

**DOUBLE BIND: FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY
IN SELECTED WORKS BY ELFRIEDE
JELINEK AND ANNE DUDEN**

by

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**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my mother, who died on November 21st, 2000; sadly, before this thesis could be completed.

This research project takes as its central focus constructions of female subjectivity in selected texts by the writers Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden. At the time of writing, few full-length studies which engage with this concept in texts by German women writers have been published. A clear preference is still demonstrated within the field of German Studies, either for subjectivity to appear as one theme among a number of others, or for studies to focus on the complete *oeuvre* of an individual female writer.

A theoretical basis to the thesis is provided by readings of psychoanalytic and postmodernist writers. This theoretical element is employed, not as a metanarrative framework, but as a means of exploring the resonances between two areas of textual practice: the theoretical and the literary. In addition, the thesis embodies a 'clinical' dimension which draws on the author's training in, and practice of, counselling, a further area of activity which focusses on the 'self'. As it is still the case that the majority of clients who seek counselling are women, this experience is particularly relevant to the subject of this thesis.

The following summary provides an overview of the structure of the thesis:

(i) The metaphor of the 'double bind' to describe female subjectivity emerged from the experience of reading texts by German women writers, and particularly the work of Elfriede Jelinek. In engaging with the implications of the 'double bind', the following questions have been asked:

- ◆ What is the nature of the 'double bind'?
- ◆ Why does the image of the 'double bind' recur so frequently in relation to female subjectivity?
- ◆ What forms does the 'double bind' take?
- ◆ Which ways out of the 'double bind' might exist?
- ◆ Can the 'double bind' also be viewed positively?

(ii) The negative image of femininity conveyed by the 'double bind' is reflected in postmodernist critiques of the self, and in feminist reactions to those critiques. These

observations give rise to a dialogue in the thesis between theoretical and literary textual practice. In an attempt to find alternative ways of viewing the 'double bind', the thesis explores other related concepts. These include Jacques Derrida's theory of deconstruction, Jane Flax's concept of the 'core self', and D.W. Winnicott's notion of the transitional space.

(iii) Three texts by the writer Elfriede Jelinek - *Die Klavierspielerin*, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* and *Lust* - are analysed in terms of their relationship to the 'double bind'. A dialogue is established between Jelinek's textual practice and the developmental theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

(iv) The thesis acknowledges the deficits of classical psychoanalytical approaches to female subjectivity. A reading of 'feminist corporeal theory' provides the view that these approaches suppress the question of the role of the female body in the construction of subjectivity.

(v) Three texts by the writer Anne Duden are analysed - *Das Judasschaf*, *Übergang* and *Wimpertier*. The work of this writer provides a literary example of an approach to female subjectivity which focusses on corporeal experience.

(vi) In summarising the approaches taken by Jelinek and Duden to the question of female subjectivity, the thesis argues that Elfriede Jelinek's aim in the three texts analysed is to radically deconstruct received notions of femininity, thereby precipitating the reader into a transitional space. Anne Duden, on the other hand, explores the experience of inhabiting the transitional space itself. Both writers exhibit an interest in 'borderline' experiences, a concept which is introduced in the conclusion to the thesis, evoking the shift from the more negative notion of the 'double bind' to the more positive concept of the 'transitional space'. In addition, in the work of both writers the body emerges as a transitional space in its own right

(vii) The thesis concludes that the process of redefinition of the 'double bind' of female subjectivity involves a continual engagement with the 'transitional space', including that provided by the female body. In their refusal to provide any

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alternative to their dystopian visions, the literary texts analysed represent powerful examples of this process of ongoing engagement and deconstruction.

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A copy of the article: Jenny Lanyon, 'The De(con)struction of Female Subjectivity in Elfriede Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*', in *Centre Stage: Contemporary Drama in Austria*, edited and with an introduction by Frank Finlay and Ralf Jeutter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999).

(i) Foreword

This thesis takes as its central focus constructions of female subjectivity in six literary texts published in the 1980s and early 1990s by the German women writers Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden. In addition, the thesis has an extensive theoretical component, comprising approximately one third of its total length, which draws on psychoanalytic, postmodernist and feminist theories. The integration of a substantial theoretical section reflects postmodernist challenges to the artificial boundaries between different disciplines and genres. The thesis, therefore, seeks to adopt the postmodernist stance that no one standpoint can be viewed as a locus from which other standpoints can be explicated; rather, it assumes that all texts, both theoretical and literary, speak their own version of the 'truth'. The postmodernist theories in question began to become influential in the interpretation of women's writing in the period during which the six primary texts were published. In addition, they all address questions of subjectivity and the self, and so are particularly relevant to the interpretation of the six literary texts considered. The thesis employs the theories, not as a metanarrative framework from which to analyse the literary texts, but to establish a dialogue between the two genres. Hence, the theoretical strand functions as a narrative in its own right within the thesis, exhibiting as it does a development from theories of the self which have a largely psychological basis, to those which also incorporate a corporeal framework. The aim of this process of dialogue is to produce a series of resonances between theoretical and literary practice, which do not, however, amount to an artificial synthesis.

When research for this thesis began, a dialogue had been in existence for over a decade between feminist theories of literary criticism and poststructuralist theories. This is exemplified by the interest displayed by feminist academics in the work of poststructuralist theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. However, in the mid-1990s, it was only just becoming possible to speak of a dialogue between feminist and postmodernist theories; this dialogue has increased significantly in the period during which the research has been undertaken. Initially,

the dialogue was concentrated almost exclusively in the Anglo-American world, only entering German-speaking feminist debates in the latter part of the 1990s.¹ This explains the bias towards Anglo-American postmodernist feminist theories in the thesis. In addition, the thesis as a whole is interwoven with a psychoanalytic perspective which is based not merely on theoretical knowledge, but also on the author's experience of clinical training, and later practice as a counsellor. At the outset, it appeared as if the thesis and the clinical work constituted two completely separate areas of experience. This impression was exacerbated by the fact that postmodernism appeared to have made almost no impact on the world of counselling and psychotherapy. This, too, has shifted, with the 'conversation' between psychotherapy and postmodernist theory being first observed within the field of Systemic Therapy in the new therapeutic method entitled 'Narrative Therapy'.² It has since become assimilated into other areas, including those of psychoanalysis and analytical (Jungian) psychology.³

Thus, the blurring of the boundaries between the different perspectives in the thesis, to a greater or lesser extent, reflects a synergy which has taken place in the world outside of this research project during the period in which it has been in preparation. Whereas the academic focus of the thesis is the construction of female selves in the works studied, this is interrogated by a further perspective which analyses the theoretical framework in terms of the experience of work with actual (mainly) female selves. It is important to emphasise that, for reasons of confidentiality, it has not been possible to include any clinical examples in this thesis. Rather, the clinical perspective describes the lived experience of working with some of the theories under discussion, and of observing the effects that they

¹ Gudrun-Axeli Knapp provides a comprehensive overview of postmodernist theories from a feminist and German-speaking perspective. She indicates essential differences between Anglo-American and German feminist responses to postmodernist challenges. Whereas the Anglo-American response is structured by a reaction against dominant discourses of liberal humanism, Knapp argues that the German response is influenced by the Frankfurter Schule, and particularly the work of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, where powerful resonances with postmodernist theories are to be observed. See Gudrun-Axeli Knapp (ed.), *Kurskorrekturen: Feminismus zwischen Kritischer Theorie und Postmoderne* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1998), p. 66.

² See Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: Norton, 1990).

³ See Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); and Christopher Hauke, *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities* (London: Routledge, 2000).

appear to have on the lives of actual female individuals. One of the purposes of this dual perspective is to introduce a 'clinical' cutting edge to the thesis. There seems little purpose in analysing female selves in the abstract, if it has no effect whatsoever on the real lives of women. Accessing counselling or psychotherapy is one of the increasingly popular ways in the present age in which women seek an opportunity to examine their lives, and to consider alternative ways of being. There are also many analogies, as psychoanalytic writers have always emphasised, between literary criticism and the world of psychotherapy, functioning as they do as two areas in which the lived experience of subjectivity can be legitimately explored.

(ii) German Women's Writing from 1970 onwards

The German women's movement provided the initial impetus for an influx of texts by women to enter the literary market from the early 1970s onwards.⁴ The psychotherapeutic strand is evident in the central focus of many of these texts, which, as many critics have argued, has been the search for an autonomous female identity, or subjectivity.⁵ In the earlier stages, the texts attempted to explore female subjectivity by means of autobiographical accounts of women's lives, and their attempts to construct a viable sense of self.⁶ Karin Struck's *Klassenliebe*, for example, documents the struggle by a young woman to situate herself within the discourses of her working-class origins and her newly-acquired academic and middle-class status.⁷ In addition, the heroine, whose life story has close parallels with that of the author, feels alienated from a society which she experiences as materialistic and estranged from nature. In similar fashion, Brigitte Schwaiger's novel, *Wie Kommt das Salz ins Meer?*, describes the process by which a young Austrian woman seeks to liberate herself from the expectations of her parents and

⁴ See Renate Wiggershaus, 'Neue Tendenzen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, in Österreich und in der Schweiz', in Hiltrud Gnüg and Renate Möhrmann (eds.), *Frauen-Literatur-Geschichte: Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), pp. 416-433; Cettina Rapisarda, 'Women's Writing, 1968-1980' and Margaret Littler, 'Women's Writing of the 1980s and 1990s', both in Chris Weedon (ed.), *Postwar Women's Writing in German* (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), pp. 77-100 and 101-129; and Ricarda Schmidt, 'Arbeit an weiblicher Subjektivität: Erzählende Prosa der siebziger und achtziger Jahre', in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, edited by Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 2 vols, II: *19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, (Munich: Beck, 1988), pp. 459-477.

⁵ See Wiggershaus, in Gnüg and Möhrmann (eds.), 1985, p. 427.

⁶ See Wiggershaus, in Gnüg and Möhrmann (eds.), 1985, pp. 420-421.

⁷ Karin Struck, *Klassenliebe* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973).

her social milieu.⁸ The central character's emancipation is crucially connected to her need to leave her loveless and uninspiring marriage. In Elisabeth Plessen's semi-autobiographical novel, *Mitteilung an den Adel*, the rejection of a privileged upbringing, and a complex and tortured relationship with a reactionary father, is the path by which the central character seeks to transform her life.⁹

In these accounts, and the many others which were published in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, the act of writing is seen to contribute to the process of 'writing oneself free' of painful experience. The text is, therefore, frequently organised around a central 'metanoia', by means of which the central character is able to establish a more autonomous existence.¹⁰ This approach to the problem of female subjectivity, however, has been much criticised by critics for what is perceived as its simplistic adoption of the autobiographical form. In his discussion of Struck's *Klassenliebe*, for example, Paul Konrad Kurz identifies a lack of critical distance between the author and her fictional recreation of herself as the central character, with the result that the novel remains enmired in the problematic from which the author is seeking liberation.¹¹ In particular, as Kurz argues, although the novel is dominated by the narrator's romantic yearning for a return to a harmonious union with the natural world, the central figure remains fragmented and unconvincing: 'Karin ist ein halb aufgeklärtes Gretchen. Sie ist in der Tat nicht überlegen, unfähig zu befreiendem Humor und kritischer Distanz. Die pathetische junge Frau steckt mitten drin in ihren Geburtswehen.'¹²

The other agenda of autobiographical texts by women is a desire for change in the position and treatment of women. In considering this aim, Marianne Schuller and Jutta Kolkenbrock-Netz provide an analysis of the origins of the autobiographical genre which, they argue, throws into question its efficacy as a tool of liberation for women:

⁸ Brigitte Schwaiger [1977], *Wie Kommt das Salz ins Meer?* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979).

