kopf gegen die Wand* in Wien und die Steinquader in Gizeh und sagte laut, und da war ihre andre Stimme: Nein. Nein” (*TP* II, 323, my emphasis). Franza’s final act of self-mutilation exists outside of language, stands as a surrogate for her ultimately ineffable *No*. Here the underlying idiom (*mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand*) is finally revealed verbatim; within this rich constellation of textual conclusions the evocative encounter with the wall that constitutes the *dénouement* (unraveling) of *Malina* is revealed to be an important quilting point for the ideological and esthetic disposition of Bachmann’s *œuvre* on the whole.

This is, incidentally, an interpretation of the end of *Malina* also implied by Elfriede Jelinek in *Die Wand* (2002)—the fifth and final play of her dramatic cycle of *Prinzessendramen*, *Der Tod und das Mädchen*. There Jelinek imagines a dialogue between a figure named for Ingeborg Bachmann and another modeled after Sylvia Plath:

Warst du es nicht, die gesagt hat, daß du einmal in einem dieser Risse verschwunden seist? Da hast du gelogen. Die Wand ist noch da, und du bist auch noch da. Paß auf, also jetzt versuchst du, *gegen die Wand zu rennen, bis dein Schädel aufgeschmissen ist*. Du stirbst in der Wüste, du verreckst im Sand, der aus

der unsichtbaren Wand in Jahrtausenden abgebröckelt und zu griffigem Mehl erodiert ist (*Der Tod und das Mädchen*, 108, my emphasis).

With her image of a shattered skull, Jelinek resurrects a dead metaphor, highlighting the horrifying violence of an everyday expression and giving it new life and body. (Conversely, the apparent reference to Franza's death in the desert is drawn back out of the concretely literal into the abstractly metaphorical.<sup>9</sup>) The author thus reads the wall-motif (both in Bachmann and others, notably Marlen Haushofer<sup>10</sup>) as symptomatic of an admirable but self-destructive—and perhaps agonizingly futile—feminist stubbornness, to which she is resistant. On the occasion of her being awarded the Nobel Prize in 2004, Jelinek returns this literalization of the idiomatic to a supposed autobiographical real, giving a suspiciously novelistic account of her own agoraphobia, which will prevent her from accepting the accolade in person:

Es ist eine spezielle Form von Agoraphobie, die ausbricht, wenn ich in einer Menschenmenge angeschaut werde. Ich bin als Mädchen ein Jahr lang nicht aus dem Haus gegangen und war als Kind schon Patientin, *weil ich wie eine Verrückte im Zimmer hin und her gerannt und mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand geknallt bin*. Mein damaliger Psychiater hat gesagt, daß ich auf diese Weise den Druck, unter dem ich stand, loswerden wollte. Das war kein schöner Anblick (“Lebensmüllabfahr”, my emphasis).

If Bachmann, and Jelinek after her, takes the image of running one's head against a wall *à la lettre* as an apt illustration of a psychic state—the frustration of femininity in patriarchal society—Jelinek gives the phrase yet another turn, allowing this literalization to contaminate even her (recollection of) lived experience. More pertinently, in another interview from the same month, Jelinek attaches this metaphorical violence to the question of an *écriture féminine*: justifying her own alleged appropriation of a ‘phallic’ prose style in a discussion of Thomas

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<sup>9</sup> In this context, in a chapter on *Die Wand*, Helga Mitterbauer provides an insightful definition of Jelinek's writing on the whole: “Es entspricht ihrer avantgardischen Schreibweise, dass diese Verweise bedeutungsoffen bleiben, vermeintlich konkrete Sinnsetzungen (...) unterlaufen. Jelinek's Ästhetik speist sich zu einem nicht unbeachtlichen Teil aus dem freien Flottieren von Signifikanten, die je nach Situation neu definiert und mit Bedeutung aufgeladen werden beziehungsweise hohe Deutungsoffenheit aufweisen” (290).

<sup>10</sup> Daniela Strigl also highlights the connection between the passages under consideration but focuses primarily on the somewhat more neglected intertext with Haushofer's novel, *Die Wand* (1963).

Bernhard with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Jelinek contends: “Es liegt darin natürlich auch eine Auflehnung gegen die Tatsache, daß man sich als Frau nicht einschreiben kann. *Man rennt mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand*. Man verschwindet” (*Mit dem Kopf gegen die Wand*, 35, my emphasis).<sup>11</sup>

Here the Nobel laureate most certainly has *Malina* in mind, which Bachmann conceived of as a particular kind of overture for the *Todesarten* project: it is intended to allow the female narrative voice to vanish into Malina’s, who would then narrate the rest of the cycle. Speaking of this decision, Bachmann informs one interviewer that

Für mich ist das eine der ältesten, wenn auch fast verschütteten Erinnerungen: daß ich immer gewußt habe, ich muß dieses Buch schreiben—sehr früh, noch während ich Gedichte geschrieben habe. Daß ich immerzu nach dieser Hauptperson gesucht habe. Daß ich wußte: sie wird männlich sein. Daß ich nur von einer männlichen Position aus erzählen kann. Aber ich habe mich oft gefragt: warum eigentlich? Ich habe es nicht verstanden, auch in den Erzählungen nicht, warum ich so oft das männliche Ich nehmen mußte. Es war nun für mich das Finden meiner Person, nämlich dieses weibliche Ich nicht zu verleugnen und trotzdem das Gewicht auf das männliche Ich zu legen (*Gul* 99-100).

Here, then, Bachmann simultaneously critiques and nevertheless apparently perpetuates the problematic exclusion of the feminine perspective from literary narrative. Just such a fundamental tension between the author’s identity as a woman and one as a writer is at the core of Jelinek’s interpretation of *Malina* and the aspect of the text she chooses to emphasize in her adaptation for the screen:

Für eine Frau *ist schon das Schreiben ein gewaltätiger Akt*,<sup>12</sup> weil das weibliche Subjekt kein sprechendes ist. Das Drehbuch zu Ingeborg Bachmanns Roman *Malina*, das ich geschrieben habe, thematisiert genau das, daß eine Frau, um zu sprechen, sich ein männliches Subjekt, das sie aber selbst nie sein kann, borgen

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<sup>11</sup> There is another echo of this in Jelinek’s *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, when one character proclaims: “Ich gehe jetzt mit der Stirn gegen den Stein einer Pyramide schlagen” and the following stage direction wryly notes “Sie verschwindet einfach” (196).

<sup>12</sup> In her study of violence in women writers including both Bachmann and Jelinek—*Gewaltiges Schreiben gegen Gewalt*—Sylvia Schmitz-Burgard concludes that Bachmann’s narrator in *Malina* attempts to remain non-violent in her creative writing, but ultimately linguistic violence becomes necessary to combat her exclusion as a female from the public sphere.

muß, aber letztlich keinen Raum hat, in dem sie sprechen kann, solange, *bis sie in der Wand verschwindet* (...) Bei den Kritikern hat man mir zum Teil vorgeworfen, ich hätte eine so menschliche Geschichte wie *Malina* zu einer Geschlechterkampfflamotte umgeschrieben. Ich würde sagen, es gibt kaum eine andere Autorin der Gegenwart, die den Geschlechterkampf mit dieser Härte thematisiert hat, wie die Bachmann (Winter 14-15, also quoted in Bethman 391, my emphasis).<sup>13</sup>

And while the importance of this ‘gender warfare’ for Bachmann’s novel and its filmic adaptation can scarcely be overstated, for the purposes of the present study I would like to once again refocus our attention not on the political but rather on the *esthetic* implications of the literary violence discussed by Jelinek above: the consequences of this torn narrative identity for the formal composition of the *Todesarten* project.

Examined from a literary historical standpoint, Bachmann’s claim is not that she feels unable to write or forbidden from writing as a female—indeed she makes pointed mention of her very successful career as a poet—but rather that there appears, for her, to be an ingrained opposition between femininity and the writing of (linear) *narrative* specifically. As Sara Lennox demonstrates, “it is apparent that the invention of *Malina* solves a good many problems for both Bachmann and the ‘I’. In the voice of *Malina*, Bachmann can narrate the rest of the ‘Ways of Death’ in a form apparently coherent, realistic, and accessible—as various reviewers (...) remarked with relief of *Three Paths to the Lake*” (100). Setting aside the clichéd association between masculinity and chronological, coherent narrative, we might instead concentrate

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<sup>13</sup> Jelinek seems to be specifically referring to Iris Radisch’s zealous condemnation of Schroeter’s film (and of Jelinek’s script especially): “Der Konflikt, der die Frau bei Ingeborg Bachmann innerlich *zerreißt*, wird bei Elfriede Jelinek zu einer Geschlechterkampf-Klamotte. Sie soll die ‘Unmöglichkeit’ demonstrieren, ‘Sexualität und Kreativität zugleich zu leben.’ Die Hölle der schreibenden Frau ist der Abgrund zwischen Bett und Schreibmaschine” (17). But not all feminist reviews of Schroeter’s film were as critical of the screenwriter—with many critics, Kathleen Komar especially, explicitly trying to exonerate Jelinek from what they see as the inherent misogyny of Schroeter’s adaptation: “‘Es war Mord,’ indeed! The final film is so subversive of the original feminist implications of Bachmann’s novel that one can only hope that the fatal blow was struck by the (male) director rather than by the (female) screenplay writer” (103). Praise for Isabelle Huppert’s performance is universal, but some are appreciative of Jelinek’s efforts as well. Margret Eifler, for instance, identifies an underlying esthetics of injury common to both Bachmann and Jelinek, concluding that rendering “Bachmann’s concept into the filmic medium with its specific directness and immediacy seemed to have suited Jelinek’s anger just fine; not only was she able to extrapolate from the original text the most disruptive models of heterosexual warfare, but the cinematic mode of expression *let her wield the axe* (to stay within Jelinek’s idiom) of intense pictures” (215, my emphasis).

exclusively on the different modalities of storytelling that are permitted by this split narrative identity, thus rereading Bachmann's '*écriture féminine*' purely as an experiment in narrative form.<sup>14</sup>

This is, for instance, albeit subtly, how the shift from the female narrator to Malina, the eventual male narrator, is presented in the novel itself. During their penultimate dialogue, confronted with the many hysterical inconsistencies of their confused argument ("Ich hasse dich. (...) Ich habe dich nie gehaßt" [*TP* III.1, 688]), Malina tells the narrator: "Ich glaube dir kein einziges Wort, ich glaub dir nur alle Worte zusammen" (*TP* III.1, 688). And while this paradoxical statement may initially to appear to be the same variety of absurd auto-contradiction that prompted his dismissal to begin with, Malina—it seems—has said the magic word. For it's precisely at this moment that narrator abandons her literary project, passing it on to him: "Ich wollte erzählen," she responds, "aber ich werde es nicht tun. (...) Übernimm du die Geschichten, aus denen die große Geschichte gemacht ist. Nimm sie alle von mir" (*TP* III.1, 688). This is exactly how Bachmann publicly describes her *Todesarten* cycle, as "ein Buch, das

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<sup>14</sup> Which is to say that I find it important to resist the tendency too readily to express these esthetic choices in ethical terms, especially with recourse to problematic notions of naturalized gender identity. (Although perhaps I should attempt to read more into the fact that the three final authors treated in this dissertation—in the history of narrative I am sketching—all happen to be women.) In order truly to understand Bachmann's importance as a twentieth-century writer, it is essential to divorce, at least temporarily, the novel's place in literary history from its position in a history of feminism. Occasionally overly politicizing Bachman, Lennox still sometimes appears to imply that an avant-garde writing strategy would be inherently politically progressive as well—in my view, a dangerously misconceived conclusion. For Lennox, these are the stakes of Bachmann's experiments in literary self-deconstruction: "we need to look for places where the 'I' mis-writes herself—*sich verschreibt*, as Bachmann puts it (...) At best, we can indicate some areas in which that which she cannot say tries nonetheless to speak. (...) The narrative structure of the book itself is one of those places. (...) If the lack of coherent plot development or even of an identifiable narrative stance has been responsible for some of reviewers' and scholars' problems with the book, it's also an assertion of the lack of coherence available to the 'I'. (...). But one might also regard these failures of the text to constitute a seamless narrative, and even those opaque and mysterious allusions which remain resistant to interpretation, as a utopian hint—though only a hint—in the direction of another, less oppressive discourse which feminists could make use of" (109-110). Lennox thus links Bachman's experiments in form to a utopian *écriture féminine* of the Cixousian variety. Nevertheless, she does decide that Malina manages to become a 'moral' narrator, even if his manner of storytelling is purportedly conservative and lamentably masculine: "If Malina does not break with the categories of the order he depicts, he nonetheless gives account of the tragedies it occasions with kindness and compassion. Bachmann's fondness for her figure is evident (...) though Malina moves in the direction of a nineteenth-century narrator, the moral burden of what he has to tell us is none the weaker for that; it is only that we must read the moral out of his narratives" (100).

aus mehreren Büchern besteht” (*TP* II, 361): “kein Roman [sondern] ein einziges langes Buch” (*GuI* 66).

The female narrative voice does not vanish from this project altogether, but is, rather, preserved in its first volume: marking this formal inconsistency as an important aspect of the cycle’s composition. And as the preceding pages have likely made apparent, even after the intervention of Malina as narrator, the work retains this structure—anything but linear, every moment of Bachmann’s work veers of rhizomatically into its countless intertexts and (more importantly) its *intratexts*: the various reprisals, repeated motifs, and points of contact between the many narrative units. Once again we are confronted with a literary work that is more than the sum of its parts—an ever-changing amalgam of many moving pieces.<sup>15</sup> While lending a ‘masculine’ and ostensibly authoritative voice to certain fragments of the *Todesarten* cycle, Malina therefore appropriates and interprets the idiosyncrasies of the narrative identity that precedes him: not one single word, one single story, but rather all together, all at once.

## 2: “...die stille Frau an der Mauer”: The Disappearance into Text

In her vitriolic critique of Werner Schroeter’s version of *Malina*, Brenda Bethman argues that the film

ends up fulfilling the same function as Malina does in the novel: he [Schroeter] appropriates Bachmann’s story and tells it *for her*. If *Malina* the novel can be read as Bachmann’s struggle to find a narrative voice with which she would be able to narrate the rest of the *Todesarten* cycle, *Malina* the film can also be viewed as Schroeter’s attempt to narrate Bachmann’s death (402, original emphasis).

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<sup>15</sup> This is also apparent in Bachmann’s use of (near-)anagrams: the same combinations of letters used in various arrangements. Throughout both the book and the film, MALINA is swapped with ANIMAL, ANIMUS and MELANIE; IVAN becomes MA VIE and TODESARTEN morphs into TODESRATEN. This procedure is addressed explicitly as a deformation of language in the script (“Damals fing ich auch an, alle Wörtzer zwanghaft zu enstellen” [Jelinek 107]) and, especially, in the film itself: “Je commence à comprendre. Depuis toujours je difforme tous les mots. Au lieu de ‘mode d’été’ je lisais ‘mort d’été.’”

Here Bethman follows Ingeborg Majer O'Sickey, who contends that our desire to understand, to master, Bachmann's story, and particularly to interpret its ambiguous ending, is symptomatic of a "desire to 'rewrite' her book (to speak for her) *into a linear, more accessible narrative* [that] also writes over the terms of her linguistic oppression" (O'Sickey 62, quoted in Bethman 402, my emphasis). But Werner Schroeter's cinema can hardly be accused of being linear or accessible, and it is for this reason that Michelle Langford has chosen to identify it as *allegorical* in the Benjaminian sense central to the first chapter of the present dissertation: "Rather than bringing together all parts in harmony, Schroeter's films consist of diverse fragments that rub against one another, causing friction and announcing the very nature of their construction. This (...) is one of the fundamental aspects of the allegorical mode of expression as it has been theorized in [sic] Walter Benjamin" (10). Instead, if anything Schroeter's adaptation accentuates the structural ruptures and formal inconsistencies of Bachmann's novel.