⁹ Elisabeth Plessen [1976], *Mitteilung an den Adel* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1979).

¹⁰ See Wiggershaus, in Gnüg and Möhrmann (eds.), 1985, p. 428.

¹¹ Paul Konrad Kurz, 'Karin Struck', in Heinz Puknus (ed.), *Neue Literatur der Frauen: Deutschsprachige Autorinnen der Gegenwart*, mit einem einleitenden Essay von Elisabeth Endres (Munich: Beck, 1980), pp. 194-195.

¹² Kurz, in Puknus (ed.), 1980, p. 194.

Nun ist allerdings die Frage zu stellen, ob nicht mit der bloßen Übernahme eines Genrekonzepts, das sich nicht zufällig gerade in Verbindung mit der Konstituierung der bürgerlichen Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert profiliert hat, das Begehren der Frauen nach kultureller Artikulation nur laut wird, um sogleich stillgestellt zu werden, anstatt daß es sich revolutionär, d.h. kultur-und gesellschaftsverändernd freisetzt. Mit anderen Worten: Wenn davon ausgegangen werden kann, daß sich die herrschende kulturelle Ordnung, in der auch die autobiographische Schreibweise ihren legitimen Platz hat, über den Ausschluß der Frauen errichtet hat und sich über den Ausschluß von Frauen reproduziert, stellt auch die noch so »feministische« Auffüllung des vorgegebenen Genremusters eher eine Gefahr für die Radikalität des feministischen Widerstandes dar.¹³

As the quotation suggests, the central difficulty presented by an unreflected use of the autobiographical form is a lack of engagement with the social context which produced the particular version of subjectivity which the text describes. This can result in a suppression of any analysis of the power structures which reproduce particular forms of subjectivity, suggesting that these influences can be overcome by individual will and effort alone. In particular, the quotation argues that the autobiographical form is more appropriate to the self-styling of the middle-class male subject, who has always had access to greater social power and determination than the equivalent female subject. Kolkenbrock-Netz and Schuller, writing in 1982, argue further that the relative ease with which many texts by women have been assimilated into the literary market provides evidence that the autobiographical approach constitutes no radical threat to the status quo, reinforcing as it frequently does stereotypes of female subjectivity.¹⁴ In Struck's *Klassenliebe*, for example, the portrayal of Karin draws on a cultural association of women with nature which is hardly revolutionary. In addition, the novel tends to reinforce the stereotypical view of women as passively suffering in the face of the machinations of the patriarchal world.¹⁵

¹³ Jutta Kolkenbrock-Netz and Marianne Schuller, 'Frau im Spiegel: Zum Verhältnis von autobiographischer Schreibweise und feministischer Praxis', in Irmela von der Lühe (ed.), *Entwürfe von Frauen in der Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Literatur im historischen Prozeß, Neue Folge, 5 (Berlin: Argument-Verlag, 1982), p. 155.

¹⁴ Kolkenbrock-Netz and Schuller, in Irmela von der Lühe (ed.), 1982, pp. 155-156.

¹⁵ 'Daß es auch Sackgassen gibt, soll nicht verschwiegen werden: Bücher, in denen der Rückzug auf die große Mutter Natur, ein intuitives, theorieloses Wissen, die Fixierung aufs Biologische und damit das Auspielen des Körpers gegen den Geist beschworen werden. Derlei führt nur dazu, daß Frauen sich selber entmündigen, indem sie Dinge zum höchsten Maßstab machen, die in der Geschichte immer wieder als Legitimation der Rechte der Stärkeren dienen', Wiggershaus, in Gnüg and Möhrmann (eds.), 1985, p. 418.

Most critics, however, agree that a shift is to be observed towards the end of the 1970s in the approach taken by women writers to questions of subjectivity. This change is marked by texts such as Christa Reinig's *Entmannung*¹⁶ and Jutta Heinrich's *Das Geschlecht der Gedanken*,¹⁷ which eschew the 'metanoia approach' in order to explore the complexities and contradictions of female subjectivity itself. Whereas the earlier texts discussed tend to employ a central female character to embody the messages of the text, the novel *Entmannung* provides an analysis of female subjectivity by means of a spectrum of female characters, who exemplify different aspects of femininity. In addition, and somewhat surprisingly, the central character, 'Herr Professor Doktor Otto Kyra, Playboy und Chirurg', is a man. At the beginning of the novel, this character, known as Kyra, adopts a conventionally patriarchal position *vis-à-vis* women but, as the book's title suggests, he gradually moves to a more feminist position, ironically marked by a symbolic attempt to transform himself into a woman through a prolonged soaking in the bathtub. Heinrich's textual practice in the novel *Das Geschlecht der Gedanken* which is also very reminiscent of Jelinek's narrative technique, conveys a portrait of the distorted subjectivity of a young girl who is forced to witness the apparent passivity of her mother in the face of verbal, physical and sexual assaults by her father. Unable to identify with either of her parents, the central figure takes refuge in fantasies of control and domination, in which she can never be relegated to the powerless position of her mother. These fantasies frequently involve either sexual domination, or place the central character in a position where she can destabilise and weaken patriarchal society. In addition, whereas the earlier texts described sought to convey an impression of transformation and resolution in their narratives, texts such as the two novels described above do not eschew contradiction and dissonance, frequently concluding on a deeply pessimistic note. It is at this point that this thesis begins its analysis, focussing on texts written in the period 1983 to 1995.

¹⁶Christa Reinig [1976], *Entmannung: Die Geschichte Ottos und seiner vier Frauen erzählt von Christa Reinig* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1977).

¹⁷Jutta Heinrich, *Das Geschlecht der Gedanken* (Munich: Frauenoffensive, 1977).

(iii) The Double Bind

The two female writers considered in this thesis, Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden, both take subjectivity as a central focus of the texts considered. Their focus, however, is less on 'metanoia' than on the deconstruction and exposure of patterns of subjectivity which are restrictive, and ultimately, toxic to the female subject. In addition, there is a theme in the work of both of these writers of the impossibility of constructing a viable subjectivity within the cultural possibilities available in the writers' respective environments. This thesis, therefore, takes as its central motif the concept of 'double bind', which is derived from the work of the anthropologist and self-styled 'ethnologist', Geoffrey Bateson.¹⁸ The concept is used by Bateson to explain the aetiology of the mental illness, schizophrenia. According to Bateson this illness is primarily a disorder of communication; that is, a schizophrenic is unable to distinguish between the complex modes of communication employed by human beings. For example, a schizophrenic patient may interpret a metaphor literally, might fail to recognise the humour in a joke, or may misinterpret an innocent comment as implying an aggressive threat.¹⁹ As human communication also frequently involves a playful blending of different levels and styles to convey complex messages, as in the use of irony or sarcasm, for example, the schizophrenic is doubly disadvantaged. The origins of this disorder are embodied in the patient's early childhood experiences in a form of a style of communication between mother and infant which Bateson terms 'the double bind'. The 'double bind' has five main components:²⁰

1. *Two or more persons;*

One of the people in the field delineated by the 'double bind' will be described as the 'victim'. The other person will, according to Bateson, normally be the mother, but she may also be supported in her treatment of the 'victim' by other family members.

¹⁸Geoffrey Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972).

¹⁹Bateson, 1972, pp. 203-206.

²⁰Bateson, 1972, pp. 206-207 (the italics are original to the text).

2. *Repeated experience;*

Bateson emphasises that a double bind structure to the personality develops only after repeated exposure to this pattern of communications.

3. *A primary negative injunction;*

This may take one of two forms: '(a) "Do not do so and so, or I will punish you," or (b) "If you do not do so and so, I will punish you."²¹

4. *A secondary injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level, and like the first enforced by punishments or signals which threaten survival;*

This injunction is communicated to the victim at a more abstract level. It may, for example, involve non-verbal communication, such as gesture or tone of voice. The toxic effect of the secondary injunction inheres in its contradiction of the message conveyed by the primary injunction. As Bateson explains this, it may involve the subtle communication of a message which pleads with the child not to view the other party as punitive, or even, not to obey the primary injunction.

5. *A tertiary negative injunction prohibiting the victim from escaping the field.*

Clearly, as Bateson emphasises, escape is not possible for an infant in any case. Nonetheless, there appears to be another level at work over and above that of physical necessity. The 'double bind' provides enough seductive encouragement to the victim to render leaving the field an emotional impossibility. Finally, Bateson argues that the pattern, once learned, no longer requires the presence of any of the five elements described above, as it becomes structural to the victim's personality and will recur in any situation which resonates with that individual's early experience.

There are significant dangers and problems in drawing analogies between psychiatric disorders and subjectivity, and postmodernism has been rightly criticised for its tendency to romanticise psychosis.²² On the other hand, arguably, postmodernism has also contributed to a blurring of the boundaries between sanity and insanity, which has produced a less pathological view of mental illness. Thus,

²¹ Bateson, 1972, pp. 206.

²² Flax, 1990, pp. 218-219.

Evelyne Keitel, in her analysis of accounts of periods of psychotic breakdown, or 'psychopathographies', as she terms them, argues that these texts enable the reader to gain some experience of a state of which s/he would otherwise have no knowledge. Whilst these experiences are clearly fictional, and cannot be compared with the lived experience of a psychotic patient, they nonetheless make a powerful intervention into the dichotomy sanity/insanity. In particular, as these texts describe a form of severe identity crisis, they resonate with the reader's unconscious feelings of alienation and fears of loss of self.²³ As female subjectivity has been subject to its own identity crisis for more than three decades, these arguments also resonate with the focus of this thesis.

Bateson's concept of the 'double bind' has much to contribute to a discussion of female subjectivity within a Western cultural context. The relationship of the female subject to that culture is one which, in common with Bateson's theory, embodies 'a disorder of communication'. One of the recurrent themes in both the theoretical and the literary sections of this thesis is the lack of access on the part of the female subject to the shared language of her cultural context. As Kristeva argues, the female subject occupies a threshold position in relation to language: she is both excluded from linguistic networks, and obliged to make use of them if she is to engage in any form of communication.²⁴ In addition, the female subject is exposed to complex and contradictory cultural messages regarding her subjectivity, mirroring the 'double bind' situation. This is particularly evident in the difficulty for women in 'escaping the field', a theme which is explored by both Jelinek and Duden, and which has also produced the title of this thesis. The female subject in the texts analysed in this thesis finds herself in a double bind situation when she attempts to circumvent the constraints of her subjectivity. This can result in accusations that the woman in question has adopted an unattractive 'pseudo-masculinity', a view which is reflected in the Freudian theory of the acquisition of gender.²⁵ Alternatively, the female

²³Evelyne Keitel, *Reading Psychosis: Readers, Texts and Psychoanalysis*, translated from the German by Anthea Bell (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 2-3. This text was first published in German as *Psychopathographien* (Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1986). The original German edition is not available at the time of writing. Examples of 'psychopathographies' would include Maria Erlenberger, *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1977), and Caroline Muhr, *Depressionen* [1970] (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979).

²⁴Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 199-200.