Moreover, the director's desire to unpack the plot of *Malina* is encoded into the book, or at the very least into its paratext: the very first sentence of the blurb (written by Bachmann herself) intended for the cover of the work markets *Malina* as a mystery, a kind of literary crime novel, asking the question, "Mord oder Selbstmord?" (*TP* III.1, 141). Schroeter can therefore be partially excused for his misstep, writes Bethman, which "is in some ways encouraged by the text" (402). Instead, what enraged Bethman and so many other critics when *Malina* debuted was what they perceived as an exploitative appropriation of the autobiographical elements of the narrative, linking its ultimate enigma "to the mystery of Bachmann's death" (*ibid.*). Here I will argue, against what appears to be popular consensus, that—much as *Malina* as a narrator inherits and even amplifies those structures already present in the novel that shares his name—Jelinek's and Schroeter's inclusion of biographical details in fact continues and intensifies the

conflation of the literal and the metaphorical, particularly surrounding images of injury, that was already an essential element of Bachmann's poetic procedure.

What most bothered critics about the film, after all, were "the endless bonfires surrounding the female character in the interminable last half hour" (Komar 103): the willful reinterpretation of the book's ending as an analogue to Bachmann's own unfortunate demise. Bethman, once again, protests that Schroeter's use of fire makes the disappearance into the wall look like a disappearance into flames:

Just before her death, Schroeter has Huppert utter the words 'Ich darf nicht verbrennen' (...) yet again intensifying the connection to Bachmann's death. While this phrase does exist in both the novel and script, Huppert repeats the word 'verbrennen' four times, compared to once in the novel and twice in Jelinek's script (398).

Like Jelinek before him, Schroeter transposes one 'injury' (the rip in the wall) onto another (the author's death by fire) thereby revealing the wound, once again, not as a mere metaphor, but rather as the secret center of an entire semiotic nexus: it is both an unsteady allegorical signifier (in the sense addressed above) and itself sometimes, self-reflectively, its own signified, its own *meaning*—as it is here, where the filmmaker, with a suspiciously mystical earnestness, interprets the final tear in *Malina* as itself a premonitory metaphor for the author's eventual death.

This take on the book predictably stirred up quite a bit of controversy amongst feminist critics in the early 1990's but it was Iris Radisch who put her objection against this reinterpretation the most dramatically when she lamented, in the opening lines of her review of Schroeter's *Malina*, that

Alles brennt. Die Buchpakete, die Briefe, die Kleiderbündel. In der Küche brennt der Gasherd. Davor steht die Frau, die Schriftstellerin, die Schauspielerin, und beugt sich über die Herdflamme. Sie will sich eine Zigarette anzünden. Da wird sie zurückgerissen. Hinter ihr steht Malina. Er sieht sich ihre Hand an. Sie hat

sich die Hand über der Gasflamme verbrannt. Der Mann leckt ihre Wunde.<sup>16</sup>  
Und sie schreibt weiter. Sie schreibt vom Feuer (17).

This apparently incidental burn wound at the end of the film then also serves as an emblem of the absolute identification of the woman writer (*Schriftstellerin*) with the actress (*Schauspielerin*) and, more broadly, with the more obscurely allegorical everywoman (*die Frau*)—held apart and at the same time united by Radisch’s comma splices. (Notably, as I will demonstrate momentarily, the same syntax governs Schroeter’s filmic cuts, which both sever and join the disparate images depicted.) Moreover, even while complaining about this cliché, Radisch, with apparently unconscious irony, redeploys it as a metaphor for the director’s treatment of Bachmann’s text: “Werner Schroeter verfilmt und flambiert einen Roman von Ingeborg Bachmann: ‘Malina’. Brennende Menschen. Flammendes Inferno. Das Kino ist heiß wie das Feuer. Aber die Kunst ist kälter als Schnee” (ibid.). While lambasting the sterility of this fire trope in Jelinek and Schroeter—to whom it seems to represent the conflagration that definitively left Bachmann’s *Todesarten* in fragments—Radisch herself employs the same ‘syntactic’ structures and returns to an even more bromidic iteration of the same established language: fire as a metaphor for the destruction of the artwork.

For Schroeter, though, it is precisely the connection to the autobiographical that justifies the formal fragmentation of Bachmann’s novel and implicitly of his own adaptation as well. In an interview with Stefan Grisseman, Schroeter is asked about the formal inconsistencies that mark *Malina*:

[Grisseman:] *Bachmanns „Malina“ strahlt **Zerissenheit** aus, nicht nur formal, weil das Buch zwischen Drama und Roman pendelt, sondern auch inhaltlich, mit dieser doppelten männlichen Figur. Wird sich diese **Brüchigkeit des Romans** auch auf die Form des Films auswirken?*

[Schroeter:] Ganz bestimmt. Ich würde das sogar noch extremer formulieren als Sie. **Der Roman ist ein Selbstaflösungsprozeß mit einer ganz starken**

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<sup>16</sup> This is both a conflation of two distinct scenes and an exaggeration, albeit not much of one: in actual fact, Malina, who had been slicing meat, places his fingers painfully on the burn on the protagonist’s wrist.

**Intuition, denn kurze Zeit später war sie ja wirklich tot. Die Bilder im Roman haben häufig mit Feuer zu tun, sie selbst ist zwei Jahre später verbrannt. Das ist hochinteressant.** Sie ist eine Lyrikerin allerersten Ranges gewesen, die Form, sich so in einem Roman zu entäußern, ist stilistisch von radikaler Ungleichmäßigkeit. Die Autorin ist gar nicht mehr sie selbst, **sie versucht, sich selbst zu vernichten, indem sie den Roman schreibt.** Und das ist faszinierend, wenn man die Person und Schriftstellerin Ingeborg Bachmann liebt, ihr Endpunkt ist am faszinierendsten. Und dann darf man ja nicht vergessen, daß das Ganze neu gesehen wird von Elfriede Jelinek (quoted in Kretschmer and Schardt 98, original italics, my emphasis).

Asked explicitly about his inheritance of Bachmann's *structural* fragmentation (*Zerissenheit* and *Brüchigkeit*) Schroeter takes immediate and enthusiastic recourse to the ostensible autobiographical element of this narrative procedure—speculating wildly about fire imagery and entirely neglecting to comment on the obvious formal *Brüchigkeit* and *Ungleichmäßigkeit* of his own work. In his view, it appears, the author's actual, *corporeal* self-destruction trumps the literary *Selbstauflösungsprozeß* present in her novel.

Jelinek also seems to intimate the connection between the two when, in an interview for the *Presseheft* for the film release of *Malina*, she speaks of an oeuvre absolutely inextricable from the author's own life:

Es gibt ja Schriftsteller, die einen interessieren, weil einen die Biographie interessiert und andere die ihre Spuren (...) ganz bewußt systematisch verbergen. Und die Bachmann hat einerseits Spuren hinterlassen und andererseits in ihrer Literatur, die eine ganz diskrete Literatur ist, die Spuren auch wieder verborgen. Und deswegen, glaube ich, dass sie die Generation von Germanistinnen sehr interessiert hat—auch durch diesen mysteriösen Tod. Aber ich meine ja man sollte die Biographien von Autoren einfach vergessen und nur ihr Werk sprechen lassen, aber bei manchen Autoren kann man es nicht vergessen (quoted from Manner).

For Jelinek, her predecessor is one of those writers whose work calls attention precisely to what it is hiding: the actual identity of the author. Bachmann, moreover, might even agree; indeed, she speaks of *Malina* as a kind of spiritual autobiography, if not ultimately an autobiography in the strictest of senses:

Es ist nicht Ingeborg Bachmann, die herumgeht, Tee trinkt oder ausgeht und mit anderen spricht. (...) [*Malina* ist] eine Autobiographie, aber nicht im herkömmlichen Sinn. Eine geistige, imaginäre Autobiographie. Diese monologische oder Nachtexistenz hat nichts mit der gewöhnlichen Autobiographie zu tun, in der ein Lebenslauf und Geschichten von irgendwelchen Leuten erzählt werden (*GuI* 73).

The autobiographical quality of Bachmann's *Malina* reposes not on points of factual coincidence with her real-life experiences, but rather on imagination and inner sensation; to wit: even as an autobiography the book is already thoroughly *estheticized*.

Emphasizing such spiritual affinities, what is most essential, in Jelinek's account, is not the parallel with Bachmann's life, but rather with her death:

Bei der Bachmann ist es (...) dieser mysteriöse und bis heute nicht aufgeklärte Tod, der wieder eine gespenstische Parallelität zu ihrem Schreiben hat. Das ist ja interessant, dass der letzte Satz von *Malina* heißt, Es war Mord, und dann dieser Verbrennungstod. Auch diese gespenstigen Parallelen, es kommt ja in *Malina* immer wieder so Feuermetaphorik [vor]: Mit meiner verbrannten Hand schreibe ich über die Natur des Feuers. Und ich habe das auch im Drehbuch dann verstärkt. So Sachen, die gar nicht im Buch sind, dass sie immer wieder in Gefahr gerät zu verbrennen. Wobei es wahrscheinlich diese Verbrennungsmetaphorik daher kommt, dass die weibliche Existenz eine so prekäre und unsichere ist und Verbrennen ist ja ein Tod, wo man faktisch verschwindet, nicht? Wo man sich in seine Bestandteile auflöst (quoted from Manner).

Here again, Jelinek estheticizes the author's death, postulating it as an answer to the literary riddle written into the conclusion of the novel. Once more (or once before, considering that Jelinek's script is the model for Schroeter's artwork) the crack in the wall is transposed into a kind of metaphor for fire—but Jelinek justifies this conflation by reading the *Feuermetaphorik* in Bachmann's work as itself symbolic of the narrator's (and author's) cloven (gender) identity. So doing, she not only closes the self-recursive semiotic loop (the *Riß* signifying *Feuer* which in turn signifies a *Riß*), she finally provides the essential link between the author's autobiography, the political concerns of her novel and its poetic form—for Jelinek's peculiar description of death by fire (“Wo man sich in seine Bestandteile auflöst”) is also an apt explanation of the

formal breakdown of Bachmann's *Todesarten* project executed by the erasure of the female narrator of *Malina*: if 'running her head against the wall' is representative in part of the female writer's obstinate refusal to write ostensibly well-ordered discourse, to narrate chronologically, for instance, it is, nevertheless, precisely her disappearance from *Todesarten* and her conferral of this project onto Malina that ensures that the work will remain polyphonic and therefore decidedly nonlinear. This is also the defining quality of Jelinek's script, which consists of a large number of extremely brief sequences—narrative miniatures, as it were—held together only loosely by a vaguely chronological arrangement. If, thematically, Jelinek and Schroeter choose to emphasize the narrator's and author's injuries, structurally it is this textual fragmentation they will stress.

Nowhere is this more evident than during the last half hour of the film, after the holocaust of scattered papers has commenced—an element added by Schroeter to Jelinek's script, which had itself, of course, already amplified what the screenwriter refers to as a *Feuermetaphorik*. Just after her drafts and unsent letters have begun to burn all around her home and after the protagonist has held her hand over the flames of the gas stove (illustrating her central pronouncement, quoted above by Jelinek and itself borrowed from Flaubert, "Avec ma main brulée, j'écris sur la nature du feu" [*TP* III.1, 390]) she proclaims to Malina that she will never again leave their shared apartment: "Je reste ici et pour de bon." The next sequence follows instantly and without any transition: a close-up of Isabelle Huppert in profile, lightly, almost lazily, hitting her head against a closed door. In the absence of an establishing shot and a full view of the actress's wardrobe (a scarf and winter coat) to signal the change of location, the

viewer initially assumes that the somber mise-en-scène is also an interior take of her apartment, as her statement would suggest.

It is only with the following cut that one notices the irony of Schroeter's montage and particularly of this jarring juxtaposition of sequences: the change in perspective reveals the faint blur of an exterior backdrop, the street scene behind the actress. Now Huppert is filmed from a frontal angle—an odd kind of point-of-view shot putting the spectator, as it were, in the position of the door itself. The actress takes a despondent step backwards for momentum and then bangs her head three more times against the screen, a fresh wound on her forehead growing bloodier, more visible, with every blow. The final contact is loudly accompanied by the at-first non-simultaneous sound of a door opening, and an almost imperceptibly brief black-out (itself an extreme close-up of the wounded forehead, seemingly directly pressed against the camera lens) gives way to a long shot of the actress striding into Ivan's apartment—with the sound bridge suggesting that door has opened through the force of her self-inflicted injury. We thus enter into this space via the underlying idiom (in this case, *mit dem Kopf **durch** die Wand zu wollen*) and also as if entering directly into the wound itself. Only the bloody bandage wrapped around her head—her outfit appears otherwise unchanged—reveals that this has been another intentionally unsettling elliptical cut and that an undetermined amount of time has passed: stringing these three distinct sequences together in quick succession, Schroeter condenses his protagonist's inner struggles into the same metaphoric constellation of walls and injuries employed by Bachmann in both *Malina* and in her *Todesarten* cycle more broadly. His violent, disruptive cuts between disparate spaces and filmic takes both sever the inchoate fragments of which his adaptation is composed and simultaneously arrange them into a suggestive narrative ordering. Form accords to content: injury is both *what* these sequences portray and *how* their editing operates.

Accordingly, what follows in the film is a relatively rapid-fire montage of injuries both literal and metaphorical—but mostly both at once. In her confrontation with Ivan, the female figure hints insincerely that she’s afraid she has left the stove on at home while he digs a Swiss Army knife into his fingers in frustration. The cut to the next sequence transitions almost immediately from the actress slamming the door of Ivan’s apartment to her opening a door within her own, where she then furiously writhes around on the floor amongst the bonfire of her drafts, as if herself on fire. And it is here that Schroeter places the dialogue concerning what we might identify as Malina’s and the woman writer’s different approaches to ‘narrative’:<sup>17</sup> helping her (or rather forcing her) into a sitting position and straightening some of her papers into neat piles, Malina insists, “Il faut que tu te décides à mettre un peu d’ordre. Pense à tes œuvres posthumes.” Examining the papers held in his hand, he then reads aloud the title *Différentes morts* from one of her drafts. Gasping, she informs him that the title has changed and instructs him to read another, which he does: *Morts différentes*. Confronted with this seemingly senseless reordering, this random rearrangement of the same words, Malina admits: “Vraiment je fais des efforts, mais je te comprends pas.” The statement could readily serve as a commentary on an audience’s likely reaction to Schroeter’s editing, which also resists decisive linearity, preferring digressions, repetitions and deferrals.

In the ensuing argument, the camera briefly slips into another POV-shot, this time from the perspective of the female figure, as Malina throws some flaming pages (which have inexplicably caught fire in his hand) at her. He then slaps her face, but insists: “Das wird doch kein blaues Auge geben...Ich hab nicht festgeschlagen” (Jelinek, *Malina* 130). (The explicit reference to the black eye disappears from the French translation, but still Malina helps the woman to reapply her make-up.) Malina’s concern for the orderliness of his interlocutor’s

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<sup>17</sup> Jelinek’s script makes it obvious that this dialogue is the same as the moment in the novel when the narrator bestows her project onto Malina: “Du bist der einzige der das Recht hat, sich diese ‘Papierfetzen’ anzusehen” (*Malina* 128).

physical appearance runs parallel to his concern for the tidiness of her written work, bringing physical injury into even closer conjunction with the textual variety. This association is again evident in the subsequent discussion, where Malina sarcastically thanks the narrator for not having torn up a dress he has gifted her: “En tout cas tu n’as pas déchiré. Merci de l’avoir laissé.” (In the script, the argument is framed in terms of wholeness: “Immerhin hast du es *ganz gelassen*” [Jelinek, *Malina* 131, original emphasis].) Returning this physical tearing to a more abstractly metaphorical level, Huppert’s character responds: “Mais toi aussi, Malina, tu m’as laissée. Ou plutôt, devrais-je dire que tu m’as *dé*laissée ?” The *Riß*-motif from Bachmann’s book thus finds its way into the script and filmic adaptation, continuing its wild vacillation between a concrete question of physical fragmentation and an abstracter issue of riven identity.

The subsequent sequences are also worth briefly mentioning (before finally turning to the film’s conclusion) both because they reprise the inventory of injuries discussed above—of which the wall motif is the ultimate iteration—and because I will return to them in my discussion of Michael Haneke’s adaptation of Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983) in the following chapter. Jelinek’s and Schroeter’s depiction of the scene in the Hotel Sacher, for instance, takes a page out of Bataille’s book. Resigning herself to what she calls her final meal, Huppert’s character concludes: “Je saurai alors ce que c’est quand on coupe la tête.” (Notably, there is no *comme* in the sentence, which is to say: it’s *not* a simile. Rather, the protagonist imagines her own *actual* beheading.) Cut from the film itself is the response Malina utters in Jelinek’s script: “Ich weiß nicht recht...andererseits ware es für dich vielleicht ganz gut, wenn du einmal deinen Kopf vergessen würdest!” (*Malina* 134). Like Malina himself or the inferno in the apartment during the final minutes of the film, this idiomatic headlessness exists again in some nebulous territory between the literal and metaphorical. This dialogue creates another sound bridge into the street scene that immediately follows in both the novel and its adaptations. Through this

bridge, Schroeter highlights the proximity of these two passages, cutting them directly together and then literalizing the bleeding on the sidewalk as menstruation: Huppert stands bewildered near a construction site with blood dripping down her leg. Not only does this add an important gender inflection to the image, but Schroeter also attaches it again to the author herself: troping on the journalistic descriptions of Bachmann's attempt to palliate her burn wounds, back in her apartment the film's protagonist is shown lying fully clothed with her legs over the bathtub, washing off the blood and sighing in relief.

If, as feminist critics insisted, Schroeter's film betrays just such a desire to conflate its protagonist her author, then this comportment is most evident here at its conclusion. Like Bethman, Kathleen Komar argues adamantly that the mirror game at the end of the film implies a disappearance "into the biographical flames" rather than "into the patriarchal wall" (108), but this charge, to me, seems skewed. Schroeter in fact depicts Huppert taping up the crack at length, applying a kind of bandage—recalling the odd angle from which the actress is filmed as she slams her head against the door, Schroeter edits this scene into a variety of shot-counter-shot: first showing Huppert's hands from a high angle, then a frontal view of her countenance from a low angle, as if she were in dialogue with the wounded wall. Immediately before her vanishing, the actress then dramatically tears this masking tape away, with Malina standing by.

As an author herself, Elfriede Jelinek certainly recognized the material component of this tearing, and in her script it had been the decisive moment:

*Sie geht zur Wand, schaut einen Augenblick auf das Leukoplast, das sie über den **Riß** geklebt hat, nimmt dann ein Ende des Klebestreifens und **reißt** entschlossen daran. Ein Ruck geht durch die Wand, als sie den Klebestreifen **abreißt**, wie ein Blitz, der einschlägt. Es wird einen Moment hell wie von einem gezackten Blitzschlag—**Riß** am Himmel. Dann ist die Frau verschwunden" (Malina 149, original italics, my emphasis).*

For Jelinek, who dubs Bachmann *die Rißautorin*, this *Riß* is a crucial illustration of what she identifies, in an essay by the same title, as Bachmann's *Krieg mit anderen Mitteln*, her war by

other means: employing, as Beatrice Hanssen has put it, a language of violence *against* violence.

As Hanssen has insightfully summarized Jelinek's position

Brandishing the 'blunt knives of our language,' Jelinek depicts fictional realms in which sexual desire, aggression, and violence substitute for and permutate one another. Seen within this light, the apparently diagnostic title of the Bachmann essay (...) acquires a prescriptive sense, allowing one to read it as a call to arms, in other words, as a call to continue war *by other means* or to wield a language of violence *against* violence (82-83, original emphasis).

And the lexical field of tearing is particularly appropriate to this procedure, as Hanssen once again demonstrates:

In the course of the essay, the word reappears in a number of guises (*Risse*, *abreißen*, *herausgerissen*), accruing evermore connotations and condensing an entire register of different meanings. Not only does the term evoke the Bachmann allusions cited earlier, but it also indicates Jelinek's praxis of *die Risse sichtbar machen*, that is, her attempt to expose the fault lines of society where chronic violence turns into acute violence. Crucially, the word *Riß* captures the violent force, the language of fierce ruptures and satiric interventions so typical of Jelinek's style (82).

But if Bachmann's *Riß* is, as Jelinek implies, a self-reflective commentary on the supposed impossibility of feminine narrative—an analogue to pages torn—then Schroeter has done nothing but to transpose this struggle into his own medium.<sup>18</sup> Recalling the iconic shootout in Orson Welles' *The Lady of Shanghai* (1947), the intricate play of mirrors into which the actress vanishes in *Malina* is the essence of what Gilles Deleuze might call an *image-cristal*: a conflation or even collapse of the actual and the virtual, the real and the imaginary.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As Sunka Simon intimates, "Schroeter utilizes the apparatus of the camera and its ability to reflect, reproduce, and make objects disappear to capture the vanishing of the female subject. Since we are watching *Malina* as film, this technique translates the *Ich's* vanishing into the cinematic medium while maintaining its self-reflexive gesture" (289).

<sup>19</sup> Richard Brody draws the same comparison to Welles in his brief review of *Malina* for *The New Yorker* (14). Among many other cinematic precedents, this play of mirrors might also be productively compared to the conclusion of the early staircase sequence in Agnes Varda's *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962). There is, for Deleuze, an important distinction between the pairings actual/virtual and real/possible. The virtual is just as *real* as the actual, it is only waiting to be actualized. (With everything framed as a question of perception, there is no Platonic real: past memory and future desire have the same ontological standing as the present moment.) For Deleuze, the virtual is associated with past and future, essentially limitless in its possibilities. The actual is the present moment, which is to say: the *actualization* of a past image in the present moment. As such it is fixed and definite. The virtual is therefore associated with pure difference and the actual with repetition. Oliver Speck goes into (the ethical

Huppert first stands with her face pressed against a mirror, which then seems to swivel as she steps away to reveal another—creating an utterly incomprehensible arrangement of mirror images.<sup>20</sup> It quickly becomes impossible to tell which of these ‘realities’ is casting its reflections and which are its supposed re-presentations: the virtual image and the actual image become entirely indiscernible. The hinge between the mirrors creates a vertical black line which is then also doubled as Huppert walks slowly forward, and this overlay of reflections—three distinct panels arranged in a horizontal sequence and all portraying the same figure—begins to resemble the different frames of a film strip: it is at this moment that montage (and thus narrative) breaks down completely into a cubist collage, with its various components all presented simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> Akin to the narrative procedure of the *Todesarten* cycle itself, if this imagery is, indeed, on the one hand, suggestive of Bachmann’s literal death, it is also, and perhaps more importantly, a self-aware performance of the metamorphosis through which her story is transformed into cinema—the writer’s disappearance into film.<sup>22</sup>

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implications of) this in his work on Haneke, to be discussed in the following chapter. With specific regard to Schreoter’s mirror game, if the actual is normally an actualization (that is: a re-present-ation) of the virtual, the mirror image is, conversely, a virtual representation of the actual: it is this virtualization of the actual image that Deleuze calls the hyalo-sign or crystal image. Actual and virtual in the same instance, such images disrupt and short-circuit the linear progression of time: a mirror image signals a breakdown of before and after, and the kind of hall of mirrors we have here *brings montage into the image itself*.

<sup>20</sup> As Ute Seiderer describes the difficulty in understanding the spatiality of this sequence: “Es handelt sich dabei eigentlich um den Spiegel in ihrem Arbeitszimmer zwischen dem Schreibtisch und den Bücherregalen, den man bisher immer in seiner ganzen Größe, d.h. mit Rahmen, zu sehen bekommen hat” (76). Here however, “wird er im ‘Rahmen’ der Einstellungsgröße (...) zur rahmenlosen Spiegelfläche: zunächst einfache Spiegelfläche, verwandelt er sich innerhalb der Einstellung zu einem dreiflügeligen, sich bewegenden ‘Spiegel-Altar’, der die Frau in Endlosspiegelung wiedergibt, bevor sie zwischen seinen Fugen ‘verschwindet’. (...) Aber schon durch die größenproportionale Verdoppelung ihres sich ganz nah am Spiegel befindenden Gesichtes (...) wird der Spiegel als Schwellenphänomen’ konstituiert” (76.).

<sup>21</sup> This might be related to what Tom Conley describes as a spatialization of time in Deleuze’s understanding of cinema: “in the time-image, perception becomes a ‘perception of perception’, offering a shift of emphasis that is witnessed in the image itself rather than the linkages (or cuts) between images” (Parr 280).

<sup>22</sup> Seiderer points out that “das Motiv des ‘Verschwinden im Spiegel’ findet sich im Roman wieder” (51), but here becomes a reflection on filmic form; she connects this sequence to an earlier moment in the film at which “öffnet sich, während die Frau mit Ivan telefoniert, vor ihren Augen die rechte Glastür eines alten Bücherschranks wie von Geisterhand; dahinter kommt eine nackte Backsteinwand zum Vorschein. Die zunächst durch das Glas sichtbaren Buchrücken erweisen sich als Attrappe, und auch die Tatsache, daß dieser Bücherschrank bis zu dem Zeitpunkt nicht als ein in der Wohnung der Frau existierendes Möbel gezeigt wurde, deutet darauf hin, daß es sich hier um ein filmisches Zeichen aus einer übergeordneten Erzählperspektive handelt” (77-78).

“Aber wenn man verschwindet,” Jelinek reminds us in *Die Wand* “ist man natürlich ganz besonders sichtbar, das weißt du” (*Tod* 109). The allusion isn’t to the end of *Malina* alone, but also to the absent images of the female pharaoh Hatshepsut in the Egyptian temple visited by Martin Ranner and his sister in *Das Buch Franza*: “die ausgekratzten Zeichen (...) in dem Tempel der Königen Hatschepsut, von der jedes Zeichen und Gesicht getilgt war auf den Wänden, durchgehend die Zerstörung (...) zu ihrer Zeit zerstört oder nach ihrem Tod von dem dritten Tuthmosis” (*TP* II, 274). The evident erasure of these images fascinates Franza, who remarks to her brother: “Siehst du (...) aber er hat vergessen, daß an der Stelle, wo er sie getilgt hat, doch sie stehen geblieben ist. Sie ist abzulesen, weil nichts ist, wo sie sein soll” (*TP* II, 274, my emphasis). Through this image Bachmann highlights the conspicuous erasure of female figures that is a hallmark of her own work.

Like the unnamed *ich* in *Malina*, at the conclusion of *Das Buch Franza* it is Franza herself who is revealed by the contours of the hole that she has left. In the final pages, following her death, her brother is invited to dinner with the Altenwyls—also visited by the narrator of *Malina* during a painful holiday separation from Ivan—where he is obligated by his hosts to watch a television documentary about Egypt. (Earlier in the book, he and Franza in fact cross paths with the film crew.) But there is nothing in these images that can show Martin his sister:

aber wie er auch versuchte, die Bilder mit den erinnerten Bildern übereinzubringen—es gelang nicht, es war nichts auf dem Filmstreifen von dem, was sein Gedächtnis gespeichert hatte (...) Kein Film konnte ihm seine Schwester in dem Tempel zeigen (...) und er war auch nicht darin, mit einer Lampe die Wände beleuchtend (*TP* II, 329-330).

Instead it is another female face that appears in a flickering (like flames) at the close of the film: “als der Film aussetzte, die dunkle Pause (...) ehe ein Filmmern entstand, ehe ein Frauengesicht auftauchte, um die Sendung abzusagen, in einem Tonfall, in dem man auch für Finsternis

werben konnte" (*TP* II, 330-331). Referring then to a fragment from the novel where the siblings visit Wadi Halfa—an epiphany for Franza that Sara Lennox calls “a kind of last supper”<sup>23</sup> (180) prepared by a “stille Frau an der Mauer” (*TP* II, 330),—Martin thinks to himself, “Wadi Halfa wurde zum Glück nicht gezeigt, weil es außerhalb Ägyptens lag, dafür hätte er den Filmern gerne eine Flasche Schnaps geschickt, daß sie davon Abstand genommen hatten” (*TP* II, 330). Should we chose to take this apparent aside as a suggestive prescription, Bachmann’s artistry would be, much like Cixous’s, based on an esthetics of omission.

As fate would have it, this fragment is itself omitted from the most recent manuscripts of *Franza* and indicated only by a place-marker: “Hier fehlt ein Stück, mit den Stationen Assuan und Wadi Halfa, vor der Rückkehr der Geschwister nach Kairo” (*TP* II, 288). A textual hole, now known only from an earlier draft (*TP* I, 280-282), even in its absence the episode takes on special importance at the end of the novel, as Martin learns of the fate of this city from Viennese newspapers: “Zu der Zeit ging Wadi Halfa unter. Ein Militärputsch brachte die Bilder von General Abboud zum Stürzen *von allen sudanesischen Wänden, auch von der Wand des Speisesaals auf dem Schiff*. Der Rest war aus der Wiener Zeitungen nicht zu ersehen” (*TP* II, 332, my emphasis). All that Martin learns about the city is which images are *missing* from the walls. Again Bachmann hints that what is most visible is precisely what is absent; and the back cover of Suhrkamp’s publication of Jelinek’s script of *Malina* features a suggestive quotation from the author of the original novel: “Ich werde dasein indem ich nicht da bin.” Within this context we might read Martin’s closing evocation of this silent woman near the wall, “die stille Frau an der Mauer” (*TP* II, 330), who prepared the meal in Wadi Halfa, as another surrogate for Franza, or

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<sup>23</sup> This description also suggests the connection between this passage and the scene in Hotel Sacher, which Jelinek’s script, following the novel itself, describes as a “Henkermahlzeit” (*Malina* 133) and the film calls a “dernier repas.”

for Bachman herself—also interpretable as the woman *on* the wall, she too is present and projected even (or perhaps especially) in her absence from the film.

Chapter 7  
**The Filmic Cut:**  
Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983)  
Michael Haneke's *La Pianiste* (2001)

“Die österreichische Schriftstellerin und Lyrikerin Ingeborg Bachmann,” Iris Radisch reminds us in her scathing review of Jelinek’s and Schroeter’s *Malina*,

setzte in der Nacht zum 26. September 1973 ihr Nylonnachthemd mit einer Zigarette in Brand und starb am 17. Oktober in einem römischen Krankenhaus. Die namenlose Schriftstellerin und Heldin in ihrem einzigen vollendeten Roman verschwindet in einem Wandspalt einer Wiener Wohnung. Die österreichische Roman- und Drehbuchautorin Elfriede Jelinek berichtet in einem Interview von den Verletzungen, die sie sich selbst mit einer Rasierklinge zugefügt hat (17).

Radisch’s dramatic catalogue of wounds, each apparently equivalent to the next, not only appropriates a narrative procedure with which we have, by this point, become familiar, it also performs the underlying marriage of the literal and the metaphorical that marks this trope: if the lack of transitions between the sentences above operates a kind of filmic cut—arranging them in a textual montage and placing an implicit equal sign between each image—, then the list also moves seamlessly between these authors’ real-life injuries and the wounds depicted in their texts. In her vehement critique of Schroeter’s film, the journalist and literary critic herself succumbs both to its syntax and to a comparable conflation of artwork and autobiography—an important element of the very esthetics of injury she is attempting to debunk.