²⁵Sigmund Freud [1932], 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), pp. 113-114 and pp. 128-30.

subject may find herself to be the focus of guilt-inducing reminders of her 'duty', reminders which also happen to coincide with stereotypical conceptions of her femininity. These reminders do not have to be explicitly stated, as they have long since been integrated into the psyche of the individual female subject at a structural level, and so are self-perpetuating.²⁶ The anxiety produced by this double bind situation can be overwhelming, and can result in the woman abandoning her attempt to transform her situation. Alternatively, and this is a dominant theme in Jelinek's work, the female subject adopts a course of action which results not only in a failure of her 'escape attempt', but also in an exacerbation of the circumstances which she is attempting to leave. The underlying cause of this failure is a lack of awareness of the complexities of the situation from which the woman is attempting to escape, which tends to result in an unrealistic appraisal of the possibilities available to her.

(iv) Overview²⁷

The first chapter of the thesis provides an introduction to postmodernist cultural theory, focussing particularly on the work of the philosopher Jacques Derrida. It then considers both a critique of postmodernist theory by the feminist theorist Christine Di Stefano, and an attempt by Linda J. Nicholson and Nancy Fraser to create links between the two theoretical fields. Chapter 1 continues to discuss a further aspect of Derridean theory, namely his concept of the 'supplement'. This concept describes an approach which is neither an overturning of existing terms, nor the creation of a new term, but focusses on the hypothetical space between the two possibilities. The thesis as a whole exhibits a particular interest in concepts which describe the intervals or spaces between different bodies of thought. As such, it seeks to employ a notion of interface, or conversation, as a means to the exposure of intervals or gaps in the seemingly unfissured surfaces of familiar concepts. The concept of 'double bind', therefore, acquires a more positive meaning as a term used to describe the experience of inhabiting unfamiliar spaces and tolerating the uncertainty which this

²⁶This theme is explored from the psychoanalytic viewpoint by Margarete Mitscherlich in two books: *Die friedfertige Frau* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987); and *Über die Mühsal der Emanzipation* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1990); see also Rosalind Coward, *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women let Men get their Way* (London: Faber, 1993).

²⁷Please note that Chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis develop and extend work which was completed for the MA dissertation submitted in September 1995.

produces. As Flax argues, the ability to tolerate this uncertainty is a prerequisite to change.

Chapter 1 also provides an overview of the postmodernist critique of conventional concepts of subjectivity. It then examines feminist critiques of that position, and concludes with an analysis of the concept of the 'core self', derived by Jane Flax from the work of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott. This concept allows for a female subjectivity which is constructed around a coherent sense of self, without having recourse to notions of a biological essentialism or transhistorical or transcultural qualities.

The second chapter examines the work of the writer Elfriede Jelinek in context. It then provides an analysis of the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, viewed from a critical Freudian and Lacanian perspective. As the novel itself provides its own critique of Freudian theory, there is no attempt to accord this framework the status of metanarrative. On the other hand, a selective use of Lacanian theory illuminates the apparent purpose of the novel, which exposes the dangers inherent for women in any attempt to articulate their concerns through language, mirroring as it does power structures inherent in society as a whole.

A focus of the third chapter is the only dramatic work to be considered in the thesis: Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*. This play engages explicitly with the discourses of female subjectivity, particularly as they are articulated within Freudian theory. This is enacted by means of a stylised 'battle of the sexes', which culminates in the murder of the two main female characters by their male counterparts. This act of brutality, however, merely renders the two men impotent through the loss of the 'other' onto which they habitually project their unwanted vulnerability and dependency. This chapter also provides an analysis of the controversial novel *Lust* which introduces the language of pornography to the sanctity of the institution of marriage within a Catholic context. In this novel, the sexual act functions as a metaphor for the subjugation of women within a patriarchal social structure. It makes strategic use of obscenity in an attempt to expose a deeper 'obscenity'; namely, the exploitation of the socially disadvantaged by the socially powerful and, particularly, the institutionalised oppression of women by men.

The fourth chapter continues the theoretical exposition, providing an overview of the concept of a 'Corporeal Feminism', as expounded in Elizabeth Grosz's text

Volatile Bodies. This text supplements the theories of female subjectivity already discussed by providing a focus on the significance of the construction of the female body. It concludes with a consideration of Grosz's reading of the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. These theories, according to Grosz, deconstruct the conventional notion of the body as a material framework surrounding an inner, psychical space within which the individual's subjectivity is located. Juxtaposed to this is what Grosz terms 'a Deleuzian problematic of surfaces', which theorises subjectivity as both located in the body, and irrevocably connected and intertwined with the social environment.

Anne Duden's novel *Das Judasschaf* forms the focus of the fifth chapter. This novel documents the increasingly unsuccessful attempts by the central female figure to maintain a coherent sense of self within a culture which she perceives as fundamentally alien. The central stumbling block for the narrator is her perception that her culture is in denial regarding aspects of Germany's recent history. Her particular focus of attention is the Holocaust, although this is extended to her perceptions of brutality and violence in society as a whole. The novel culminates in the central character's surrealistic decision to terminate her existence within her cultural context, and to 'live' within the environment of one of the Renaissance paintings she admires.

Chapter 6 analyses two further works by Duden, both of which consist of collections of short prose texts. The first of these, the text 'Übergang', describes the effect on the narrator of a brutal attack which causes extensive injury to her mouth. It documents the process of hospital admission and subsequent recovery to which she then becomes subject. The attack has the effect of exposing to the narrator the underlying trauma of her adaptation to her culture, producing in her the need to distance herself by means of a self-imposed isolation. The second, and most recently published text *Wimpertier* continues the theme of alienation from the cultural environment; however, the focus on the Holocaust shifts to a more personal, existential dimension which integrates an engagement with the creative process itself. Both of these works incorporate a central focus on the body, and traumatic events are frequently described in terms of a real or imagined assault on the body.

The thesis concludes with a consideration of the underlying theme of borderline or threshold territories. This theme encompasses the crucial theoretical concepts of the

thesis: namely those of the 'interval' or 'supplement', derived from the work of Derrida; the concept of the 'core self', as articulated by Flax; Bateson's theory of the 'double bind'; and Deleuze's notion of the 'Body without Organs'. In addition, it provides a final analysis of the resonances produced in the thesis between the literary texts by Jelinek and Duden, and the theoretical concepts considered.

1.1 Introduction

In its exploration of the complex and contradictory relationships between the modernist, postmodernist and feminist theoretical fields, this chapter attempts to introduce a more positive dimension to the concept of 'double bind' which forms part of the title of this thesis. Female subjectivity, the focus of this thesis, is a product of the Cartesian philosophical tradition. It is, therefore, not possible to examine subjectivity without first considering the philosophical and cultural tradition which produced the versions of female subjectivity out of which women seek to construct a sense of self. It is also necessary, however, to consider the problematic relationship of female subjectivity to this tradition, which tended to view women either in terms of idealised images, or their presumed social and intellectual inferiority to men. This thesis argues that the postmodernist challenge to this tradition, which destabilises both sides of the subject/object dualism, opens up the possibility of new ways of thinking about female subjects. It also acknowledges the paradox that, in loosening accepted patterns of thinking about gender, postmodernist theory also forecloses on other possibilities which are beneficial to women. The 'double bind' created by this paradox, however, as this chapter will attempt to argue, can be viewed as a state of creative tension which can enable new ways of thinking about female subjectivity to emerge. This chapter will, therefore, first examine the postmodernist critique of the Western philosophical tradition. It will then consider reactions by feminist theorists to this challenge, and the complex relationships between feminist theory, modernism and postmodernism. Finally, it will analyse both the postmodernist critique of the concept of subjectivity, and a feminist response to this critique.

1.2 What is meant by *postmodernism*?

The postmodernist theorists who will be considered in this chapter raise epistemological questions; that is, they question the conception of knowledge embodied in the Western philosophical tradition. This tradition, they argue, assumes that understanding of an object of enquiry will be achieved by means of a logical and systematic analysis. If the process of enquiry is carried out correctly, then the object

of enquiry will inevitably deliver up its 'truths', with the result that the enquirer's state of knowledge will be greater than at the outset of the investigation. Postmodernism, on the other hand, casts into doubt the whole question of 'knowing', postulating that any investigation only produces further questions and uncertainties. Within the Western philosophical tradition, predicated as it is on Cartesian dualism, the assumption is also made that any investigation is carried out by a subject, a clearly delineated consciousness, which is separate from the object of enquiry, and which is able to direct its intellectual energies towards that object. The postmodernist critique also calls into question the status of this 'knower', the Cartesian, or Enlightenment, or modernist subject, suggesting that its apparent integrity is an illusion, and that it is irrevocably intertwined with the world of objects over which it seeks to achieve mastery.

Postmodernist theories have been identified as providing the theoretical framework of this thesis. The use of the term 'framework,' though, is something of a misnomer, suggesting as it does an entity which is fixed and tangible. The theories in question, on the other hand, are more reminiscent of an intricate web than of a solid structure or framework. Further, this theoretical field casts doubt on the whole concept of 'theory', thereby also rendering its own utterances provisional and, arguably, suspect. Thus, in attempting to elucidate the meaning of the term 'postmodernist theories', the arguments of postmodernism themselves appear to articulate the impossibility of the project. Jacques Derrida, one of the most prominent of postmodernist theorists indicates, in his concept of *différance*, the inaccessibility of 'true' knowledge. In opposition to the certainties of conventional Western philosophical thought, according to Derrida, meaning connotes absence, rather than presence. Meaning exists only in a relational sense; that is, a concept acquires meaning through its relationship to other concepts from which it differs, and, even then, only temporarily:

The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element" - phoneme or grapheme - being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. This interweaving, this textile, is the *text* produced only

in the transformation of another text. Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.¹

In Derridean terms, there is, therefore, no foundational truth at the centre of an idea, no essence or core to be excavated, and any apparent meaning is merely a temporary, and culturally- and historically-specific, freezing of the fluidity of the linguistic networks. In attempting, therefore, to 'fix' the meaning, or even the *meanings* of postmodernism, the object of enquiry itself will, inevitably, evade this movement of closure.

Nonetheless, some explanation of the use of the term in this thesis must be attempted. If, therefore, postmodernist principles are applied to the challenge of producing their own definition, it emerges that any such definition must be historically and culturally specific. Further, there must be no attempt to express the 'truth' regarding this area of enquiry, only a version of the many possible truths. Similarly, whilst this investigation seeks to implement a form of objectivity, it must at the same time acknowledge that all seemingly objective judgements are inevitably coloured and shaped by the cultural location of their author. This section will, therefore, employ a diachronic lens, focussing on the emergence of postmodernism over a period of several decades. In addition, it will employ a further lens which is both selective and synchronic, illuminating one specific area of postmodernist enquiry: the philosophical branch of postmodernism, as represented by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Finally, this thesis acknowledges that the lenses employed in this section are wielded from a feminist perspective, and one which privileges those aspects of postmodernist theory which articulate concepts of subjectivity. This thesis attempts no synthesis of the postmodernist perspectives to be considered. Rather, it seeks to facilitate the telling of stories, thereby enabling new stories to emerge.

1.3 Postmodernism: an overview

1.3.1 Beginnings

¹ Jacques Derrida [1972], *Positions*, translated and annotated by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 26.