Once again, it is an association apparently endorsed by the author; the interview to which Radisch is referring is one granted to her own employer, *Die Zeit*, on 22 June 1990, around the time of *Malina*’s début. Here the journalist André Müller—who makes a cameo appearance in the film as the reporter interviewing Isabelle Huppert’s character—asks Elfriede Jelinek about the autobiographical elements of her own novel, *Die Klavierspielerin*, which the

writer describes as a portrait of self-hatred. “Das grausamste Bild, das Sie erfunden haben, um diesen Haß zu beschreiben,” suggests Müller, “ist eine Selbstverletzung”—to which Jelinek emphatically responds that the self-injury in question is not invention but rather fact: “Das habe ich nicht erfunden” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56). Apparently bewildered by this bold declaration, the interviewer clarifies his statement, specifying just which wound he means: “Die Frau im Buch zerschneidet sich mit einer Rasierklinge die Scheide” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56). Undeterred, again Jelinek implicitly denies the image its metaphorical quality, contending it is *not* symbolic but instead insisting: “Das habe ich wirklich getan” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56). Expressing the inevitably horrified response of even the most jaded audience, Müller finally exclaims: “Schon der Gedanke bereitet Schmerzen” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56). In part through her obstinate attachment to its purported reality, Elfriede Jelinek has, over the course of an almost casual discussion, provided an injury still capable of provoking a shock—one uniquely positioned to disturb, even amongst the list of appalling images this dissertation has already documented.

This renewed shock value via an image of injury is both what positions Jelinek into the lineage of authors addressed by the current project and also what makes her appropriate as its conclusion. In a seminal essay on Jelinek’s language of violence, for instance, Beatrice Hanssen situates the author within “the context of the aesthetics, poetics and politics of violence that have shaped modernity” (83). Yet this heritage fails fully to account for the radical revision of the same that one discovers in the author’s work, as Hanssen also cautions:

But to situate Jelinek in a canonical tradition of poetic and aesthetic violence may temper the outrage, to assign her work a respectable position within the perspective of a literature of violence. Such a classificatory gesture does not pay heed to the diverse, eclectic traditions that come together in her praxis of linguistic destruction [*Sprachzerstückelung*] nor to the postmodern transformation she proposes of these traditions (ibid., original brackets).

Instead, Hanssen locates Jelinek at the intersection between (1) this literature of violence represented by such figures as Sade, Bataille and Artaud; (2) an Austrian tradition of

*Sprachkritik* ranging “from Hofmannsthal and Kraus to Wittgenstein and Bachmann” and finally (3) “the poetics of an *écriture féminine*” represented most notably by Cixous’s desire (expressed in her Medusa essay) to break up and destroy language as it has been received (ibid.). Jelinek’s esthetics of injury has not only an intended ethical-political dimension, but also a semiological and veritably *ontological* one as well; insofar as it delights simultaneously in the postmodern play of language qua pure *différance* and nevertheless returns to a modernist language crisis—looking to the wound as a marker of that which exists *beyond* (and primary to) language—the author’s self-de(con)structive linguistic violence pushes to the absolute extreme the ethical and esthetic states of Bataillan sovereignty<sup>1</sup> and of the paradox it ultimately opens up: the reduction of the real to a *Sinnbild*, a mere mental image.

This is true not only of her early avant-garde experiments in fiction or her more recent, radically postdramatic theater<sup>2</sup> but indeed of her work generally, and the current chapter will examine this violence on the example of what is arguably Jelinek’s most accessible and certainly her most widely read literary work, *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983). The novel relates the romantic and sexual struggles of its protagonist, Erika Kohut, a piano teacher at the Vienna Conservatory—in particular her affair with a much younger student, Walter Klemmer. Having confessed in writing to her fantasies of being beaten, raped and tortured, the protagonist is

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<sup>1</sup> Jelinek’s reception of Bataille is most explicit in her breakthrough novel *Lust* (1989), which she conceived of as a critical counterpart to the earlier author’s *Histoire de l’oeil*. Ostensibly initially intended as a work of pornography from a female perspective, Jelinek’s highly scandalous novel performatively devolves into a patently gratuitous account the same sexual violence it seeks to deconstruct. On the relationship between Bataille’s book and Jelinek’s, see especially Allyson Fiddler, “Problems with Porn: Situating Elfriede Jelinek’s *Lust*.”

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘postdramatic theater’ was coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book of the same title, *Postdramatisches Theater* (1999), to describe phenomena in avant-garde theatrical practice from the 1960s onwards. Jelinek’s works for the stage can be considered postdramatic inasmuch as it is not the drama itself—or even the written text—that takes precedence but rather the conditions of its staging and production. Jelinek’s theatrical writings are left open to radical (re)interpretation: stage directions, settings and the like are often only loosely defined and it is sometimes, as is the case with the *Prinzessendramen* treated in the previous chapter, even left to the director to decide which character is speaking at any given moment. This foregrounding of form rather than plot, of dramaturgy over drama, can be seen as analogous to the decay of narrative examined here—a parallel literary history that might be traced from Artaud and Genet via Heiner Müller and Rainald Goetz to the theater of Cixous and Jelinek herself.

ultimately subjected to the same by Klemmer; the novel then concludes with her numbly stabbing herself in the shoulder, inflicting a wound that does not, however, appear fatal. The whole of this is related in language of a startling brutality, marked by a penchant for often confusing wordplay as well constant and disorienting shifts between the literal and the metaphorical more radical even than the numerous examples of the same (for instance in Kafka, Cixous or Bachmann) that I have already observed.

The story is replete with instances of (sado)masochistic wounding, most notably the horrific self-harm alluded to above. Jelinek's work deliberately follows in the tradition of a Kafkan esthetics of injury, which is to say she writes the kinds of books that bite and stab—as is made evident by André Müller's performative reaction to this particular cut: "Schon der Gedanke bereitet Schmerzen." Müller's contention that the thought alone is painful initially appears to signal the success of this textual strategy, as does Jelinek's insistence on the *extratextual* nature of the image: its *immediate* relation to experienced reality. Here, however, I will focus for one final time on the self-reflective nature of this image of self-cutting (qua inscription) in order to reveal both its dangerous underlying estheticism and an implicit critique of the same. As I intend to demonstrate on the example of this moment of self-mutilation, Jelinek's practice—here specifically but also in her narrative work on the whole—is prone to an abrupt and bewildering alternation between references to her characters and plots and the more universal social commentary they illustrate.<sup>3</sup> Alternately insisting on the singular nature of this cut as an image to be taken literally and on its function as a signifier for a universal condition (specifically as a parodic rereading of the castration trope), Jelinek calls into question the very possibility of authenticity and consequently of the capacity of the artwork to be (socially) meaningful.

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<sup>3</sup> Fatima Naqvi observes an analogous tendency toward reverse abstraction in Haneke: "Gerade durch das Unspezifische wird das Spezifische gezeigt" (9)

The same grave doubt haunts the œuvre of Michael Haneke, and this chapter will explore Jelinek's image of self-injury beside Haneke's reception of the same in his 2001 adaptation of the novel, *La Pianiste*. (Haneke's adaptations of Bachmann's *Drei Wege zum See* [1979] and of Kafka's *Das Schloß* [1997]<sup>4</sup> also position him squarely as a heritor of the literary lineage revealed here.) Like Jelinek, Haneke finds himself at the intersection between various traditions. On the one hand, as Catherine Wheatley has argued,

Haneke's work stands in a tradition of films that reflect upon their own construction, attempting to understand the rules or norms that govern and sustain them. These films are formally reflexive—they reflect on their own construction. They are the films produced by Samuel Peckinpah, Oliver Stone, Jean-Luc Godard, Chantal Akerman—just a few of the directors who have tried to investigate the workings of film *through* film (*Michael Haneke's Cinema* 5).

However, as Jean Ma contends, Haneke's work also “participates in a recent turn toward explicit, at times gory, violence in European art cinema, exemplified in films by contemporaries such as Gaspar Noé, Marina de Van, and Catherine Breillat, to name only a few” (9).<sup>5</sup> The marriage of these two overlapping traditions reveals the metareflexive aspect of Haneke's obsession with violence as, chiefly, a commentary on filmic form. Beyond the modernist reflexivity observed thus far, however, in Haneke, as in Jelinek, this question takes on a postmodern(ist) character: his artistic violence is no longer merely an *aesthetic* question, but truly begins to interrogate the nature of reality itself.<sup>6</sup> The current chapter addresses the *semiotics*,

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Sharrett, in an introduction to an interview with Haneke, notes that this adaptation “is the least involved in narrativizing Kafka, and is concerned more with a sense of disruption and dislocation, the structure of the film featuring literal breaks that foreground the novel's artifice”—which is to say that the film recognizes and reproduces the element of narrative decay discussed in my Kafka chapter, opting instead to operate allegorically in the sense employed by Benjamin.

<sup>5</sup> Wheatley adds the Dardenne brothers, Lars von Trier and François Ozon to this list (*Michael Haneke's Cinema* 14); Ben McCann and David Sorfa also address Haneke's proximity to New French Brutalism in their introduction to *The Cinema of Michael Haneke: Europe Utopia* (2). Brian Price and John David Rhodes, in their introduction to *On Michael Haneke*, see Haneke chiefly as a heritor of Robert Bresson (whom Haneke has acknowledged as a mentor [Peucker, “Games Haneke Plays”, 17]) and Pier Paolo Pasolini. One might categorize this, as does Moira Wegel in a recent essay on Haneke, as a tradition of ‘sadomodernism’.

<sup>6</sup> In her monograph on Haneke's cinema, Wheatley positions the filmmaker in terms of first wave (Nouvelle Vague) and second wave modernism, eliding entirely the category of postmodernism, which does not enter into her analysis. For Jean Ma, “what distinguishes Haneke's films and positions them decisively within a strategy of

the *ontology* and finally the *ethics* of Jelinek's and Haneke's esthetics of injury each in turn: if the wounds in their works hesitate between a desired transcendence of the textual and a self-conscious illustration of textual play, both Jelinek and Haneke ask whether reality is itself already always mediated and, if so, whether it is indeed possible to remedy this mediation through artistic mediation—specifically how one might critique violence through a language of violence.

### 1: The Semiotics of Estheticism: A Self-Mutilating Striptease

Throughout her interview with André Müller, Jelinek performs what she herself intimates is a variety of psychological striptease—“Schrecklich! Ich habe mich von Journalisten so oft ausziehen lassen” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56)—: alternately revealing and concealing aspects of her autobiography, sometimes acknowledging these esthetic self-stylizations as such, but ultimately always returning to an insistent assertion of their ontological certainty (their alleged grounding in actual fact) as a guarantor of the truth value of her artwork, of its capacity to convey painful sensations.<sup>7</sup> As the conversation grows increasingly contentious she proclaims,

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modernist reflexivity, as opposed to postmodern hybridity, is their investigation of the ways in which the effects of violence are inseparable from its forms of circulation and representation” (9).

<sup>7</sup> As Sabine Wilke argues with regard to this ‘confession’ specifically, Jelinek “hat (...) systematisch die Medien mit ganz gezielt gefilterter Information gefüttert, die als Einladung zur Parallelisierung dieses Textes mit ihrem eigenen Leben gelten darf. (...) Diese Äußerungen sind dazu da, den Blick auf Jelinek selbst zu lenken und damit dem Voyeurismus des Publikums in stilisierter Form nachzugeben, ohne daß es eigentlich an Jelinek selbst herankommt” (140). Quoting the same interview addressed above, Pommé has also noted that by allowing for speculation of an autobiographical origin for the cutting in *Die Klavierspielerin*, Jelinek portrays it as the real cutting into the world of fiction: “Immer wieder wird der Text als biographisch insipieriertes ‘Pathogramm’ präsentiert. Diese Lesart und das wachsende Interesse an ihrer Person hat Jelinek eigenmächtig unterstützt. Auf die Bemerkung André Müllers, die Protagonistin zerschneide sich in der *Klavierspielerin* ‘mit einer Rasierklinge die Scheide’, antwortete sie: ‘Das habe ich wirklich getan.’” (38-39). Juliane Vogel similarly speaks of a “PR-Maschine, die seit Jahren in sich selbst kreist. Diese bemühe sich, die Sprache von Elfriede Jelinek heim ins Leben, heim in die ‘Künstlerbiographie’ zu holen” (145). Eva Szalay, following Ingeborg Hoesterey, notes that this is a strategy that begins shortly after the publication of *Lust* and contributes to the ensuing controversy around that novel (242).

“Jetzt sage ich gar nicht mehr,” but reminded by Müller of her relative candor in earlier interviews, she pays him an ambivalent compliment:

Ja, aber das waren Äußerungen, aus denen man trotzdem über mich nichts erfuhr. Was ich sonst sage, sind Stilisierungen. Ich ziehe mir Kleider an in Ermangelung eines eigenen Lebens. Ich trage die Sätze vor mir her wie Plakate, hinter denen ich mich verstecken kann. Aber das geht nicht mit Ihnen. Sie durchbrechen die Deckung (*Ich lebe nicht* 56).

Presented in this way, *Die Klavierspielerin* would be a psychical autobiography in the same sense as Bachmann’s *Malina*: its depraved plot is not a secondary representation of a preëxisting reality, but rather a *supplement* for this lacking reality through esthetic artifice, the attempt to fill the hole of the missing real-life antecedent through an esthetic(ized) authorial identity. Nevertheless the remedy for the artificial character of the artwork is itself an act of injury—the ostensible penetration (*Durchbrechung*) of this artifice by the interviewer. Acknowledging her earlier and often contradictory statements as muddled efforts, “eine Art Identität [zu] schaffen,” Jelinek concludes her remarks with what might well be a sincere confession: “Dieses Interview hat mich völlig dekonstruiert” (*Ich lebe nicht* 56). While admitting to sensationalizing and estheticizing her own lived traumas for narrative effect, Jelinek, like Radisch, fails to find another model—an alternative to the esthetics of injury she is in the midst of deconstructing—to assure the artwork’s authenticity.

In an essay written on the quotidian gender violence inherent in societal expectations for female hygiene, Jelinek offers her own interpretation of her protagonist’s self-mutilation, describing it as a variety of subversively demystifying striptease similar to the one she herself undertakes in her interview with Müller:

In meinem Roman “Die Klavierspielerin” spickt sich die Hauptfigur Erika Kohut, Klavierlehrerin, mit Küchengeräten, Stecknadeln, Wäscheklammern. Sie selbst ist ihre eigene Voyeurin im Spiegel, kein anderer sieht ihr dabei zu. Es ist kein Striptease mit Zuschauern, bei dem das Ritual, die verwendeten Requisiten, die Dauer der Handlung, dem ganzen Akt die eigentliche Bedeutung verleihen (*Schamgrenzen* 137).

Notably, Jelinek describes this ‘dance’ in both dramaturgical and also *narratological* terms: not only does the striptease inherently involve props and an underlying (which is to say: allegorical) meaning, it also has both duration and *plot*. (*Handlung* here refers broadly to the action of undressing but also to its teleology, its implied storyline.) Regarded from this angle, it becomes apparent that Jelinek represents the self-mutilation in *Die Klavierspielerin* almost as if it were an avant-garde art form; this is confirmed within the novel when she refers to these household appliances, in the hands of a musician, as “Instrumente” (*KS* 254) as well as through the allusions to Schubert-*Lieder* that punctuate the episodes.<sup>8</sup> (Erika Kohut is, after all, a Schubert specialist.) Erika’s artistry enters directly into the depiction of her self-harm as the author, with evident irony, highlights the pianist’s skill with a razorblade: “Im Umgang mit Klingen ist sie geschickt” (*KS* 90). And if the title of novel perceptibly belittles Erika’s vocation (the word *Klavierspielerin*, ‘piano player,’ has a deprecating tone beside the more conventional *Pianistin*) by reducing it to a mere pastime, this diction is gentle ribbing when compared to the viciously condescending assertion: “Ihr Hobby ist das Schneiden am eigenen Körper” (*KS* 90).

Building on Roland Barthes’ demythification of the striptease as a *suppression* rather than an expression of female sexuality, Jelinek argues that *her* depiction *strips* the striptease, so to speak, of its essential artifice and ornamentation, employing the habitual accoutrements of female domesticity as weapons in a ruthless (and clearly pyrrhic) assault on an idealized and objectivized female form: “Erika Kohut verwendet diese Mittel aber anders, und zwar, in letzter Konsequenz, direkt gegen ihren Körper, dessen Außenhaut verletzend” (*SG* 138-139). Emphasizing instead the self-reflexive, narcissistic and even solipsistic character of Erika’s self-inflicted violence, the author also insists on the immediacy of this self-harm as an act of *literal*

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<sup>8</sup> On the subject of these Schubert intertexts, see Annegret Mahler-Bungers, who also provides the most thorough and, to my mind, one of the more convincing interpretations of self-mutilation in *Die Klavierspielerin* (esp. 93-94).

penetration: “Erika Kohut fügt sich mit Haus- und Küchengeräten Schmerz zu und beschaut sich selbst dabei. Dieses Bild der Frau, in die häusliche Gerätschaften aller Art eindringen, *buchstäblich eindringen*, ist ihr Verusch, diesen Körper, den sie da hat, zu entmystifizieren” (SG 137, my emphasis). This demystification, however, is not ultimately successful as a laying bare, as an antidote to the alienation felt by the female subject vis-à-vis her own body; rather, far from constituting a renewed sense of identification and immediacy, even here Jelinek refers to an *image* of femininity (“[d]ieses *Bild* der Frau”), a battered idol, rather than to the female protagonist herself.

Beatrice Hanssen, in her essay on Jelinek’s linguistic violence, summarizes the author’s take on hygiene and self-harm as a “sublimation of bodily pain (...) lifted to the level of critical meta-analysis”: “in this meta-analysis masochistic pain becomes the subversive instrument through which the body is denuded and—literally—dissected [*sezieren*]<sup>9</sup> at the moment of its violation” (101-102). But if, in her hygiene essay, Jelinek nonchalantly, almost parenthetically, concedes that this performance is a painful one—“Natürlich tut das ihr weh” (SG 137)—in the novel itself, it is the numbness of this actually quite clinical procedure that is striking: it is not pain that is the analytical tool but the *cutting* alone. The first incident of self-injury to which the reader is privy results in a bleeding described as “warm und lautlos und nicht unangenehm” (KS 47); having made four shallow cuts into the back of her hand (recalling Bataille’s ink-stain ellipsis) Erika concludes, via the narrator, “Es tut überhaupt nicht weh” (KS 47). Frank W. Young thus rightly identifies these “masochistische Eingriffe in den eigenen Körper” as “Beutezüge nach Gefühl” (77), but as the cutting becomes more drastic, targeting the genitalia, Erika’s previous experiences continue to serve as reassurance of painlessness: “Erfahrung hat

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<sup>9</sup> This is Hanssen’s own insertion and a slight misquotation; the word that Jelinek uses in the essay is in fact the somewhat more graphic and less scientific *zerstückeln* (SG 138).

sie mittlerweile darin, daß so ein Schnitt mittels Klinge nicht schmerzt, denn ihre Arme, Hände, Beine mußten oft als Versuchsobjekte herhalten” (KS 90).

The anesthetic aspect of this cutting is only intensified with the habituation of repeated practice: “Ein nicht ungewohnter Anblick, dieses Blut, der aber durch Gewohnheit nicht gewinnt. Wie üblich tut nichts weh” (KS 91). Michael Fischer, quoting the novel directly, summarizes the futility of the endeavor: “Erika ist und bleibt der eigene Körper ‘fürchterlich fremd’. Ihre Selbstverletzungen sind, wie ihre anderen voyeuristischen Verhaltensweisen, einzig Formen der Kompensation” (56). Here my aim is to interrogate the sterility of this self-destructive voyeuristic compensation, this artful surrogate for sensation, *injury as ersatz for immediate experience*: through her subtle treatment of a decidedly *unsubtle* motif—her depiction of Erika’s auto-mutilation as an art—Jelinek, perhaps unwittingly, provides a critique of the aestheticist impulse, potentially condemning her own latent aestheticism as a wound without pain. This condemnation carries grave consequences for the capacity of the novel to provide meaningful social commentary.

This is particularly evident in the account of what should be a most excruciating injury, an inadvertent castration—the moment that Erika “durschneidet (...) versehentlich die Klitoris” (Young 77): “SIE schneidet sich jedoch an der falschen Stelle und trennt damit, was Herr Gott und Mutter Natur in ungewohnter Einigkeit zusammengefügt haben. Der Mensch darf es nicht, und es rächt sich. *Sie fühlt nichts*” (KS 91, my emphasis). A straightforward psychoanalytic reading of such passages does little to illuminate the novel, which already parodies and problematizes this perspective; as Marlies Janz cautions, such an interpretation “verdoppelt nur den Text, ohne ihm noch einen latenten Sinn abgewinnen zu können” (72, also quoted in Swales 439). It is for this reason that Erika Swales is critical of the reading of masochism provided by Annegret Mahler-Bungers in her article on the novel:

psycho-analytical readings are rather restrictive as regards the evaluation of the novel's aesthetic organization. Thus Annegret Mahler-Bungers, who does discuss this issue, subsumes the aesthetic under a strictly psycho-analytical agenda: on her reading, the (self)destructive compulsion of the protagonist (...) also informs the narrative, which systematically excises all emotion and warmth. This undialectical alignment of theme and form on the part of the critic harbours considerable dangers: the force of the aesthetic is marginalized by being identified with the foregrounded thematic statement, and the question whether it might deviate from, and differentiate that statement, is simply not allowed to arise (439).

While I agree with Swales that Mahler-Bungers takes an at times too strictly psychoanalytic approach to the material, I feel that the former fails to acknowledge the extent to which this earlier treatment informs her own insightful argument that Jelinek's work shifts constantly between the literal and the figurative. While hoping not to fall victim to the same hermeneutic perils Swales identifies, it is my aspiration that the present interpretation might reconcile these previous readings by providing a somewhat more dialectical approach to the interaction between form and content.

One might, then, nevertheless take as a point of departure Mahler-Bungers' analysis of masochism in the work, which hints that Erika Kohut's self-castration, not unlike Cixous's laughing Medusa, is an incorporation of the Freudian mythology of femininity—an attempt to give its symbolism actual, *corporeal* form. Quoting Samuel Weber in order to establish that the Freudian notion of castration is, as I have previously observed, itself an allegorical heuristic hovering somewhere between fantasy and fact, Mahler-Bungers, indulging in distasteful punning worthy of Jelinek herself, summarizes Erika's self-injury in the following terms: “sie sucht das Ent-Scheidende: die Kastration. Was in ihrer psychosexuellen Entwicklung *symbolisch* nicht möglich war, will sie nun an sich selbst verkörpern” (86, original emphasis). If Mahler-Bungers thus begins to intuit the same literalization of the metaphorical we have so frequently witnessed in the preceding chapters, here I would like to give her argument another turn by recognizing that this particular cut cum castration is merely an allegory of another allegory, a

literary metaphor for what was already a Freudian metaphor: which is to say that by taking this crucial psychoanalytic illustration at face value, Jelinek inscribes into her text a metonymic gesture, a chain of signifiers, that brings us not, as is implied, one step closer to the real (to the originary or extratextual) but transforms this reality into a mere signifier in an endless series of the same. Yet it is precisely this alternation between the concrete and the abstract, “the metonymic and the symbolic,” between “literal and figurative” registers—as Swales so convincingly argues—that allows the “autobiographically rooted case study [to acquire] a socio-critical and, ultimately, existential dimension” (442, 440). Grounding the work in the biographical, this ‘castration’ poses a challenge to the supposed hierarchy between signifier and signified, with the real-life event that it supposedly recalls itself transformed into a *symptom* (which is to say: a signifier) of an underlying allegory of castration. Like the Lacanian unconscious, the author’s primary perception of reality appears already to have been *symbolic*—already structured as a text.

This ironic and irreverent attitude toward the Freudian intertext—which complicates and calls into question the production of meaning—hints at the postmodernist direction of Jelinek’s work.<sup>10</sup> And rather than a strictly Freudian account, Erika’s numb castration scene can perhaps be interpreted more precisely through a poststructuralist lens as a parodic revision of the Lacanian mirror stage, the instant of subjectivization through a passage into the symbolic order;<sup>11</sup> yet, rather than proffering the wholeness of the imagined image, as is the emphasis in Lacan’s version, here it is the concomitant fear of fragmentation that is highlighted:

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<sup>10</sup> For Michèle Pommé, it is chiefly this irreverential attitude toward the use of intertext that makes Jelinek a postmodernist: unlike Bachmann, argues Pommé, Jelinek’s intertextual references no longer serve to enhance meaning but rather to demonstrate that there is no meaning.

<sup>11</sup> Mahler-Bungers, for instance, interprets it as an appropriation of castration anxiety and a failed attempt to achieve a gender(ed) identity through an utter destruction of gender, a descent into total nihilism: “Das Bild der zerschnittenen Fleischhälften, in dem der Text die Trennung von Mann und Frau, aber auch von Mutter und Tochter, verdichtet, suggeriert eine Schlachter-Szene. Erika hat sich geschlechert, indem sie sich schlachtet. Körperlich inszeniert sie die ihrer Ich-Entwicklung fehlende symbolische Kastration mit dem Instrument, das den fehlenden *väterlichen* Phallus repräsentiert, der allein es vermocht hätte, sie zu ge-schlechten, das heißt, sie von der

Einen Augenblick lang starren die beiden zerschnittenen Fleischhälften einander betroffen an, weil plötzlich dieser Abstand entstanden ist, der vorher noch nicht da war. Sie haben viele Jahre lang Freud und Leid miteinander geteilt, und nun separiert man sie voneinander! *Im Spiegel sehen die Hälften sich auch noch seitenverkehrt, so daß keine weiß, welche Hälfte sie ist* (91, my emphasis).

Like the conclusion to Schroeter's *Malina*—where a play of mirrors makes it impossible to distinguish between reality and its representation—here even the wounded flesh regarded in the amplified reflection (Erika Kohut uses a magnifying shaving mirror) acts as another mirrored surface, completing the confusion between an image and its double. Nevertheless, Erika's cutting inscribes an *Abstand* (itself also assonantly doubled, somewhat redundantly *entstanden*); rather than allowing an identification with the idealized image in the mirror, the resultant mess of blood merely serves to alienate the subject further from her own body:

Dann kommt entschlossen das Blut hervorgeschossen. Die Blutstropfen sickern, rinnen, mischen sich mit ihren Kameraden, werden zu einem steten Rinnsal. Dann ein roter, gleichmäßig und beruhigend rinnender Strom, als sich die einzelnen Rinnsale vereinigen. Sie sieht ja nicht vor lauter Blut, was sie da eigentlich aufgeschnitten hat. *Es war ihr eigener Körper, doch er ist ihr fürchterlich fremd* (91, my emphasis).

As the sudden and ephemeral shift into the past tense betrays (“*Es war ihr eigener Körper*”), this cut marks the ultimate alienation from one's own body: Erika's clitoris has been literally severed (“*aufgeschnitten*”), lopped off and rendered foreign. Indeed, the thought alone is painful—although for a male reader like André Müller or myself it is *just* the thought, *alone*,

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Mutter zu trennen und die Illusion, selbst einen Phallus zu besitzen, sowie die Illusion, der alleinbegehrte Partner der Mutter zu sein, zu zerstören. Aber: Kastration wird bei Erika als *reine Destruktion* inszeniert, als Inkarnation des Nichts (...) Sie geschlechtet sich aber vor einem Spiegel, und vielleicht kann man sagen, daß der Identifikation mit dieser Wunde, dem ‚Nichts‘, ihr ein imaginärer Suizid gelingt. Der Wunsch, eine Kastrationsgeschichte zu haben läuft immer wieder (als Wiederholungszwang im Sinne des Todestriebes) auf den imaginären Suizid hinaus, der gerade der Erfüllung des Wunsches zuwider läuft: eine Geschlechtsidentität zu haben” (87-88, original emphasis). In her essay, Mahler-Bungers repeatedly speaks of the death drive and of suicidal thoughts, yet is important to distinguish between self-harm and a suicidal instinct. In his seminal study on the subject, Armando Favazza incorporates this distinction into the very definition of self-injury: “*self-injury is the deliberate, direct alteration or destruction of healthy body tissue without an intent to die*” (197, original emphasis). Iuliana Corina Vaida, quoting Marilee Strong's work on self-injury, takes this stance not only toward Erika's genital mutilation but also on her final stab wound: “The self-cutting has become a successful strategy to cope with the pain and to fight numbness (...) Even in the end, after Walter rapes and discards her, the wound she inflicts on herself should not be viewed as a suicide attempt: ‘Rather than a suicidal gesture, cutting is a symbol of the fight to stay alive’ (211).

that can be painful insofar as this is a hurt that can only be imagined. It is this *incapacity* for empathy, even with oneself, that Jelinek inscribes into Erika's self-mutilation: the very trauma to which the author takes recourse in order to legitimize her fiction—to which she turns as an assurance of her artwork's poignant veracity—does not signal a *return* to the real, a sense of oneness with the world, but rather the very moment, again in Lacanian language, at which the real and the imaginary are irreparably cloven from the symbolic order.

Lacan's understanding of *the real* as that which stands outside of symbolic structures and resists representation absolutely is enormously indebted to Bataillan notions of communication, inner experience and sovereignty—in short: all of the fissures Bataille posits as allowing a direct, unmediated experience of an external reality. And just as Bataille's texts perpetually destroy and deconstruct themselves in an effort to allow access to this unadulterated extratextual domain, Jelinek's writerly violence clearly aspires to achieve an ontological dimension. But even if the author's own justifications for the depiction of self-mutilation in *Die Klavierspielerin* initially imply that this image of self-harm is *non-symbolic*—instead exceeding symbolism by its immediate contact with an extratextual and autobiographical reality—, by inscribing a procedure of self-mutilation as an artistic manifesto (a demythification à la Roland Barthes<sup>12</sup>), Jelinek reveals that this ostensibly unallegorical image is indeed an illustration of her own textual strategy of deconstruction: the self-injury in the plot is, as it were, an allegory for the structural procedure according to which it operates. The image that Jelinek puts forth as a marker of an external reality exceeding the text's symbolic structures—the emblem of her identification with her own novel and the overlap between artwork and autobiography—is, as it turns out, instead an alienation: this cut does not

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<sup>12</sup> Marlies Janz, for instance, convincingly demonstrates the importance of Barthes' *Mythologies* as an influence on Jelinek's early work.

mark the moment at which the text gains access to the real but rather the one at which the real dissolves entirely into text.