Central to postmodernist thought across a range of disciplines is a challenge to conventional boundaries of knowledge and artistic activity. This challenge is evocatively described by Patricia Waugh as a 'mood',² rather than an organised 'movement', and, as such, its forms are diverse and frequently contradictory.³ A recurrent feature of this 'mood' is its emphasis on the aesthetic, and it is characterised by the spread of aesthetics into areas of experience which would previously have been regarded as both outside of its domain, and beyond its scope.⁴ Significantly, then, most critics are agreed that postmodernism began to emerge in a literary context in 1950s America, where initially *postmodernist* was a pejorative term used to describe a perceived impoverishment following the demise of modernism.⁵ In the 1960s, however, the term began to be used affirmatively by such critics as Leslie Fiedler and Susan Sontag to describe literary forms which challenged conventional critical paradigms and judgements. Thus, Fiedler's essay *Cross the Border, Close the Gap* argues for a blurring of the boundaries between 'high' culture, as represented by high modernism, and popular or mass culture, and an end to the scientific pretensions of literary criticism.⁶ Sontag argued for a move from a surface/depth interpretation of literature to an 'erotics of art', a critical approach which 'reveal[s] the sensuous surface of art without mucking about in it.'⁷ These diverse approaches to literary expression are linked by their conviction that, to quote Jane Flax, 'a "shape of life" is growing old'.⁸ Their heroic challenge to conventional modes of artistic expression reveals a desire to redraw the consensual map, producing a new and dynamic network of thought patterns.

In the 1970s postmodernism diversified from its literary beginnings into other spheres of artistic and cultural activity, of which the postmodernist movement in architecture is perhaps the best known, and also the most frequently derided,

² Patricia Waugh, *Postmodernism: A Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), p. 4.

³ Waugh, 1992, p. 3.

⁴ In her introduction, Waugh defines postmodernism in the following terms: 'I have regarded Postmodernism as a theoretical and representational "mood", developing over the last twenty years and characterised by an extension of what had previously been purely *aesthetic* concerns into the demesne of what Kant had called the spheres of the "cognitive" or scientific and the "practical" or moral' (Waugh, 1992, p. 1).

⁵ See Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited by Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 237, and Waugh, 1992, p. 1.

⁶ Leslie Fiedler, *Cross the Border-Close the Gap* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972).

⁷ Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation', in Waugh, 1992, p. 55.

⁸ Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 5.

example. Expressing a growing disillusionment with the functional grandeur of modernism, postmodern architecture, as expounded by Charles Jencks, initiated a 'reintroduction of multivalent symbolic dimensions [...], a mixing of codes, an appropriation of local vernaculars and regional traditions.'⁹ Echoing Fiedler's exhortation to 'cross the border, close the gap', then, postmodern architecture eschews modernist purity, adopting a conscious eclecticism which freely selects elements from both the present and the past. This 'schizophrenia', the attempt to determine a form of expression which is both nostalgic and contemporary, as Huyssen suggests, could be deemed to be paradigmatic for postmodern culture as a whole.¹⁰ In a way which is reminiscent of the two faces of the Roman god, Janus, postmodernism seeks to look forward and backwards simultaneously, thereby demonstrating the impossibility of existence in the present. The image of Janus also evokes metaphorically Derrida's challenge to the Western 'metaphysics of presence', and his assertion that all meaning is both temporary and fictive.¹¹

1.3.2 The widening debate

In the 1970s postmodernism migrated to Europe, where literary theory expanded within the context of French poststructuralism to form part of wider cultural, philosophical and political debates in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The beginnings of these debates were marked by the publication of Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979, a work which takes the form of a sustained attack on Enlightenment epistemology, the target of all later postmodernist critiques.¹² Lyotard proclaims the demise of the overarching 'narratives of legitimation' central to Western philosophical thought, particularly those of Kant, Hegel and Marx, which postulate a teleological movement towards a state of enlightenment, truth and justice. This desire for measurable progress, and for wholeness, as Lyotard famously declares, has spawned its exact opposite: acts of brutality of which the enlightened optimism of the Western world had never dreamt:

⁹ Huyssen [1984], in Nicholson, 1990, p. 240.

¹⁰ Huyssen [1984], in Nicholson, 1990, p. 240.

¹¹ Toril Moi [1985], *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 107.

¹² Jean-François Lyotard [1979], *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester University Press, 1984).

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return of terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name.¹³

Terror, according to Lyotard's analysis, is a direct result of, rather than an unfortunate aberration from, adherence to the metanarrative. It is an expression of the frustration produced by the constraints of the metanarrative, and its tendency to exclude marginal voices in favour of the promotion of the mainstream. Lyotard, thus, calls for a move away from transcendence to immanence, from homogeneity to heterogeneity and from univocity to plurivocity.

In the retreat from the metanarrative, Lyotard postulates a form of legitimation which is 'plural, local and immanent'.¹⁴ Thus, each cause would generate its own set of ethical guidelines and principles which might diverge markedly from those of other causes. Justice would be defined as an acceptance of the irreducible differences between causes, and the impossibility of creating a system of ethics which can encompass all situations. As Zima summarises Lyotard's arguments:

Ausgehend von der bekannten Prämisse, die ihn mit Foucault und Deleuze verbindet, daß »der Rekurs auf die großen Erzählungen (...) ausgeschlossen« ist, stellt er die nicht unplausible These auf, daß Konflikte zwischen kollidierenden Gruppeninteressen und Gruppensprachen nicht im Rahmen eines übergreifenden, umfassenden Metadiskurses geschlichtet werden können, weil sie inkommensurabel sind. In dieser Situation zeichnen sich aus Lyotards Sicht nur zwei Möglichkeiten ab: Entweder wird die Unvereinbarkeit der Gruppensprachen (und Interessen) dadurch negiert, daß eine oder mehrere Sprachen dem Machtanspruch einer übergeordneten Sprache subsumiert werden, oder aber die Inkommensurabilität der Sprachen wird anerkannt und bewahrt. Im ersten Fall geschieht ein *Unrecht* (*tort*, Lyotard), im zweiten Fall wird die *Paralogie* als sprachliche Inkommensurabilität praktiziert und eine Art Gerechtigkeit hergestellt.¹⁵

¹³Jean-François Lyotard, 'Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?', in Waugh, 1992, p. 125.

¹⁴Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism', in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 23.

¹⁵Peter V. Zima, *Moderne/Postmoderne: Gesellschaft, Philosophie, Literatur* (Tübingen: Francke, 1997), p. 137.

Zima's reading of Lyotard emphasises the linguistic focus of his thesis. Each cause is characterised by its particular set of discursive conventions; conflict results when discursive pluralism is suppressed in favour of the retention of a hegemonic discourse. Lyotard's solution, therefore, is a rejection of any notion of a discursive hierarchy: no one discourse may claim the right to contain or displace another. The result of this approach would be the liberation of those marginal voices which have been repressed in favour of dominant discourses. These aspects of the theories of Lyotard have crucial implications for both the theoretical and literary sections of this thesis. A central concern for the feminist theorists considered is to enable the expression of female voices which have been excluded. Similarly, the work of Jelinek and Duden also attempts the exposure of difference and dissonance by means of an engagement with language. Nonetheless, the suggestion of a collapse into unmitigated plurivocity also raises concerns for a feminist critique of subjectivity, as the later sections of this chapter will seek to demonstrate.

1.3.3 Jacques Derrida's critique of the Western philosophical tradition

Lyotard's attempted exposure of the overarching metanarrative as a dangerous *Wunschtraum* is expanded in the work of Jacques Derrida to encompass a critique of the Western philosophical tradition in its entirety. Derrida provides a critique of the history of Western thought, which he terms 'logocentric', or as embodying a 'metaphysics of presence'.¹⁶ In his use of this terminology Derrida refers to the philosophical tendency to view the world in terms of essences; to claim to perceive an underlying pattern, meaning or goal embedded within a concept, whether this is attributed to God, or defined as a 'universal' truth concealed at the heart of the idea.¹⁷ This belief in 'presence', in cores or essences, can be traced back as least as far as the 'Cogito', to which Derrida's terminology clearly refers. However, as Grosz¹⁸ argues, this tradition is far older than Cartesianism, and is also evident in ancient Greece, particularly in Plato's conception of matter as a perverted form of the Idea. Thus, in Platonic terms, according to Grosz, the transcendent mind is

¹⁶Susan J. Hekman., *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 22.

¹⁷See Moi, [1985], 1988, p. 106.

¹⁸Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 5.

theorised as imprisoned in the inferior and constricting body, echoing Derrida's view of Western philosophy as revolving around the notion of 'centres'.

Logocentrism is characterised by its binary structure.¹⁹ Derrida identifies a system of binary pairs which is integral to the metaphysics of presence, in which one pair in the term is viewed as superior to the second.²⁰ The obvious example is Descartes' assertion of the superiority of mind over body; however, the crucial pair for Derrida is the opposition between speech and writing. The logocentric tradition, as the term implies, prioritises the spoken over the written word, the latter being viewed as a delayed and perverted form of pure and unmediated logos.²¹ Derrida does not, however, merely privilege writing over speech, but also argues that speech has never in fact existed: even the spoken word is already a text, a form of writing, and the human subject uses language, text, to converse with him-/herself.²² Thus, Derrida's appropriation of writing exceeds the possibilities of a simple reversal. By removing the concept of writing from the field of binary oppositions, he has carried out a displacement of the structure, liberating the subversive potential of the concept.²³ A binary opposition, therefore, cannot be overcome merely by inverting it and according the previously denigrated concept equal, or even superior, status (although this is still a useful technique); a more powerful process is needed, a process which Derrida terms 'deconstruction', or the 'undoing of logocentrism'.²⁴

Deconstruction employs the strategies of reversal and intervention in order to undo binary thinking. It does not presuppose any centre or core to its object of study; rather, it involves analysing a text in such a way that its historical, cultural, political and social contexts are exposed and clarified. By reversing oppositions and displacing them, deconstruction represents an intervention into the structure of the opposition which both weakens it, and opens it to alternative interpretations.²⁵ Derrida, however, denies that deconstruction is a negative or destructive process, striving as it does to emphasise the constitutive components of a text and, on this basis, to produce an interpretation of that text.²⁶ The interpretation is specific to that

¹⁹Hekman, 1990, p. 22.

²⁰Derrida [1972], 1987, p. 41.

²¹See Moi, [1985], 1988, p. 107.

²²Hekman, 1990, p. 23.

²³Derrida [1972], 1987, pp. 41-42.

²⁴Hekman, 1990, p. 23.

²⁵Hekman, 1990, p. 24.

²⁶Hekman, 1990, pp. 163-164.

reader's interaction with the text, which, in turn, is located in a particular historical context.²⁷ Thus, deconstruction always involves the creation of new elements, rather than an annulment of that which is already in existence. The concept can only be viewed as destructive in the sense that it removes the possibility of identifying a single, 'true' meaning in a text. On the other hand, by opening the text to a variety of meanings, all of which (within certain limits) can be said to be 'true' it enhances and expands the relevance of the text. Derrida's deconstruction therefore attempts to avoid the construction of new theories and certainties which, he believes, mimic the philosophical tradition which they attempt to unravel. Thus, in Derridean terms, there is no escape from the Enlightenment tradition, rather, the aim is to deconstruct it from inside, to understand its labyrinthine structure, and, by so doing, to weaken and displace it.²⁸

Crucial to the process of deconstruction is the concept of *différance*, spelt with an 'a' to distinguish it from the usual French spelling. *Différance*, as Susan Hekman explains, encompasses both the English concept of deferral and that of difference.²⁹ The concept is notoriously difficult to define because it itself refers to the impossibility of definition. *Différance* implies not the kernel of meaning at the heart of a concept whose existence is presumed by logocentrism, but precisely that which is not there. As Hekman describes this:

One way of attempting to understand what Derrida means by this concept is to define it as that which always escapes, is deferred in the attempt to define absolute knowledge as presence. Derrida states that, despite the claims of phenomenology, the "thing itself" always escapes.³⁰

Meaning, therefore, is as fragile as a hollow eggshell: its existence is predicated only on what a concept is not, rather than what it presumes to *be*. This is in sharp contradistinction to the 'pregnant' quality of the Enlightenment view of meaning, which postulates a centre to every concept. As Weedon argues, Derrida's concept exemplifies the shift from structuralism to poststructuralism. Whereas structuralism assumed that the linkage of signifier to signified was permanent, although also

²⁷Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 164-165.

²⁸Derrida (1972), 1987, pp. 35-36.

²⁹Hekman, 1990, p. 24.

³⁰ Hekman, 1990, p. 25. Hekman refers to Derrida's *Speech and Phenomena*, translated by David Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

emphasising the randomness of the connection, poststructuralism posits no ending to the process of linkage, rupture, re-linkage which constitutes meaning. All 'meaning', that is the connection of signifier and signified, is temporary, and is crucially linked to context.³¹

Derrida's theories of logocentrism and deconstruction offer an approach to the undoing of the philosophical framework which has created the constraints within which women seek to construct a sense of self in Western culture. The apparent certainty of the dominant philosophical tradition is revealed by Derrida to be a *legerdemain*, an illusion of solidity constructed around a non-existent centre. The assertion of feminist theorists that dominant assumptions about women are unjust, and in need of radical redefinition, are thus amplified by the insight that these same assumptions have no basis other than the desire to embody and conceal power structures which privilege men. The notion that women possess a different 'nature' to men, that they embody particular qualities to which men do not have access, is exposed as pure metaphysics. On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, Derrida's work has been viewed with suspicion by feminist theorists precisely because of its rejection of the Enlightenment tradition. The following section examines the case against postmodernism, viewed from the feminist perspective, and an attempt by two feminist theorists to negotiate the modernism/postmodernism interface in order to produce a theory of a postmodern feminism. An attempted 'rehabilitation' of Derrida then follows, whose work, this thesis argues, can be viewed as particularly relevant to an analysis of female subjectivity within a literary context.

1.4 Postmodernism and Feminism

It is significant that feminist theorists, with the exception of a small group of female writers and theorists in France, made a relatively late entrance into the postmodernist debate, from the late 1980s onwards. The major studies considered in this chapter emanate from the Anglo-American world, and were all published in the 1990s. In the German-speaking world, a dialogue between feminism and postmodernism in the form of full-length studies is not to be observed until the late 1990s. Huyssen,

³¹Weedon, 1987, pp. 23-5.

however, writing as early as 1984, situates the Women's Movement firmly within the 'problematic of "otherness" which has asserted itself in the socio-political sphere as much as in the cultural sphere',³² and he queries the apparent lack of interest on the part of feminist theorists in the postmodernist debate:

It is somewhat baffling that feminist criticism has so far largely stayed away from the postmodernism debate which is considered not to be pertinent to feminist concerns. The fact that to date only male critics have addressed the problem of modernity/postmodernity, however, does not mean that it does not concern women. I would argue [...] that women's art, literature and criticism are an important part of the postmodern culture of the 1970s and 1980s and indeed a measure of the vitality and energy of that culture.³³

Hekman, who describes herself as writing from a postmodernist feminist perspective, identifies 'an uneasy relationship between postmodernists and feminists', referring to the mutual distrust which characterises the interface between the two theoretical fields.³⁴ This, she argues, inheres in the hybrid heritage of the feminist movement which, while allied to postmodernism by its challenge to Enlightenment epistemology, is also rooted in the liberal humanism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a central target for postmodernist critiques.³⁵ These arguments are echoed in a further account of the relationship between postmodernism and feminism: the collection of essays entitled *Feminism/Postmodernism*, edited and introduced by Linda J. Nicholson. This text seeks to address the absence of women from postmodernist theorising, and to assess the relevance of postmodernism for feminism. In the chapter 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Postmodernism and Feminism', Nicholson and Fraser argue that there are significant similarities between the feminist project and that of postmodernism. In its critique of the Western cultural tradition, and in common with postmodernist theory, feminism aims to expose invisible assumptions, thereby revealing the gendered basis of thought in an attempt to construct a theory of the exclusion of women from the epistemological framework of Western culture. On the other hand, where postmodernist theory proceeds from a philosophical perspective to social criticism,

³²Huyssen [1984], in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 269.

³³Huyssen [1984], in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, pp. 250-251.

³⁴Hekman, 1990, p. 2.

³⁵Hekman, 1990, p. 2.

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feminist theory is empirical, and it is crucially connected with a politics.³⁶ As a result, they argue, postmodernist theory can appear to feminists to be politically naive, and to lack a gendered perspective.

A particularly comprehensive summary of the feminist suspicion regarding postmodernist theory is provided by Christine Di Stefano in her analysis of feminist responses to the challenges of postmodernism:

The feminist case against postmodernism would seem to consist of several related claims. First, that postmodernism expresses the claims and needs of a constituency (white, privileged men of the industrialised West) that has already had an Enlightenment for itself and that is now ready and willing to subject that legacy to critical scrutiny. Secondly, that the objects of postmodernism's various deconstructive efforts have been the creations of a similarly specific and partial constituency (beginning with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle). Third, that mainstream postmodernist theory (Derrida, Lyotard, Rorty, Foucault) has been remarkably blind and insensitive to questions of gender in its own purportedly politicised rereadings of history, politics and culture. Finally, that the postmodernist project, if seriously adopted by feminists, would make any semblance of a feminist politics impossible. To the extent that feminist politics is bound up with a specific constituency or subject, namely, women, the postmodernist prohibition against subject-centered inquiry and theory undermines the legitimacy of a broad-based organized movement dedicated to articulating and implementing the goals of such a constituency.³⁷

The 'feminist case against postmodernism', then, as articulated by Di Stefano, argues that postmodernism's arrogant abandonment of the concept of Enlightenment is unacceptable to women, who deem themselves to have been excluded from its aims. It is only possible for those who have been constructed by the Enlightenment tradition, that is, male subjects, and who have already enjoyed its benefits for the last two hundred years, to distance themselves from that same tradition in the way that has been effected by Derrida *et al.* Di Stefano indicates a central concern for feminist theorists: namely, that the relative absence of female voices within the Enlightenment tradition renders the relationship of women to that tradition complex and contradictory. Women can neither embrace, nor reject the Enlightenment, and Di Stefano's arguments suggest that feminism has first to pass through its own process of Enlightenment to ensure that women are, at the very least, able to access

³⁶Nicholson and Fraser, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, pp. 19-20.

³⁷Di Stefano, Christine, 'Dilemmas of Difference', in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, pp. 75-76.

the minimum level of human rights accorded to men within that tradition. Only when that point has been reached can feminists risk deconstructing that tradition. On the other hand, Di Stefano does not consider the extent to which women have also participated in, and colluded with, the Enlightenment discourse which refused to accord them full subjecthood. Similarly, the question also has to be posed whether a tradition which excluded women from subjecthood can be adopted retrospectively in any way which would benefit them. It is therefore necessary to consider whether it is possible to separate the Enlightenment from its misogynist elements, or whether by espousing that discourse, albeit critically, this implies a tacit acceptance of its assumptions regarding the status of women.

Di Stefano argues further that the postmodernist critique of the Platonic and, by extension, the Western philosophical tradition in philosophy, is based on a highly selective interpretation of cultural history.³⁸ It is also a critique which, to a large extent, ignores the crucial importance of concepts of gender in the shaping of Western culture, thereby repeating the omission of the very tradition from which it seeks to distance itself. Di Stefano identifies correctly a striking absence of reference by postmodernist theorists to feminist concerns, or even to women as a group at all. Feminism as a politics is crucially concerned with gender, and the implications of constructions of gender for the ways in which human subjects live out their lives. The blind spot which is to be observed on the part of postmodernist theorists to the female perspective is, therefore, all the more striking in the light of their radical critique of the dominant cultural and philosophical tradition which also disregards female voices. Feminist postmodernist theorists, therefore, attempt to analyse both the reasons for the exclusion of a female perspective from the main body of postmodernist theories, and the implications of its inclusion for the destabilisation of dominant thought paradigms which oppress women.

Di Stefano also argues that the postmodernist deconstruction of the subject destroys the central tenet of feminism: namely, that women are an identifiable, if highly diverse group, and that they are, in different ways, oppressed within the framework of a patriarchal society. The suggestion that all categories are dispensable is deeply threatening to a set of theories which also informs a politics. The impulse behind feminism is that there is a group of individuals who are 'women', who are

³⁸See also Flax, 1990, pp. 192-193.

therefore oppressed (in different ways in different cultures and social classes), and that it is necessary to organise and campaign on their behalf. If, however, postmodernism is taken to its logical conclusion, there is no longer any justification or need for the global category of feminism. The needs of particular groups of women will be dealt with against the framework of a local campaign or organisation, and this may or may not be limited to the problems of those of female gender, depending on the issue in question. Unless certain universal assumptions can be made, though, feminism as a politics ceases to exist, swept away on a tide of *différance*.

1.5 A Postmodern Feminism?

An approach to feminist theorising which inserts itself into a postmodernist framework, whilst also retaining a degree of autonomy, is suggested by Fraser and Nicholson.³⁹ They address a number of the concerns raised by Di Stefano with regard to postmodernist theory, producing a convincing argument for the inclusion of its insights into feminist theory. Whereas Di Stefano focusses on the differences between the two areas of thought, Fraser and Nicholson look for common ground. As they point out, while their starting-points are very different, feminism and postmodernism are united by their suspicion towards universal values and essentialism. They both provide a critique of the Enlightenment philosophical tradition, albeit in different ways, and with different aims. In addition, both feminists and postmodernists seek to establish forms of social criticism which no longer depend on conventional philosophical frameworks.⁴⁰ Whereas postmodernist theorists, though, focus on a deconstruction of philosophy, feminist theorising seeks to produce concrete and verifiable change in women's lives through providing insights into the nature of their oppression(s), and suggesting ways in which this may be overcome. As a result, feminist theories are grounded through their anchoring to specific issues and social phenomena, and, as they have grown out of, and are informed by, a political practice, in a sense, they already employ a legitimation which is 'plural, local, and immanent', to use Lyotard's phrase.

³⁹Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, pp. 19-38.

⁴⁰Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 19.

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Nonetheless, Nicholson and Fraser also identify significant lacunae in feminist theory; namely, a lack of postmodernist sensitivity towards the creation of large, ahistorical theories. Although since 1980 a movement away from the production of grand social theory is to be observed among feminist theorists, nonetheless, they argue, the 'quasi-metanarrative'⁴¹ is still to be observed, particularly in discussions of gender identity. Representative of this tendency is Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, a study of women's moral discourse.⁴² In this feminist classic, Gilligan, according to Fraser and Nicholson, rightly criticises the tendency to judge women's moral sense by the same criteria as those used to judge men, but relapses into essentialism by attempting to construct a counter-model representing a 'female' ethical approach.⁴³ Thus, traces of essentialism are observable within feminist theory even as it attempts to free itself from its constraints through attention to the cultural and historical specificity of women's experience.