## 2: The Ontology of Estheticism: Mediated Reality

The same paradox marks Jelinek's reaction to the adaptation by Michael Haneke of her novel—which she tells the *Wiener Zeitung* she viewed “allerdings nicht auf großer Leinwand, sondern im Rohschnitt auf kleinem Schirm, faktisch am *Schneidetisch*” (my emphasis). The violence of the film, she claims, is of an almost unbearably painful proximity to the real: “Die Brutalität der Bilder geht mir sehr nahe. Ich kann den Film nur schwer aushalten, er trägt ja autobiographische Züge.” Chief among these autobiographical features, as the author perhaps intends to hint with her reference to the rough cut and the cutting room (such distasteful puns are a hallmark of her style), would be the mirror scene just addressed; if there the emphasis is placed on the sense of alienation engendered by an overabundance of reflections, in an essay on Michael Haneke, Jelinek notably uses nearly identical language to describe the cinematic medium as such:

Ist Film eine Spiegelung? Etwas *Seitenverkehrtes*, das wieder umgekehrt wird, aber als Verkehrung der Seiten noch erkannt werden kann? *Ich kenne mich jetzt schon nicht mehr aus*, denn der Spiegel verkehrt die Seiten, der Film auch, also müßte der Film eine Spiegelung ja wieder geraderücken, aber in zweifacher Spiegelung (in Naqvi vii, my emphasis).

The confused (and confusing) quality of this description is most certainly not incidental; rather it is a linguistic reflection (pun intended) of the existential confusion being described: *ich kenne mich jetzt schon nicht mehr aus*. Jelinek posits film as a reflection of a reflection, which is to say that the possibility of any primary reality has been revoked. Trapped in the infinite mise-en-

abyeme between two facing mirrors, the subject is uprooted, and into Jelinek's assertion *ich kenne mich nicht mehr aus* we might instead read, *ich erkenne mich nicht mehr*. This 'misrecognition' (for Lacan it is an inverse *méconnaissance* that allows the budding subject to identify with its idealized mirror image, its imago) would be common to any spectator of the film, but is particularly poignant for Jelinek, who—if the autobiographical overtures are to be believed—should readily recognize herself as the subject of Haneke's *Pianiste* at least.

From Jelinek's perspective it is precisely this ontological bewilderment that allows for the intrusion of the extradiegetic—specifically the recognition of reality as something always *constructed*: “Haneke will die Zusammenhänge zwischen Personen und Dingen zeigen, aber immer als etwas Hergestelltes” (ibid. v). The esthetic strategy of Benjaminian allegory I observed first in Baudelaire has been definitively transformed into a veritable worldview, with its foregrounding and celebration of artifice taking on an ontological weight approaching an inevitability—which is to say that this presentation is not arbitrary but rather in keeping with the constructed character of lived reality:

Aber bei Haneke ist es immer nur: so wie es sein muß, nicht wie es gemacht werden könnte, also wie es genausogut auch anders gemacht werden könnte. Und damit sagt er dann nicht weniger als die Wahrheit, er läßt sie auftreten als sie selbst. Die Wahrheit in ihrer wichtigsten Gastrolle (in Naqvi., viii).

But if truth makes a cameo appearance, as the author puts it, it also becomes—as is the case with any cameo—an *imitation* of itself, revealing itself to be non-self-identical and merely standing in as its own simulacrum. The same principle of constructedness that governs filmic form is understood to be determinate of the nature of reality, and Haneke therefore reveals his characters

als Spiegelungen (...) die sich über das künstliche Licht, das er gemacht hat, hinwegsetzten und dann ganz besonders da sind (...) als immer (...) in etwas Gespiegelte (...) Und dieser Vorgang wird sichtbar, weil man in genau dieser Situation eben genau das sehen muß, was sie sind (...) auch wenn man den Spiegel nicht sieht, der sie verkehrt und dann zeigt (ibid. ix).

These figures, in Jelinek's account, are always *only* visible as reflections; despite what might appear to be the novelist's intentions, the refraction and fragmentation that constitute her understanding of Haneke's oeuvre once again do not grant access to an extratextual reality, but rather reveal experienced reality itself to be of the symbolic order.<sup>13</sup> This truth is, indeed, *always* already mediated.

In this context one might return to Iris Radisch and her indignation over Jelinek's self-injury. In another conversation with André Müller, nearly fifteen years after their initial interview—on the occasion of her Nobel Prize—Jelinek was asked about Radisch's recent complaint that the author draws her "Weltsicht allein aus dem Fernsehen." Once again, the novelist surprisingly appears to agree:

Frau Radisch kennt mich nicht. Ich kenne sie auch nicht. Aber natürlich bezieht sie ihre Weltsicht auch aus dem Fernsehen, nur weiß sie es nicht, das ist der Unterschied. Wenn sie vor der Kamera ihre schöne Beine übereinanderschlägt,

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<sup>13</sup> Or, as Fatima Naqvi has summarized this phenomenon in another of Haneke's films, *Benny's Video* (1992): "Die Repräsentation von Wirklichkeit wird beim Wort genommen: Eine stets durch die Kamera gebrochene Realität, die außerhalb der Bilder nicht erfahrbar ist, wird wieder dargestellt. Es geht aber hier nicht um die Negation einer als unzufriedenstellend erlebten Medien-Wirklichkeit, sondern viel eher um deren Potenzierung mittel des Bildes, als das sich die gelebte Realität herausstellt" (2). My argument here may run counter to recent attempts in film theory to recuperate the (Lacanian) real into contemporary cinema. In their introduction to a volume on *Lacan and Contemporary Film*, Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle endeavor to correct what they see as film studies' earlier overemphasis on the imaginary: "What was missing in this [generation of] Lacanian film theory was any sense of the power of film (...) to challenge—or even expose—the process of interpellation. This was the result of its too narrow understanding that elided the role of the Real in Lacan's thought. According to this way of understanding Lacan, the signifier's authority is absolute, and its functioning is flawless. But this fails to see the signifier's dependence on failure—the role that failure plays in the *effective* functioning of the signifier. (...) That is to say, the symbolic order continually comes up against a barrier that disrupts its smooth functioning—a barrier that Lacan calls the Real. This barrier is not external to the symbolic structure: the Lacanian Real is not a thing in itself existing beyond the realm of the signifier. Instead, the Real marks the point at which the symbolic order derails itself, the point where a gap occurs within that order. The symbolic order cannot exist without gaps at which its control breaks down. These gaps not only hinder the working of the symbolic order, they are essential to its working" (xvi). For the theorists and critics contributing to this volume, "Filmic analysis offers (...) a privileged site for the elaboration of the contours of the Real because it combines the symbolic structure of analysis with the traumatic Real often unleashed in cinema. Thus, through the formalizations of Lacan, we can fathom the lack in meaning and the beyond of the signifier that so many contemporary films have in their sights" (xxvii). As tempting and as ideologically optimistic as such a perspective might be, I cannot—in the specific context of Jelinek's and Haneke's esthetics of injury—so readily adhere to what would be a rather naïve (though roughly Bataillian) view that the gaps in discourse open it up to a pre-symbolic real that would exceed it. Which is not by any means to say that I believe this real does not exist, but rather that the figures of violence employed here to appropriate it must be problematized as far too self-reflexive, too self-consciously *textual*, to unequivocally transcend their own textuality. This, of course, is what I am theorizing here as *estheticism*.

dann macht sie das, weil sie es in einem Film so gesehen hat. Es gibt ja nichts Authentisches. *Was wir heute für die Wirklichkeit halten, ist eine Fernsehwirklichkeit. Darüber schreibe ich* (ibid., my emphasis).

It is here that Jelinek's project most explicitly overlaps with Haneke's; as has frequently been established in the secondary literature and by the filmmaker's own assertions, a deconstruction of this *Fernsehwirklichkeit* is also the chief aim of his cinema. In an interview (published in English) with Christopher Sharrett, for instance, Haneke contends:

We don't, of course, anymore perceive reality, but instead the representation of reality in television. Our experiential horizon is very limited. What we know of the world is little more than the mediated world, the image. We have no reality, but a derivative of reality, which is extremely dangerous, most certainly from a political standpoint but in a larger sense to our ability to have a palpable sense of the truth of everyday experience.<sup>14</sup>

Strikingly similar in perspective, these two statements also demonstrate quite palpably Jelinek's and Haneke's position on the cusp of the postmodern: the nostalgia for an immediate (which is to say, *unmediated*) and 'authentic' existence and the simultaneous skepticism toward the same. It is their concomitant faith in the capacity of an esthetics of injury to dismantle this mediated reality in order to allow a more 'real' reality to emerge and their own perpetual questioning of that same faith<sup>15</sup> that make Jelinek and Haneke so appropriate as the conclusion to the literary lineage under consideration here.

It is unsurprising, given the opinions expressed above, that Haneke's adaptation would subtly depict the scene of self-mutilation in *Die Klavierspielerin* as Erika Kohut's own private cinema. This is achieved, in part, through the relative proximity of this sequence to the

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<sup>14</sup> Employing a Deleuzian language common in scholarship on Haneke, Mattias Frey describes the staging of this derivative reality in *Benny's Video* (1992): "The effect of course is to create a flat line of reality or unreality, a total conflation of the actual and the virtual" (32).

<sup>15</sup> Again, this does not necessarily imply an absolute disavowal of the possibility of a primary reality either on the part of the critic nor of the artists under scrutiny, as Arne Koch insists (and as Haneke indeed implies above): "Surely, whatever reality we may be referring to in Haneke's films, it is highly mediated; nonetheless his films do not suggest that a reality does not exist. Clearly it does. (...) [But] reality only appears *to be of consequence* (to have meaning) when it is mediated or captured as representation. It is only when (...) spectators see reality as an image that it gains meaning. It is in this context that one must consider Haneke's statement that the world is not much more than its own mediated image" (90).

protagonist's visit to a peep show (which Haneke recasts as a porno booth, highlighting the self-reflexivity of his medium) and her voyeuristic activity in the Wiener Prater (which the filmmaker similarly displaces onto an open-air movie theater). The same visual motifs mark each of these moments in the film: at the sex shop and at the drive-in, Erika takes coins out of and puts them back into her leather purse; at home in her own bathroom, it is from this same purse that she withdraws the razorblade (resembling a coin in both material and size) with which she will cut herself. The tissue in which the razor is wrapped might also be compared both to the semen-covered tissue she sniffs while viewing videos at the sex shop and to the scarf in which she wraps the glass she later shatters in order to mutilate the hand of an unfortunate student in a fit of jealousy.

But such understated visual cues are hardly obvious upon first viewing; instead what is most striking about the self-mutilation sequence is its apparent arbitrariness, its absolutely unexplained position in the montage and its lack of psychologization.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the sudden but shockingly subdued portrayal of this violence seems almost to resist both narrativization and allegorization, rejecting any evident symbolic content in favor of a raw, almost disinterested realism. The mutilation itself is shot with an excruciating slowness and restraint in a single three-minute-long take. The handheld camera pans to follow Erika from her purse to the bathtub, where, sitting in profile, she takes up the magnifying mirror and carefully positions it between her naked knees. It is not immediately apparent from Huppert's gestures what she is meant to be doing with her right hand (the hand holding the razorblade), instead the focus is on her left as she fiddles with the mirror and shifts her weight from side to side to achieve the

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<sup>16</sup> As film critic Landon Palmer puts it, in an article comparing *Die Klavierspielerin* to Haneke's most sustained commentary on filmic violence, *Funny Games* (1997, American remake 2007): "With regards [sic] to the genital self-mutilation that occurs early in the film, the casual nature of the incident, the breadth of its framing, and its seemingly random place within the succession of narrative events (that is, nothing occurs before or after this scene that attempts to directly explicate it) render no simple shortcut for spectatorial understanding of any potential motivation for such a random act of violence" (189).

necessary angle, framing her perspective as a cinematographer would frame a shot. All that can be heard—exactly as in the porno booth—is her breathing and the off-screen sound of the television playing in the background. The silent trickle of blood down the side of the bathtub is at first so inconspicuous that one might not notice it until afterwards, after Erika has quelled the bleeding with a sanitary pad and turned the water on to clean up and conceal her act.

The resemblance between this sequence and the visit to the sex shop is significant. In an essay on Baudelaire from *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, Stanley Cavell has noted that “the ontological conditions of the motion picture reveal it as inherently pornographic” (45); in his interview with Sharrett, Haneke concedes that his adaptation of *Die Klavierspielerin* must indeed be recognized as an obscenity, but not, however, as pornography: for him, “any contemporary art practice is pornographic *if it attempts to bandage the wound*, so to speak, which is to say our social and psychological wound.”<sup>17</sup> (I will return to this rather Baudelairean defense in an instant.) Part of the hermeneutic difficulty consists, then, of the apparent immediacy (the apparently unmediated nature) of this particular scene of violence. To the extent that it appropriates a documentary approach to its material, the sequence of Erika’s self-injury also adopts a quasi-pornographic character; as Ma notes of the visit to the sex booth:

The definition of pornography as a genre (...) entails a slippage between the fictional and the actual, between depiction and realization, such that the social and moral anxieties surrounding it frequently respond less to its actual contents than to its mediation. (...) With the advent of representational technologies like film capable of producing images of unprecedented likeness to reality, such anxieties contaminate the medium itself (10).

Haneke’s depiction would be salvaged from the pornographic through this self-aware Bataillan *glissement*—precisely by its very proximity to the pornographic: problematizing the precarious relationship of an image to its representation or reproduction, Haneke leaves entirely

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<sup>17</sup> As Jean Ma argues in reference to this statement and *La Pianiste*, the “film explores the murky territory between description and conflation—between the work *on* pornography and the work *of* pornography—by framing its representation of sexual violence in a way that renders it particularly difficult to interpret” (12)—which is to say that the language of deconstruction and the language being deconstructed are essentially the same.

unresolved the interpretative possibility this permits and subsequently refuses to bandage the wound it opens.

One might then note the parallels between Haneke's defense of his self-admitted obscenity and the defense offered on behalf of Baudelaire at the time of his 1857 obscenity trial. If the pornographic, in Haneke's view, betrays a desire to mend this wound—to hide it—then his aim, by contrast, must be what was in the case of Baudelaire identified as the essence of artistic purpose: *le procédé ancien a toujours consisté à montrer la plaie*. Like Baudelaire, Haneke positions the artist in the role of a cultural diagnostician.<sup>18</sup> The disease, for Haneke, would be the *Fernsehwirklichkeit*, the mediated reality lamented above; yet it appears debatable whether the filmmaker allows for the possibility of a cure.<sup>19</sup> At issue, then, are the same concerns with *realism*—the nude depiction of 'reality'—that haunted Baudelaire in 1857; now, however, nearly a century and a half later, the question is no longer (or no longer uniquely) what the limits of representation ought to be but rather how complicit artistic representation might be in the

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<sup>18</sup> Oliver Speck, for instance, has noted that "There are, of course, good reasons to take Haneke as a 'physician of culture', what Gilles Deleuze calls a 'clinician of civilization, somebody who diagnoses the disease in society'" (52).

<sup>19</sup> As Speck also intimates, "while Haneke certainly provides a diagnosis, he is far from suggesting a cure that works only within the limits of the already-moribund system. Furthermore, his diagnoses do not hold out the hope-against-hope that life and spectacle could ever be separated again, as some critics mistakenly conclude. They are already indissociably one" (52). For this reason, Speck aligns Haneke with film theorist Guy Debord's sixth thesis that the spectacle "n'est pas un supplément au monde réel, sa décoration surajoutée. Il est le cœur de l'irréalisme de la société réelle" (11, also quoted in Speck, 52). But Brian Price and John David Rhodes, in their introduction to the volume *On Michael Haneke*, would manifestly disagree: "For Debord, understandably, life under advanced capitalism—the organization of our lives in and through the spectacle—is understood and evoked in the most acerbic of terms. Haneke, however, asks for us to read specularly as a description and not a condemnation: yes, the world is mediated—even governed, perhaps—by images and their relation to one another. Mediation, however, is a force that can both reconcile and divide (to mediate is to divide—at least—in two), and that can stir reaction as well. For Haneke, unlike for Debord, the image is not only a two-dimensional condensation of capital. It is something, in a sense, more simple: it is an *image*—that is, it is a picture, a representation of the world, of something in the world, of something that can be imagined. (...) In other words, the image is not the problem at all. The image is a radically neutral medium" (4, original emphasis).