Feminism, then, according to Fraser and Nicholson, is guilty of not questioning its own assumptions and subjecting them to a process of critical distancing, such as that articulated by Judith Butler with regard to the whole notion of binary gender.⁴⁴ Similarly, feminist theory is permeated by a lack of attention to questions of 'social, historical and cultural specificity'.⁴⁵ This blind spot in feminist theorising is illuminated when it is viewed through the lens of postmodernist theory. On the other hand, whilst acknowledging Lyotard's critique of the 'metanarratives' of the Enlightenment tradition, Fraser and Nicholson are not willing to discard them altogether, calling instead for the use of temporary over-arching narratives which are culturally and historically specific. With echoes of Foucauldian theory, Fraser and Nicholson suggest that where large, ahistorical categories are used, these should take the form of genealogies; that is, they should be situated within a historical perspective which is both diachronic and synchronic, and the cultural context should be rendered explicit. The tendency, then, would be away from totalising accounts of female history and gender identity towards plural conceptions of these categories.

⁴¹Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 24.

⁴²Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁴³Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁴Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 147. Butler argues that the use of the term 'women' to describe a diverse group serves to perpetuate the social structures from which 'women' seek to liberate themselves.

⁴⁵Weedon, 1987, p. 136.

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Gender might be one of a number of elements considered in relation to a particular area of experience. The theory that Fraser and Nicholson suggest would:

[...] tailor its methods and categories to the specific task at hand, using multiple categories when appropriate and forswearing the metaphysical comfort of a single feminist method or feminist epistemology. In short, this theory would look more like a tapestry composed of threads of many different hues than one woven in a single color.⁴⁶

This form of theory would be judged by its usefulness for political practice and would foster the creation of alliances among women, rather than assuming a false unity at the expense of the suppression of women's diverse needs and experiences; it would describe the practice of 'feminisms', rather than feminist practice.⁴⁷ In this sense, Nicholson and Fraser provide a solution to the concerns evinced by Di Stefano.

Nonetheless, the suggestion that feminism can occupy a position which spans both camps is also a problematic one: modernity and postmodernism are not complementary points of view. Whereas modernity views the world from within a safe framework of transcendent values, and from the fixed point of a stable, unitary self, postmodernism postulates a world in which there is no ultimate meaning, and the human subject is in a constant state of flux. The question is whether, having revealed the instability of modernity, which affirmed its presence through the denial of those aspects which did not fit in with its world-view, that this new awareness can be put away when it suits. Whereas Fraser and Nicholson attempt to provide a corrective to the omissions of postmodernist theory, this thesis also argues that the work of Derrida could function as a counterbalance to the difficulties generated by the 'in-between' approach to the feminism/modernism/postmodernism problematic. Derrida's work has been criticised for its abstraction and lack of apparent relevance for any political programme. Hekman, however, attempts a defence of Derridean theory in the chapter entitled 'The Possibilities of a Postmodern Feminism'.⁴⁸ She cites Derrida's own refutation of the suggestion that deconstruction is a neutral activity, or a practice of negation. Derrida, according to Hekman's account, defines deconstruction as a practice which strikes at the roots of the metaphysics of presence

⁴⁶Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 35.

⁴⁷Fraser and Nicholson, in Nicholson (ed.), 1990, p. 35.

⁴⁸Hekman, 1990, pp. 152-190.

by attempting to overturn logocentric thinking.⁴⁹ Further, according to Hekman, in his reference to a 'field of non-discursive forces', Derrida recognises that, 'the epistemological polarities of logocentric thought are reflected in non-discursive formations, that is, social structure'.⁵⁰ Thus, Hekman argues, Derrida's work is not reducible to a set of purely linguistic theories, rather it presupposes close links between linguistic and social reality and is therefore a 'practico-political' approach.⁵¹

This connection is crucial to an examination of female subjectivity, as:

Since the beginning of western thought the opposition between masculine and feminine has informed all of the polarities of western epistemology and defined the disprivileging of women. What Derrida sees very clearly is that we must deconstruct these polarities if that epistemology is to be overturned.⁵²

Deconstruction is defined by Derrida as a process which involves an intervention into the field of binary oppositions. The exact form of this intervention, however, is hard to quantify, and Hekman therefore turns to the text *'Positions'*⁵³ to further explore this question. Rejecting both the strategy of simple inversion of binary oppositions, and the constitution of a third term which consists of a synthesis of the binary terms, Derrida, she argues, posits: 'an approach that marks an interval between these two approaches'.⁵⁴ This 'interval' is also termed a 'supplement', but it does not, Derrida insists, imply the existence of a third term, an ontological category which would be opposed to the aims of deconstruction.⁵⁵ The 'supplement' breaks through binary logic without ever re-forming as an entity in its own right.⁵⁶ The binary oppositions which structure Western thought are further revealed by Derrida not to be oppositions at all, rather they are, 'confused elements that inhabit each other'.⁵⁷ Rather than attempting to straddle modernist and postmodernist thought, then, Derrida's theory represents a dynamic engagement with the interval between the two fields.

⁴⁹Hekman, 1990, p. 164.

⁵⁰Hekman, 1990, p. 164.

⁵¹Hekman, 1990, p. 164.

⁵²Hekman, 1990, p. 164.

⁵³Derrida [1972], 1987.

⁵⁴Hekman, 1990, p. 171.

⁵⁵Hekman, 1990, p. 171.

⁵⁶Hekman, 1990, p. 171.

⁵⁷Hekman, 1990, p. 171.

This aspect of Derrida's theory is particularly relevant to the texts of the two authors to be considered in this thesis, and its relevance to any analysis of female subjectivity is also clear. The feminist suspicion of Derrida's work has already been discussed in this chapter; it is therefore also significant that Derrida himself has made critical comments about the status of feminism. However, as Hekman argues, it is not feminism *per se* to which Derrida objects, but a particular form of feminism which seeks to achieve the liberation of women by means of overturning the binarism which constructs women as the social inferiors of men.⁵⁸ Derrida, in fact, in common with other French theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray, sees a radical potential in the concept 'woman' which exceeds its status as the inferior component of a binary opposition. 'Woman' is aligned with 'writing' as a force which opposes the certainties of logocentric thinking, and Derrida perceives in the feminine 'qualities of multiplicity and ambiguity'.⁵⁹ On the other hand, by ascribing what could be described as quasi-transcendental status to the already overdetermined concept 'woman', other problems are generated, a difficulty which is also examined in Chapter 4, with reference to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Nonetheless, the work of Derrida supplements to the arguments of Fraser and Nicholson a linguistic sensitivity which is central to the consideration of female subjectivity as it is approached in the six literary texts analysed in this thesis.

In a sense, then, postmodernism itself suggests the solution to the dilemmas outlined in these conclusions, arguing as it does for the acceptance of contradiction and dissonance, and the avoidance of contrived syntheses. Thus, feminist theories can be viewed conjointly as located within the Enlightenment tradition, as radically distinct from that same tradition, and as occupying a position between postmodernism and modernity. This multiple perspective provides both for a radical examination of questions of knowledge and subjectivity, and simultaneously of the tools employed to interrogate those same objects. This approach, which is analogous to Derrida's concepts of the 'interval' and the 'supplement' is brilliantly summarised by Flax:

Hence I would argue, despite an understandable attraction to the (apparently) logical, orderly world of the Enlightenment, feminist theory more properly belongs in the terrain of postmodern philosophy.

⁵⁸ Hekman, 1990, p. 170.

⁵⁹ Hekman, 1990, p. 167.

Feminist notions of self, knowledge and truth are too contradictory to those of the Enlightenment to be contained within its categories. The way(s) to feminist future(s) cannot lie in reviving or appropriating Enlightenment concepts of the person or knowledge. Our lives and alliances belong with those who seek to decenter the world further - although [...] feminists and psychoanalysts ought to be suspicious of their motives and visions as well. Feminist theorists, like other postmodernists, should encourage us to tolerate, invite, and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity, as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these may be. If we do our work well, "reality" will appear even more unstable, complex, and disorderly than it does now. In this sense perhaps Freud was right when he declared that women are the enemies of civilisation.⁶⁰

In her assertion that the female subject can find no place of refuge from the omnipresence of 'ambivalence, ambiguity and multiplicity' other than the acceptance of a reality which is 'even more unstable, complex and disorderly' than it appears at present, Flax evokes a classical 'double bind' situation. However, as she argues, there is no alternative for the twenty-first century subject other than to tolerate existence within the set of relationships created by 'double bind'. There is also a convergence between the concept of the 'double bind' and Derrida's notion of the 'interval' or 'supplement', which also involves the toleration of a position between two equally unacceptable alternatives. These concepts will be explored in depth in the following sections of this chapter, which take the work of Flax as a central focus. In addition, both of the writers to be considered in this thesis, Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden, can be analysed in terms of their relationship to the question of the 'double bind', the interval or the supplement.

1.6 The postmodernist critique of subjectivity

Postmodernist conceptions of subjectivity are linked by a critical stance *vis-à-vis* the Cartesian view of the human subject, derived from Descartes' famous statement, '*cogito ergo sum*'. Descartes postulated that the 'fact' of his consciousness represented proof of his existence. He also claimed to derive proof of the existence of God from his own mind, believing that, as a mere mortal could not give rise to

⁶⁰ Flax, 1990, p. 183. In the final sentence of the quotation, Flax refers to an English translation of Freud's *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur : Civilisation and its Discontents* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), pp. 50-51.

such transcendence, the idea of an infinite being could only have been placed there by God himself.⁶¹ The mind is, therefore, imprinted with the mark of its divine creator and, as such, its propositions are deemed by Descartes to be trustworthy, assuming that the thought processes which have produced them have pursued a rational and logical path. The view that the individual consciousness is a reliable source of knowledge about the world is contested within postmodernist thought, as the analysis of the work of Derrida in the earlier part of this chapter sought to demonstrate. Further, as Waugh argues, the status of this 'individual consciousness' itself is called into question:

Postmodernism situates itself epistemologically at the point where the epistemic subject characterised in terms of historical experience, interiority, and consciousness has given way to the 'decentred' subject identified through the public, impersonal signifying practices of other similarly 'decentred' subjects.⁶²

The Cartesian subject is governed by a conscious mind, which is viewed as separate and distinct from its body. The mind, in contradistinction to the body, is believed to convey accurate information about the subject's environment. Similarly, the subject is conceived as possessing a clear boundary between self and Other. In contrast to the stable, fully present, knowing subject of the 'Cogito', the postmodernist subject, according to Waugh's description, is theorised as diffuse, continually in process, and constituted out of social, rather than personal meanings.

The genealogy of the origins of the postmodernist critique of the subject is complex. Foucault suggests that, when Nietzsche announced the death of God, he was by extension also proclaiming the death of Man, viewed as a spark of his divine creator.⁶³ James E. Giles views Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* as the 'the locus classicus of the critique of the traditional view of the self',⁶⁴ whereas Connie Zweig locates this in the sixth century B.C., arguing that: 'Siddharta Gautama the Buddha

⁶¹*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, edited by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 190.

⁶²Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 7.

⁶³Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*. Selected essays and interviews, edited and with an introduction by Donald F. Bouchard, translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 121.

⁶⁴James E Giles, 'The Story of the Self: The Self of the Story', in *Religion and Intellectual Life*, 4.1, (Fall 1986), 105-112.

(This article can be referred to at: http://www.iona.edu/academic/arts_sci/orgs/Giles.htm).

may have been the first deconstructionist'.⁶⁵ For Zweig there is a resonance between the Buddha's rejection of the concept of the Self, or 'Atman', in favour of the state of no-Self which is the goal of spiritual growth, and the postmodernist rejection of the Cartesian self.⁶⁶ There is no doubt, though, that the postmodernist conception of the self is indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis, which undermined the hubris of the Cartesian subject, suggesting that human actions are dictated by unconscious processes to at least the same extent as they are guided by conscious thoughts.⁶⁷ However, while Freud, arguably, remains wedded to his Enlightenment heritage, postulating a teleology of the subject in the form of a 'cure' once unconscious material has been transformed through analysis into conscious thoughts, postmodernism produces a subject which is decentred, socially-constructed, constantly in flux, and without teleology. In addition, most critics, as Hekman argues, attribute central importance to the work of Heidegger.⁶⁸ The concept of a detached and autonomous subjectivity, according to Heidegger, provides the illusion of a transhistorical vantage point from which the human subject can direct events. This concept, termed *Sein* by Heidegger, is replaced in his work by the notion of *Dasein*, according to which the human subject is viewed as embedded in the world, and as historically determined.⁶⁹ This conception of the self, as Hekman argues, provides the link between Derrida's attack on Western metaphysics, and the psychoanalytically-inspired critiques of the Cartesian subject:

The Cartesian's subject's search for truth entails both an ontology and a metaphysics: an ontology of truth and a metaphysics of subjects and objects. Thus, as both Heidegger and Derrida make clear, the critique of the subject is not only epistemological but is also a critique of metaphysics.⁷⁰

The Cartesian subject, then, assumes both that the concept of 'truth' exists, and that it can be revealed through systematic analysis, and also that there is a clear boundary between him/herself and the rest of the world. Thus, no critique of knowledge is

⁶⁵Connie Zweig, 'The Death of the Self in a Postmodern World', in *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader*, edited by Walter Truett Anderson (London: Fontana, 1996), pp. 141-146.

⁶⁶Zweig, in Truett Anderson (ed.), 1996, p. 142.

⁶⁷Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-3.

⁶⁸Hekman, 1990, p. 64.

⁶⁹*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, pp. 346-347.

⁷⁰Hekman, 1990, p. 64.

possible unless the status of the 'knower' is also called into question, and, similarly, the subject cannot be analysed without also interrogating the object of its presumed knowing.

The postmodern subject, on the other hand, is viewed as a product of its environment, with which it remains inextricably intertwined. The notion of the socially-constructed subject is taken to a particularly radical conclusion in the work of the philosopher Michel Foucault in his suggestion that the subject is not merely a container for discursive material, but that it is itself a product, rather than the author, of those discourses. The subject is, therefore, effaced in Foucault's theory in an attempt to foreground the power interests which have produced him/her:

[...] We should ask: under what conditions and through what forms can an entity like the subject appear in the order of discourse; what position does it occupy; what functions does it exhibit; and what rules does it follow in each type of discourse? In short, the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.⁷¹

The above quotation provides the view that the self is primarily a function of language, rather than the representation of the essence of an individual. As Hekman argues, Foucault's central target in this controversial viewpoint is the presumed autonomy of the Enlightenment subject. He identifies a correlation between the rise of the subject within Enlightenment thought, and that same subject's 'subjection' within that tradition. This is associated particularly in Foucault's work with the subject's contradictory status as both subject and object of investigation within the human sciences. He discerns an increasing shift away from the explicit rules for conduct which were a feature of social life in pre-Enlightenment society, to an internalisation of mores which produces in the subject the illusion that he is the originator of the principles by which he guides his conduct. The subject is, therefore, a 'spoken', rather than a speaking subject. At the same time, though, the subject's illusory sense of autonomy guarantees the reproduction of the power relations embodied in the discourses by which s/he is constituted.⁷² This apparently passive conception of the subject has been criticised by feminist theorists. McNay, for example, argues that, in his earlier work, Foucault appears to theorise subjectivity as

⁷¹Foucault, 1977, p. 138.

⁷²Foucault [1976], 1990, pp. 20-21.

a form of social inscription applied to an unresisting and unsuspecting body.⁷³ On the other hand, Hekman's reading of Foucault stresses that the subject, whilst socially constructed, 'is also an "agonism" a "permanent provocation" to the knowledge/power nexus that defines subjectivity'.⁷⁴ This more optimistic reading provides an alternative conception of the Foucauldian subject as a docile body, postulating a more dynamic, but nonetheless socially-constructed, subject, within whom passivity and agency are held in a relationship of creative tension.

1.7 Thinking Fragments:⁷⁵ A postmodernist feminist approach to female subjectivity

The postmodernist conception of subjectivity, whilst opening up new terrain to feminist enquiry, is also problematic for feminist projects, which are predicated on the necessity of female agency. Feminism is characterised by a desire on the part of women to analyse conventional forms of female subjectivity, and to develop new and autonomous modes of identity. There are many examples, both literary and non-literary, of this phenomenon, and, in fact, much German women's writing of the 1970s and 1980s can be subsumed under this heading.⁷⁶ This search is motivated by a sense that women lack an autonomous subjectivity, that the forms of subjectivity which are available to them have been imposed on them by a society organised in favour of patriarchal interests. Further, with postmodernist hindsight, it is questionable whether, within a Cartesian framework, women have any access to subjecthood; as Schmidt summarises this problem, 'Das Subjektsein des Mannes steht nicht grundsätzlich in Frage. Für die Frau jedoch gilt es zu allererst zu entdecken, daß ein weibliches Subjekt noch gar nicht existiert.'⁷⁷ Postmodernism's

⁷³Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 47.

⁷⁴Hekman, 1992, p. 73.

⁷⁵Flax, 1990.

⁷⁶For a comprehensive survey of this period see Ricarda Schmidt, 'Arbeit an weiblicher Subjektivität: Erzählende Prosa der siebziger und achtziger Jahre', in *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen*, edited by Gisela Brinker-Gabler, 2 vols, II: *19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Beck, 1988), pp. 459-477. See also the introduction to this thesis.

⁷⁷Schmidt, in Brinker-Gabler (ed.), 1988, p. 460.

cavalier urge to *deconstruct* the subject, then, is unlikely to find favour with feminist theorists, inasmuch as it runs counter to the feminist drive towards the *construction* of an autonomous female subjectivity.⁷⁸

Jane Flax, in her book *Thinking Fragments* deals specifically with the implications of postmodernist theory for a feminist concern with gender. Flax analyses the significance of, and the relationship between, three strands in contemporary thought, the strands which, she believes, best represent the mood of the time: postmodernist thought, feminist theory and psychoanalytic theory. As she argues, it is largely a result of feminist theorising that gender has been highlighted as an issue that can be discussed in its own right.⁷⁹ Feminist writing claims to reveal that the thought paradigms on which contemporary Western society is based are gendered. Gender systems are crucially related to power relations in society and, therefore, a concern with injustice, and the desire to amend this, is unthinkable without an analysis of the role of gender in the constitution of those relations. Similarly, feminist theory asserts, the construction of the self takes place within a gendered context. An ungendered self is an impossibility within the Western cultural context. Gender is a crucial element in the Western subject's sense of self, whether that involves an identity which conforms to conventional gender patterns, or takes the form of a clearly oppositional stance to gender norms.⁸⁰

Feminist theory, Flax contends, is characterised by its complex and contradictory forms. These forms fall into two broad groups, the first of which is closely allied to Enlightenment ideals of truth, justice and freedom, and the second of which is to be located within the postmodernist critique of that position.⁸¹ Allying herself with the postmodernist position, the notion that feminist theory has a greater claim to represent the 'truth' than any other theory is rejected by Flax; feminist theorists are inevitably affected and shaped by the gender structures which they criticise, and this will be observable in their writing.⁸² The notion of a 'feminist standpoint', to take this argument a step further, is rejected by Flax as foundationalist in its orientation. The assertion of a perspective which is specific to feminism is reductive, obscuring as it

⁷⁸See also Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 6.

⁷⁹Flax, 1990, pp. 135-183.

⁸⁰Flax, 1990, p. 138.

⁸¹Flax, 1990, p. 140.

⁸²Flax, 1990, pp. 139-140.

does other differences which are not necessarily gender-related, such as race or class. It also makes the assumption that the oppressed retain a voice which is untainted and unshaped by their oppression: that they are still able to, or possess a greater ability than others, to speak the 'truth'.⁸³ The implication of Flax's stance is that feminist theories will no longer be able to assume the status of classics, as early feminist writings did, and their premises will inevitably produce as many contradictions as insights for feminist practice. However, Flax argues, the gaps and omissions, flaws and inconsistencies are as important, or even, more important for feminism than firm conclusions. It is particularly crucial, she emphasises, to avoid the temptation towards narrative closure which is characteristic of Enlightenment discourse, and which has the effect of silencing dissonance. Any theory will be 'not good enough', but this very insufficiency is a more fruitful basis for feminist theory and practice than the grand and universalising gestures of Enlightenment discourses.⁸⁴

1.8 Feminism and the postmodernist critique of the subject

Unlike Nicholson and Fraser, who advocate a location for feminist postmodernism between the 'logical orderly world of the Enlightenment'⁸⁵ on the one hand, and the fluidity and arbitrariness of the postmodernist world on the other, Flax locates feminism firmly within postmodernist terrain. This assertion is based both on an assessment of the history of feminist thought from 1970 onwards, which provides a radical critique of the Enlightenment view of the 'self, knowledge and truth',⁸⁶ and also on the future shape of feminist theorising. The weaknesses and omissions identified by Flax in the body of feminist theories, she argues, repeat and enact the contradictions inherent in female identity in Western culture. Thus, feminist theory is riven by contradictory views of autonomy, of motherhood and of the 'nature' of 'woman'.⁸⁷ The desire to establish an 'authentic' female identity has resulted in a tendency towards premature closure of concepts, rather than a willingness to expose

⁸³ Flax, 1990, pp. 140-141.

⁸⁴ Flax, 1990, pp. 142-143.

⁸⁵ Flax, 1990, p. 183.

⁸⁶ Flax, 1990, p. 183.

⁸⁷ Flax, 1990, p. 180.

and explore dissonance.⁸⁸ As these weaknesses can be elucidated using postmodernist theories as a set of analytical tools, the same tools can be used to provide checks and balances in future theoretical writing. In particular, feminist theorists need to be aware that they write from within the social relations which they are analysing, and that they are inevitably influenced and affected by their social location.⁸⁹

Nonetheless, Flax, in her final chapter, provides an uncompromising exposé of the blind spots of postmodernist theory which, to some extent, contradicts her assertion that feminism is to be subsumed within this category. Flax echoes Di Stefano in her identification of the 'selective' view of cultural history provided by postmodernist theorists, which assumes that the 'history of the West *is* the history of reason and philosophy'.⁹⁰ Thus, at the same time as Lyotard *et al* condemn the over-reliance of the Enlightenment tradition on philosophy, they repeat that same error in their own analysis by reducing the materiality of history to a consideration of philosophical trends. Flax provides an interesting analysis of this process; she conjectures, thinking psychotherapeutically, that those philosophers who have taken on the task of destabilising the Western philosophical tradition, thereby displacing themselves from their former position of importance, enact an unconscious retaliation through their insistence on the textuality of the world. This, Flax argues is a means of bringing a defiant world, which has escaped the dictates of philosophy, back under its control; a world which is constructed out of texts can easily be ruled by philosophers and cultural critics.⁹¹ Similarly, although exercised to enable the voices of 'others' to be heard, postmodernism produces its own practices of exclusion and repression.⁹² The most obvious example of this is the relative disregard of female voices and perspectives within postmodernist theory, prior to the late 1980s. If the precepts of postmodernism are applied to its own practice, then this omission must be viewed as significant. Postmodernist theories celebrate the 'Other' and, to quote Derrida, denounce the 'violent hierarchy' of metaphysics, whose concern is always to reestablish the 'hierarchy of dual oppositions'.⁹³ However, in the work of both Lacan

⁸⁸ Flax, 1990, p. 179.