There is, here, an important tension with Marco Abel's work on violence, which I have quoted in my introduction and elsewhere. For Price and Rhodes, "the image discloses violence through the absence of violence in the image. Neither the violent image nor the image of violence is the image of which we should be the most suspicious. The image is neutral. It has no essential relation to violence" (5). However, in Abel's account, as in mine, it is of chief importance to determine how these images of violence operate rather than focusing exclusively on *what* they purportedly represent or signify. This hermeneutic method therefore "derives its ethical impetus directly from the sites themselves, from *how* the imaged violence itself calls forth critical response-ability" (Abel xvi).

reality it is reproducing and perhaps even supplanting.<sup>20</sup> The anxiety today has less to do with the *depiction* of the real than with the precarious *reality* of the real that is depicted: the ethical questions posed by Jelinek and Haneke concern not only the challenges of a critique of violence through a language of violence but also the difficulty of a critique of this mediated reality through esthetic mediation. These two concerns are not distinct from one another, but rather—as I intend to demonstrate in conclusion—come together in an esthetics of injury.<sup>21</sup>

### 3: The Ethics of Estheticism: Raped into Reality

One can once again observe these ontological and interpretative anxieties on the example of the central image of self-harm. If its sober depiction in *La Pianiste* seems to deprive Erika's self-injurious act of any psychological depth, of any capacity for symbolic significance, what follows in the film is nonetheless an attempt at an interpretation—albeit an intentionally insufficient and unsatisfying one. Called to dinner by her overbearing mother, the piano teacher stands near the table with a posture explicitly recalling the menstruation scene from Schroeter's *Malina*—the same general reading at which Erika's mother arrives when she notices the blood

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<sup>20</sup> As McCann and Sorfa write of the political content of Haneke's films: "Within a European filmmaking context Haneke's productions are closely allied to what we might call 'critical realism'. By this we mean that his films engage not so much with 'reality', although being very much involved with historical events, but with the problems and possibilities of presenting such a reality through a fictional, normative, medium" (1).

<sup>21</sup> Hanssen also discusses this link, proposing an understanding of Jelinek's language of violence "as an iconoclastic critique of visual and spectatorial culture. For while Jelinek's theatrical and fictional work flaunts the spectacle, it is also permeated by a sustained condemnation of the image, offering the disruptive force of language as a possible corrective to the aestheticization of violence" (105). If the key question of Hanssen's analysis is "the *strategic* use of counterviolence" as a feminist critique and the risk it runs in its "mimetic reenactment of sexual violence" (84, 80, original emphasis), Hanssen (with a nod to Susan Suleiman's opposition of reality and textuality in her work on Bataille's *Histoire de l'oeil*) acknowledges that this perspective also involves a poststructuralist and postmodern(ist) skepticism regarding the nature of reality itself: "reified dualisms such as history or the 'real' vs. play, parody, or citation continue to fuel the controversies surrounding postmodernism, including postmodern feminism. Precisely because Jelinek's work confronts an entire range of violence thematized by feminism—form its domestic, fascist, and pornographic manifestations to its subversive redeployment—it also goes to the heart of those contentious issues that continue to divide the women's movement and feminism, both in the United States and in Germany" (85).

running down her daughter's leg. This interpretation operates as a kind of hermeneutic modeling for Haneke's spectator, but it is both offered and revoked by the same gesture, since the viewer—having witnessed the actual cause of the wound—will recognize the mother's reading as inaccurate.<sup>22</sup> There is a morbid irony to this failed interpretation but also something more profound. If Schroeter's image of menstruation in *Malina* constituted a literalization of a wound abstractly representing femininity, here Haneke makes his audience work harder; biological menstruation is, in turn, itself *made metaphorical* or rather, more accurately, *metonymic* (of itself): in a self-recursive feedback loop, a kind of textual short-circuit, Erika's 'menstruation' only approximates her actual wound, itself apparently intended to signify her femininity. Ma has therefore identified Erika's act of automutilation and the resulting confusion of allegorical valences "as a self-reference to the body, achieved by a violent mimicking of the biological processes that mark sexual difference" (20).

This *violent mimicry* is of the same variety as Jelinek's or Haneke's artistic attempts to deconstruct pornography and violence through a language that is itself both pornographic and violent; through her reaction to this bleeding, Erika's mother models the inherent difficulty of interpreting the obscene—also in the sense of the *ob-scène*, often attributed an (erroneous) etymology referring to that which occurs off stage—of understanding the effects of a violence that takes place barely out of sight. This interpretative challenge is of a piece with Haneke's ethical project, and violence in his cinema, accordingly, *routinely* takes place just off screen.<sup>23</sup> As Oliver Speck points out in a monograph on the filmmaker, however, self-inflicted violence, such as the automutilation scene portrayed here, constitutes an exception to this rule: "as opposed to

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<sup>22</sup> As Jean Ma observes: "What Erika's mother perceives is exactly what we as an audience have been shown, blood dripping from an imperceptible source, and she misconstrues this sign as menstruation. This misconstrual, along with Erika's choice of bandage, accomplishes a stunning deflation of the shock of this self-infliction of violence, referring its effects to the natural, and vaguely unappetizing, cause of female anatomy" (20).

<sup>23</sup> Lisa Coulthard, for instance, notes that "although addressing the murder of children, bodily dismemberment, graphic suicide, rape, sadism and brutality, Haneke's films eschew the direct representation of explicit violence in favour of more subtle, minimalist and complex depictions" (38).

the violence that is done to others, scenes of violence against one's own body are shown directly in Haneke's cinema" (10). Part of the reason for this exemption, as the scholar so insightfully notes, is that "none of these gestures of (...) auto-aggression carry an ascribable meaning" (162), which is to say that self-harm in Haneke is always left unexplained, putting the weight of the (ethical) responsibility of interpretation squarely on the viewer, who is asked to supply the answers that the film omits.

As in Genet and Cixous, here again, it is not what is explicitly presented but rather the evident omission—what is absent from the image, the gaps in discourse—that are ultimately most productive and most meaningful; in Haneke this omission takes on an ethical dimension, calling forth a responsibility on the part of the audience to interpret these textual lacunae. Nevertheless, if this tactic leaves an open space for spectatorial judgment to intervene, it also makes the spectator an accomplice in the imag(in)ed violence, insofar as it is generally not explicitly shown but only implied—and this is what Peter Brunette has rightfully critiqued as a moralizing strategy "perilously close to aesthetic coercion" (7).<sup>24</sup> Such coercion constitutes the aggressive didactic stance of Haneke's esthetics of injury.

Indeed, the filmmaker himself has frequently and notoriously described his films as an assault, for instance in a 1997 interview with *Der Spiegel*: "Jeder Film vergewaltigt seine Zuschauer. (...) Meine Filme vergewaltigen den Zuschauer immerhin dazu, selbst nachzudenken" (147). Like Kafka's ax or Bachmann's wall, it is to this metaphor of rape that Haneke will repeatedly return as an illustration of the desired effect of his artwork on its

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<sup>24</sup> Brunette demonstrates how this strategy of omission puts the film's viewers into a position of complicity with the violence (almost) depicted—forcing them to fill in the gaps: "The fact that most of the brutality in the director's films is offscreen is also used by his devotees to exonerate Haneke of any moral failing in this regard. But just because violence is not actually *pictured*, it is nevertheless always *heard*, and its aftermath is seen, and thus it is always directly represented in his films in some complex way that goes beyond the visual. (...) Haneke feels that the audience members must be persuaded—or forced, if necessary—to contribute to a film's meaning themselves and to recognize their complicity in its psychological dynamics. It is here that the director's aesthetic mission sometimes comes perilously close to aesthetic coercion" (6-7, original emphasis).

audience. Considering, however, the ethical stakes of Haneke's project of social commentary—a critique of violence and the complicity of media in the (re)production of violence—this choice of metaphor engenders yet another uncomfortable, unsteady irony. Just as Kafka's ax-wound in *Ein Landarzt* must be considered the consummation of an esthetic strategy previously described as the blow of an ax, Haneke's cinematic representation of rape must be taken seriously as an analogue for the artwork described as such.<sup>25</sup> And if Jelinek's own interpretation of self-mutilation in *Die Klavierspielerin* seems to contain an implicit critique of her own estheticization of injury, perhaps Haneke, as well, calls into doubt the success of his ethical-esthetic rape through his depiction of the rape scene in *La Pianiste*—which realizes and deromanticizes the protagonist's fantasy of violence but clearly fails to exorcise the inclination toward violence.

This act of aggression constitutes an anomaly in Haneke's work insofar as it is directly figured on screen; like the sequence portraying self-mutilation, the rape and preceding battery are presented with a pseudo-documentary sobriety—with the camera panning to follow the assailant as he paces back and forth predatorily, exploding in intermittent bursts of violence. Throughout the sequence, Benoît Magimel, in the role of Walter Klemmer, interrogates his victim, quoting her earlier epistle to him and highlighting the dissonance between her expressed desires and their brutal realization—asking her, sometimes sadistically, sometimes with an almost tender sincerity, if this is really what she had imagined.<sup>26</sup> From the moment the sexual nature of the assault becomes unmistakable, as Klemmer tries to cuddle closer to the

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<sup>25</sup> As Wheatley has it: "Metaphor this may be; nonetheless, its (un)ethical implications cannot be overlooked, for it seems indicative of a brutality towards the audience, that may or may not be warranted, but that certainly problematizes Haneke's own ethical standing" (*Michael Haneke's Cinema* 114). Oddly, this quotation does not reappear in the course of Wheatley's own reading of the role of rape in *La Pianiste*.

<sup>26</sup> Ma also notes how his assault reproduces and problematizes the sadomasochistic fantasies revealed by the reading of Erika's letter: "The troubling echoes of the one scene in the other disallow a reading that would insist upon a clear-cut distinction between fantasy and reality (...) They signal the operation of repetition and circularity that (...) underwrites a critical strategy that works from within the idiom of power and domination rather than claiming a position that transcends ideology. (...) *La Pianiste* locates this metacommentary within a series of mimetic reenactments that locate the possibilities of social critique within the language of the symptom itself" (13).

bleeding woman on the floor, it too is shot in a single, uncut long take, with the two horizontal figures closely framed in profile. Forcing the viewer to observe this violence directly—and at considerable length—is an evident example of the metaphorical ‘rape’ to which this discomfiting sequence appears to be the more literal complement. Erika is silent and unmoving, nearly catatonic, throughout, but the camera remains focused on her even after her attacker has finished and stands off screen continuing to lecture, berate and even attempt to comfort her: “Tu sais ? La plaie d’amour n’est pas mortel.” Reduced by this closing blow to a stale cliché, the most hackneyed of literary tropes, the trauma of the rape may momentarily appear to escape artistic mediation, but it is immediately subsumed again into a trite artistic tradition.

No more fatal than the self-inflicted cuts that preceded it, Erika’s rape is far from the transcendent experience that the protagonist had clearly hoped such violence might deliver. And yet what follows must be understood as another attempt to dismantle this trope by literalizing it to the greatest possible degree: for when the protracted close-up of Erika’s battered countenance finally cuts away, it is to a close-up of her hands removing a knife from a drawer in her kitchen. Haneke’s film, like Jelinek’s novel, then ends with one final, inscrutable wound which echoes both this rape and the protagonist’s vaginal self-mutilation: the stab wound in the shoulder that Speck reads as “symbolic self-castration” (90). Jelinek has stated that this knife wound is an allusion to the slaughter of Josef K. on the final page of Kafka’s *Proceß*, but insofar as it remains “inconclusive in accordance with the logic of linear narrative exposition” (Ma 22), it can also be compared to the enigmatic bleeding with which Bachmann’s narratives so frequently conclude. As in the other accounts of self-harm, here it is the numb futility of the injury that is highlighted. Again the wound fails to provide the visceral transcendence it would appear to promise:

Das Messer *soll ihr ins Herz fahren* und sich dort drehen! Der Rest der dazu nötigen Kraft versagt, ihre Blicke fallen auf nichts, und ohne einen Aufschwung

des Zorns, der Wut, der Leidenschaft sticht Erika Kohut sich in eine Stelle an ihrer Schulter, die sofort *Blut hervorschießen* läßt. Harmlos ist diese Wunde, nur Schmutz, Eiter dürfen nicht hineingeraten. Die Welt steht, unverwundet, nicht still. (...) An Erikas Schulter klafft *ein Riß*, widerstandslos hat sich zartes Gewebe geteilt. (...) Keiner der schrecklichen und jede Sekunde erwarteten Schmerzen trifft ein. (...) Erika's Rücken, an dem der *Reißverschluss* ein Stück offensteht, wird gewärmt. (...) *Blut sickert* aus ihr heraus (*KS 285*, my emphasis).

The still-metaphorical *Herzwunde*, the *plaie d'amour*, of the first sentence quoted above is indeed literalized, but it loses its romantic allure in the process. If the repeated allusion to the *Riß* again recalls Bachmann, the description of the blood explicitly relates this wound to the earlier depiction of cutting, which is related in largely the same vocabulary ("Dann kommt entschlossen das Blut hervorgeschossen. Die Blutstropfen sickern" [*KS 91*]).

Just as Haneke displaces the peep show and the Prater to locations allowing him to reflect on the medium of film, he moves his final sequence from Walter Klemmer's technical university to the concert house. Obligated to stand in for the student she has maimed, Erika's stab wound takes the place of her imminent piano performance: as in Jelinek's account of self-injury, the wound becomes a kind of artwork. Haneke's adaptation of this passage for the screen is, however, of an even more marked sobriety than Jelinek's original: in medium-close up, centered in the frame, Huppert stands perfectly still for an exceedingly long moment before drawing the knife from her purse and, with a determined grimace, plunging it into her shoulder. (The framing, frontal angle and sluggish tempo recall the shot in *Malina* in which Huppert slams her head against the door.) All that is visible, when she first removes the weapon and puts it back into her purse, is a small slit, which slowly begins to spread into a bloody stain before the actress covers it with her hand. As was the case with the blood in the bathtub, it is only from this aftereffect that the spectator begins to gage—but again cannot definitively determine—the gravity of the injury. Still, the 'wound of love' is far from fatal.

What is important, in both cases, is not what is present in the image, but rather the explanation that is absent from it; and it is in this manner that the protagonist's utterly unexplained self-mutilating cuts can be compared to Haneke's equally cryptic filmic ones:<sup>27</sup> deprived of explanations, the spectator is required to fill in the explicit and essential gaps left by Haneke's cinematic arrangement. While apparently less radical—in this film at least—his editing thus achieves the same ends as Werner Schroeter's challenging intellectual montage. As Speck contends, "Haneke does not leave the framework of narrative cinema, but rather subverts narrative cinema by its own means, 'destroying' it and its explanations from within" (168). Again, the language of critique bears an uncanny resemblance to the language it is critiquing, and it is for this reason—the preservation and perpetuation of narrative even as it is being destroyed—that Haneke's filmic project can be regarded as another experiment in (the dismantling of) narrative form akin to Bataille's *Bleu du ciel* or Bachmann's *Todesarten* cycle.

For Haneke, however, there is also an epistemological aspect to this intervention, which he opposes to a literature of totality recognizable roughly as the nineteenth-century realism represented for some critics (namely Sara Lennox) by Malina's narrative voice in Bachmann. In an interview with Michel Cieutat, published in French translation, Haneke comments on the structural fragmentation of films like his *71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des Zufalls* (1994) and *Code inconnu* (2000):

Pour moi, ce n'est pas un intérêt, mais plutôt une nécessité, parce que le cinéma de distraction prétend que nous pouvons montrer la réalité dans sa totalité, ce qui est faux. Si le cinéma veut être responsable, c'est-à-dire être un art véritable, il est obligé de se rendre compte que notre perception du monde est naturellement fragmentée. Alors il nous faut trouver des moyens esthétiques qui nous permettent de transférer ce regard fragmenté sur l'écran. Aujourd'hui,

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<sup>27</sup> Consider, for instance, Landon Palmer's assertion that "The formal restraint and lack of overt psychological justification with which Haneke himself handles these moments of violence allows his films to disrupt conventional representations of violence exercised through expected patterns of *cutting* and performance (...) common (...) within mainstream cinema (...) the confounding nature of Erika's behaviour potentially makes the spectator aware of the conventions with which such subjects are often approached in cinema by placing ambiguity where a clichéd and reductive explanatory *shortcut* would otherwise be" (189, my emphasis).

aucun écrivain n'oserait avancer qu'il peut retranscrire dans un livre la totalité du monde. Il va lui aussi réfléchir aux moyens d'écriture qui vont l'amener à reproduire cette même perception fragmentée de l'existence. Il s'agit d'une attitude qui n'est certes pas propre au monde moderne—cela a toujours été ainsi—, mais nous en sommes plus conscients de nos jours. C'est ma façon personnelle de procéder. Ce n'est pas une fascination pour la fragmentation : cela résulte très naturellement de cette faculté d'avoir cette nécessité (25).

Disintegration and rearrangement (the same variety of structural decadence that characterizes the arrangement of Baudelaire's prose poems) is not, Haneke contends, a mannerism—an art(siness) for the sake of art(siness) or fragmentation purely for the sake of fragmentation. Rather, it is the only honest representation of (a contemporary perception) of reality, which is itself inherently fragmented. Moreover, with his reference to the written word, Haneke himself places this practice into the literary history sketched throughout the present thesis—revealing the underlying epistemology implicit therein: an understanding of (the perception of) reality as itself already wounded.

Throughout his œuvre Haneke emphasizes the participation of media in this fragmentation—a participation particularly evident in, and particularly important to, representations of violence. The dismantling of a narrative (of totality) through narrative means is a risky wager of the same variety as Haneke's juxtaposition of Erika's viewing of video pornography and the private pornography of her self-mutilation or of the pianist's fantasies of rape and their awful realization: through its 'violent mimicry' the latter parodies and deconstructs but also (re)produces and indeed actualizes the threat of physical harm involved in the former.<sup>28</sup> His film *Caché* (2005) famously begins with an almost entirely static street scene: a

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<sup>28</sup> This simultaneous complicity and dissonance between competing ontological levels is what Speck has called "Haneke's mode of ontological filmmaking" and the crux of his ethical engagement, even if the precise political concerns of his films frequently remain obscure: "It is the very ontological levels of his films—shifts between which are signaled by different media, the extradiegetic space, narrative devices, genre markers—and the manipulation or perturbation of the latter and, by extension, of the different ontological levels through montage that play a role in the analysis of other, also extradiegetic ontologies, among them political ontology (...) when posing questions about politics in this mode, be it in the German or the French context, this discussion takes place on the plane of violence in representation itself, that is, his films focus not only on the representation of violence (*how* is it represented?), but also the violence that is done *by* representation" (161, original emphasis). Price and

palpably protracted exterior long take of a Parisian apartment, which is then revealed to be a threatening surveillance tape filmed by an unknown author observing the family at the center of the plot. When the film concludes with another long take—this time an exterior of the school attended by Pierrot, the family’s son—it is undeterminable whether the image is meant to be extradiegetic or instead another instance of such surveillance: the filmic medium is revealed to be inherently complicit in the observational violence it documents. This problematic complicity adds another dimension to the final shot of *La Pianiste*—also an uninterrupted exterior long shot of the concert hall as a wounded Erika heads home: this cinematic sobriety is not a remedy to the fantasies of violence it realizes, but rather a filmic reflection of their numbness, a *symptom* of their lamentable sterility.

Like his preoccupation with fragmentation, Haneke’s fixation on filmic violence is far from gratuitous: rather, it goes right to the heart of an interrogation of the nature of reality in a mediated age. If the aim of a Kafkan esthetics of injury was to restore sensitivity—to make each bite more painful—then Haneke’s is an analogous attempt to make the effects of this violence *felt* both despite and *through* its mediation.<sup>29</sup> By his refusal to bandage the wounded sense of being this reveals, Haneke hopes to restore reality’s immediacy. As in Jelinek’s work—as is evident in her insistence on the *reality* of her depiction of self-harm—an esthetics of injury is the methodology of this endeavor. And yet, this approach is also (as it has been historically)

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Rhodes put this in semiotic terms, rightly reading it as, in part, a challenge to a poststructuralist paradigm: “The sign itself—whether as an image, a sound, or text—is something that can reproduce a free play of both meaning *and* violence. In this sense, we can say that Haneke’s films raise a provocative question for poststructural theory, which often understands the free play of the signifier as the solution to domination and violence, or as evidence of the final untethering of the real—a masking of the real by the image. However (...) the solution to violence is not the reinstallation of the one-to-one correspondence and a metaphysics of presence” (9, original emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> This is what Speck, drawing once again on Deleuzian language, sees as Haneke’s call for a responsible montage that recognizes the complicity of the medium in all of its complexity—problematizing it without resolving it: “through the attentive and subtle use of filmic montage, and because there is, in the end, no *real* distinction between our extradiegetic space and the virtual space of film, Haneke is able to lay at the door step of the attentive viewer the gift of violence done *by* representation. Violence is moved back to the present, is literally ‘represented’” (176-177).

inherently complicit in the kind of esthetic mediation that makes such an endeavor necessary to begin with.

## Conclusion

A deconstructive critique of modern-day mediated reality is also at issue in the scandalous public self-mutilation discussed in my introduction—performed by Rainald Goetz during the very same year as the initial publication of Jelinek's *Klavierspielerin*. In this context, and by way of conclusion, let us return to his *Subito* where we left off, addressing the continuation of the same passage with which this dissertation began:

ein Blut ein Blut ein Blut, das müßte raus fließen, Spritz Quill Ström, so müßte es voll echt spritzen, am besten aus so einem fetten Direktor, das täte mir gefallen, in dem sein Fleisch hinein zumschneiden, den zumfoltern, und während er blutüberströmtmundig um Gnade winseln täte, *täte er logisch gefilmt werden*, wie dann hinein geschnitten wird in das nächste Fleisch, *alles logisch in Farbe*, das bleiche weiße fette Fleisch und das schöne rote Blut, alles blutig voll Blut, alles blutig voll Blut, bis es enden täte, zum Schluß er dauernd schon, Röchel Röchel— (*Subito* 66, my emphasis).

The brutal sarcasm of this fantasy of televised bleeding—and the even more violent irony of its actual realization through Goetz's televised performance—calls into question the sincerity of the author's call for blood, if not the very notion of sincerity.

Later in *Subito*, Goetz openly wonders whether there really is any reality primary to the televised one; referring directly to his immediate context—his attendance of the Bachmann readings in Klagenfurt—he describes it as *already* mediated: “Genau!, vielleicht gibt es das gar nicht in Wirklichkeit, das Klagenfurt, das gibt es doch bloß im Fernsehen, oder ist das Fernsehen schon wirklicher als wie die Wirklichkeit, oder ist die Wirklichkeit wirklicher als wie das Fernsehen?” (*S* 74). For this reason, Anna Opel reinterprets Goetz's act of self-injury less in terms of an unambivalent—and what might be conceived of as a naïve or reactionary—attempt at the restoration of a metaphysics of presence than as an ironic postmodernist poetics

of failure: “Die Bezugnahme auf das Blut ist in diesem Kontext wohl als Anstrengung zu betrachten, die Wirklichkeit zu erreichen, eine Anstrengung, die sich im Voraus ihres Scheiterns bewußt ist” (115). His esthetics of injury would be a self-consciously doomed effort to return to or restore a reality of which he no longer believes in the reality.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, years later, when asked directly in an interview if he has any faith in the possibility of authenticity, Goetz will respond to the question affirmatively in a manner that seems to celebrate a desire or perhaps nostalgia for the real and, furthermore, allows us to draw a connection to the question of the autobiographical that has been so important to the preceding enquiry:

Ja, natürlich. Also ich glaube an die Konstruktion dieser Form, an konstruierte Authentizität. Ich glaube natürlich nicht, daß es je im Text eine wirkliche, wahre, *unmittelbare* Authentizität geben könnte. Aber ich glaube daran, daß es richtig ist, daß man als einzelner Leser, als Schreiber genau diese Frage sich stellt: wer bist du? Ganz direkt. Andere sagen hör mal, ich habe mir da eine Geschichte ausgedacht, folgendermaßen; das geht natürlich auch. Aber die Idee Authentizität ist von etwas anderem fasziniert, von Problemen wie: *wie kriegen die Leute ihr Leben hin in echt?* (*JdsF* 147, my emphasis).

The ethical imperative of this effort appears to trump its underlying ontological crisis: the written word, the art of signs and mediation, could naturally never achieve an originary and unmediated authenticity—but it can and *should* create its own (mediated) authenticity. Despite his obvious cynicism, Goetz still believes, it seems, in literature. “[S]i Dieu n’existait pas,” Voltaire famously cautioned an (in part imaginary) author of a much different era, “il faudrait l’inventer” (*ÆC* X, 403). And, oddly, Goetz’s irreverent punk paradigm appears once again to take such a suggestion at face value: just so today, if there is no real reality—we might more

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<sup>1</sup> According to Opel, who takes a rather pessimistic view, “Echtheit und Authentizität als Begriffe, die nicht nur philosophisch als absolute gelten, sondern auch politisch in Verruf geraten sind, die aber in der Entfremdung einer medialen Welt immer wieder faszinieren, sind Puzzleteile, die in Goetz’ Werk nur als Zitat, als Zerrspiegel, niemals in Sinne einer Eingentlichkeit verwendet werden. Sie stellen andererseits Anschlußstellen zu Goetz’ Bezugnahme auf den Körper dar” (92).

hopefully paraphrase his point of view—then one will need to be invented. But this artificial *Wirklichkeit* is fragmentary by necessity: it must bear the scars of its construction.

Of course, Rainald Goetz, too, has his scars.<sup>2</sup> Following his contribution to the Bachmann competition, as Goetz sat bleeding listening to the judge's polarized critiques, a concerned spectator in the audience interrupted with the suggestion that somebody ought to send for a doctor. The stuttering response, from a member of the jury, would be almost comical if it weren't also so horrifying: "Er ist selbst... Er ist selbst... Er will das nicht... Entschuldigen Sie... Er will das nicht, wir haben das bereits alles gemacht, aber (...) er ist ja selbst ausgebildeter Arzt und er mache das ja öfters." This reaction once again accomplishes the spectacular deflation of the shock of self-inflicted violence that Jean Ma notes in Haneke's *La Pianiste*—contrasting the seeming suddenness of the cut with its apparently habitual and insignificant nature.

The same might be said of the very persistence of an esthetics of injury in our own era. Goetz's act is, after all, merely a strikingly literal iteration of what has, I hope, by this point been revealed to be a common cliché and one of the foundational mythologies of literary modernity: the wound as an analogue to the artwork. In Goetz's sensationalism, one must recognize a Baudelairean flair and the same decadent desire to shock—*épater le bourgeois*—that drives Bataille, Genet, Jelinek and Haneke as well. (Cixous and Bachmann are admittedly somewhat less aggressive.) If, for Baudelaire, the structural component of this *decadence*, the breakdown into ever smaller and more mobile compositional units, was a fortuitous response to the censorship his textual violence provoked, his heritors have elevated narrative fragmentation to a veritable textual strategy becoming ever more drastic as the century progresses and

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, his 2010 interview with Christoph Amend for *Zeitmagazin*, titled "Nein. Ja. Freude." for the author's three final responses. The questions asked, respectively, are whether he has ever regretted his *Rasierklingschnitt*, whether he still thinks of it occasionally, and what he feels recalling it.

ultimately rendering the very possibility of linear narrative nearly impossible—at least if we subscribe to the Bataillian view that *authentic* experience inherently exceeds such constrained discourse. But what was, for Bataille, perhaps a hopeful paradigm takes on a fundamentally different character when seen from the more skeptical postmodern perspective of authors like Goetz and Jelinek, or a filmmaker like Haneke. The epistemological weight of this position has come to contaminate reality, which is now perceived as fragmented and flawed—as itself injured. The literary or filmic wound, cut or hole and their compositional equivalents (fragments, cuts and omissions) are posited as both the thematic and structural symptoms of and solutions to this problem: as is evident in Goetz’s numbness, such imagery of injury has largely lost the dramatic power it sought to harness throughout literary modernity but without coming to another model to replace it.

Similarly, the protagonist of Goetz’s text continues to regard blood as the only assurance of meaning long after it has lost its novelty: “Da mußte ich wieder an die blutige Folter denken und an das lebendige rote Blut, das irgendwo heraus fließen müßte, damit alles einen Sinn ergäbe. Ohne Blut logisch kein Sinn. Und weil ich kein Terrorist geworden bin, deshalb kann ich bloß in mein eigenes weißes Fleisch hinein schneiden” (*S* 72, my emphasis, also quoted in Bartl 13). Like Jelinek’s auto-mutilating striptease, Goetz presents self-injury as an attempt at demythologization—although the exact target of his critique remains somewhat more nebulous:

Das habe ich schon gemacht, wenn mir das böse Leben zu schlimm unter der Haut gebrannt hat, habe ich in sie hineinschneiden müssen und so das Brennen weg gelöscht. Ich schneide in die Haut, Blut quillt hervor, und es macht: Fließ Rinn Zisch Lösch. In mir brennt es nämlich von innen, es brennt vor so viel Lebenbrennen, und außen ist die glatte Haut. Aber *mit meiner Rasierklinge enttarne ich die Lüge* (*S* 72, my emphasis).

For Goetz, then, injury *is* autobiography: the corporeal manifestation of an inner turmoil. This wound is described not as an inscription, but rather, in almost painterly or architectural terms,

as an asignifying overflow—as contours of colors, a sublime curvature (*erhabene Wölbung*) and a cupola of blood (*Blutkuppel*):

Mit ruhiger Hand setze ich die Rasierklinge auf eine beliebige Stelle unversehrter Haut und schneide gut sichtbar und tief in die Epidermis ein. Die so hergestellte Spalte ist für einen Augenblick von hell weißen Wundrändern eingefasst und beginnt dann langsam, vom Wundgrund her, sich mit Blut zu füllen, das spannt dann zwischen den Rändern eine über das Hautniveau *erhabene Wölbung, Blutkuppel*, die dann, sobald die stetig von unten her nach sickernde Flüssigkeit die Oberflächenspannung gesprengt hat, zugleich ausläuft und in sich zusammensackt, schließlich den Blick freigibt auf den jetzt rot glänzenden Spalt und die jetzt rot überfluteten Wundränder. Das frische helle Blut sucht nun, der Schwerkraft gehorchend, seinen Weg nach unten und bildet so *eigensinnige Ornamente* auf der Haut (*S* 72, my emphasis).

This obstinate ornamentation has become its own reality—signifying nothing, it is its own sense and *Sinnbild*, its own self-referential *Eigensinn*. This is the unfortunate heritage of Kafkaan *aestheticism* and the modernist fetish for the suffering artist it betrays: the reference to the autobiographical, the desired recourse to the real and the concomitant literalization of the metaphorical that characterized the earlier author's *Sinnbild der Wunde* have, over the course of the century, been radicalized to the extent that even *an actual cut* has become merely a tautological ornament. What was once intended as the assurance of a deeper *meaning* is now a monument to its absence. With the possibility of signification revoked, such esthetic decoration is the only option. It is a poignant image of the utter hopefulness but also of the very real danger of an esthetics of injury: in the absence of *significance*, all that would remain would be to leave another scar.

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