⁸⁹ Flax, 1990. pp. 182-183.

⁹⁰ Flax, 1990. p. 192.

⁹¹ Flax, 1990, pp. 190-191

⁹² Flax, 1990, p. 191.

⁹³ Derrida [1972], 1987, p. 42.

and Derrida, the Other is also equated with women, who are accorded metaphorical status on the grounds of their exclusion from culture, or the 'Symbolic Order'. Flax suggests that postmodernists, even as they celebrate the destabilising power of the 'Other', are also terrified by its disruptive potential.⁹⁴

Flax also identifies what she perceives to be a further misconception in the postmodernist view of subjectivity, which includes Foucault's view of the self as constructed in and through discourse. Postmodernism, she argues, juxtaposes a false unitary and essentialist self to a totally decentred, textually constructed self, offering no alternatives to this binary vision.⁹⁵ Flax on the other hand, on the basis of her reading of psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of D.W. Winnicott, and her practice of psychotherapy, introduces a third conception of the self: the 'core self'. The core self is not an essentialist or unitary self. It allows for what Andrew Samuels terms 'the plural psyche', and it is culturally, historically and socially specific.⁹⁶ On the other hand, this view of the self emphasises the importance of early infant experience, and the development within the infant of healthy internal 'objects', thereby honouring the pre-Oedipal phase of life, and the earliest experiences of human beings which, in most cases, are still in close connection with a woman. A core self, then, implies that an individual has gained some unifying principle to their concept of self, which accompanies them through the vicissitudes of life. Similarly, the core self implies a sense of 'deep subjectivity', a sense of self which is not merely a conglomeration of 'fragments of words and stories that are woven around the silent core of our existence',⁹⁷ but contains some sense of that person's unique way of being in the world. While it is crucial to give attention to the social construction of subjectivity, it is also reductive to suggest that a human being, male or female, can be reduced to this formula.

According to Flax's analysis, if postmodernist theory is to be viewed from the psychotherapeutic viewpoint, the space in which its critique is to be located is that which Winnicott terms 'the transitional space'.⁹⁸ This space is entered by the healthy infant once it has begun to acquire a sense of its identity as separate from that of its

⁹⁴ Flax, 1990, p. 191.

⁹⁵ Flax, 1990, p. 210.

⁹⁶ Andrew Samuels, *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁹⁷ Gordon Lynch, 'Counselling and the dislocation of representation and reality', in *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 26, No. 4, (1998), 525-531.

⁹⁸ Flax, 1990, p. 219.

mother. It functions as location in which, through play, the infant can experiment with notions of togetherness and separateness until it is ready to assume an autonomous identity. It is also, by extension, the space in which all creative activity takes place.⁹⁹ However, as Flax points out, to enter the transitional space necessitates at least some sense of a core self, otherwise those attempts can result in the unbounded extreme of psychosis. By analogy, women have yet to achieve a sense of a 'core self' and therefore risk 'psychosis' when they enter the transitional space. At the same time, this space is indispensable to them if they are to undo restrictive notions of female subjectivity. Flax acknowledges that her notion of a core self is paradoxical, as it 'cannot fully exist in contemporary culture'.¹⁰⁰ However, by engaging with the paradoxes inherent in this concept, women are propelled into an outsider position in which they are able to, 'take up existence as agents who can aggressively confront civilization and its discontents'.¹⁰¹

1.9 Conclusions

The conceptions of the self articulated by postmodernist theorists represent a diverse and contradictory body of knowledge. Nonetheless, theorists such as Foucault, Derrida and Lacan are united in their view of the self as decentred; that is, the self is organised round no centre or essence, and it is to be viewed as a process, rather than as a fixed and clearly delimited entity. In addition, the self embodies no transcendence; it is constructed out of the discourses in circulation within the society within which it originates. This view of the self has powerful liberating potential for a feminist consideration of female subjectivity. It deconstructs the notion of an essential, biologically determined female self, thereby opening up female subjectivity to the possibility of change. It also acknowledges the social content of subjectivity, a point which feminists have argued from the beginning of the Women's Movement. Feminist critiques further supplement postmodernist theorising by emphasising the gendered nature of the Enlightenment view of the self. The feminist critiques of postmodernist theory considered in this chapter take as their focus the

⁹⁹D.W. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 95-103. Also, 'The Place where we Live', in the same collection of texts, pp. 104-110.

¹⁰⁰Flax, 1990, p. 220.

¹⁰¹Flax, 1990, p. 220.

subject/object dichotomy deemed to be intrinsic to the Western philosophical tradition. Postmodernists seek to deconstruct this binary opposition, which they view as fictive, raising questions both as to the identity of this presumed 'subject', and his presumed object of knowledge, the world about him. Women also criticise this binarism, identifying its gendered quality: the subject of knowledge is judged by feminists to be unequivocally male, and 'woman' is among the objects over which he seeks to have mastery by means of his 'understanding'. This dichotomy, then, denies women the possibility of full subjecthood, with the result that women who attempt to convert their status as object into that of 'knower' are attacked by patriarchal 'subjects' who are unwilling to relinquish their epistemological power.

On the other hand, the postmodernist deconstruction of the Enlightenment view of the self is as problematic for feminism as its predecessor, and must therefore be treated with appropriate caution. In this respect, Flax's arguments provide an important critique of postmodernist theories of subjectivity. Flax argues for a distinction between the notions of a 'unitary' or 'essentialist' self, and that of a 'core self', demonstrating that postmodernism recognises only the two extremes of the rigidity of the Enlightenment self on the one hand, or the total fluidity of the decentred self on the other. The radically decentred, postmodernist self offers little hope to feminists, whose concern is to redress the cultural imbalance which has resulted in female subjectivity being defined as a lack of 'maleness': female 'absence' is juxtaposed to male 'presence'. A reification and idealisation of the very lack which has produced female oppression is, therefore, not attractive to a feminist redefinition of female subjectivity.

Derived from the work of D.W. Winnicott, Flax's concept of the core self acknowledges the need for a firm and resilient theorisation of female subjectivity. These 'core selves' would be resilient, yet constantly evolving, both bounded and fluid, autonomous, yet also cognisant of the importance of relationship in the construction of subjectivity. This version of female subjectivity would acknowledge the function of discourse in the construction of the self, and yet it would avoid a total subsumption of the self into discourse, rejecting Foucault's notion of the subject as a product of discourse. It would, therefore, retain the idea of authorship, the self as the author of discourses, whilst at the same time recognising that the level of authorship to which a subject can aspire is circumscribed by its social, cultural and historical

context. Crucially, in the context of this thesis, which examines subjectivity through the medium of women's writing, it would acknowledge that each self, although socially produced, possesses an inner world, a deep subjectivity, which is unique to itself.¹⁰² Finally, it would exercise suspicion regarding any theories which seek to deconstruct the self as a concept. As Flax concludes, it is surely not without significance that the urge to deconstruct the self has emanated from male theorists, who, as Di Stefano points out, have had access to full subjectivity since the Enlightenment. She therefore questions the purpose for feminism in colluding in the act of de(con)struction.¹⁰³ Whilst remaining open and receptive to the potential of postmodernist theories, according to Flax, it behoves feminists to remain suspicious and alert to omissions in those theories which reproduce aspects of the Enlightenment tradition which they seek to deconstruct. This position is effectively summarised by Waugh with reference to women's writing:

The 'subject', whether masculine or feminine, clearly *is* historically determined and discursively situated, but human will, subversive desire, and the consolidation of human connectedness can still exist as effective forces of political change. Simply to deconstruct the subject is not enough for many contemporary women - particularly feminist writers, for in itself this will not magically produce a collectivist or utopian society. What such a process *can* do is to reveal the inauthenticity of the goal of 'personal unity', expose the contradictions of the liberal definition of subjectivity (particularly as they operate to oppress women), and thus act as a starting-point for the alternative projection of a society founded on a dispersed but rational rather than individualist understanding and construction of the subject.¹⁰⁴

Flax is particularly concerned to use the insights gained in psychotherapy as a corrective to the excesses of postmodernist theories of the self. This thesis acknowledges this view, believing that the therapeutic encounter provides a testing ground for theories of subjectivity: if a theory fails to make any sense in terms of the subjectivity of actual individuals, then its status as a viable theory has to be questioned. The particular focus of this thesis is literary explorations of female subjectivity, and, more specifically, German women's writing as exemplified by the works of Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden. The history of German women's writing in the last thirty years, arguably, can be viewed as an investigation of, and an

¹⁰²Flax, 1990, pp. 219-220.

¹⁰³Flax, 1990, pp. 219-221.

¹⁰⁴Waugh, 1989, p. 210.

attempted reconstruction of, female subjectivity. Literature provides a particularly fertile ground for the exploration of subjectivity, and, unlike the therapeutic situation, its products are readily accessible. It is, therefore, not surprising that the political aims of feminism have been accompanied by an exponential growth in the numbers of women writers publishing in Germany, and a correspondingly enthusiastic reception from female readers. The aim of this study is not to use the theoretical tools considered as a means of revealing the 'truths' contained within the literary works. Nor is it to assert the superiority of creative writing when juxtaposed to the 'inferior' genre of theory. Rather, it views the theoretical and literary texts considered as two different forms of exploration of female subjectivity, both of which have equal validity.

The psychotherapeutic method which unites the two strands of this thesis, the literary and the theoretical, is the recent development of 'Narrative Therapy', the first therapeutic approach to describe itself in explicitly postmodernist terms.¹⁰⁵ This approach views the client's material as a narrative which has run into difficulties, and the task of therapy is that of 'reauthoring' to produce a story which is closer to the client's aims and aspirations.¹⁰⁶ Narrative Therapy recognises that the postmodernist world has become 'destoried', and that the effects of this have been both liberating and disorientating for marginalised Others.¹⁰⁷ Within this theoretical orientation, the client's experience of their childhood is viewed as a historical narrative which is (usually) no longer appropriate to their present circumstances. The decision to consult a therapist is regarded as a 'wake-up call', representing the client's desire to rewrite this narrative in more adult and autonomous terms.

If the Enlightenment can be regarded as the 'family story' of female (and male) subjectivity, then both feminist and postmodernist theories represent the 'wake-up call'.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, any attempt to re-author this outmoded story requires a thorough engagement with the originary narrative before editing and rewriting can be considered. Thus, the approach suggested by postmodernist feminist theorists, which attempts to utilise the strengths of both the modernist and postmodernist

¹⁰⁵ The first text to expound this new theoretical approach was: Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: Norton, 1990).

¹⁰⁶ Alan Parry and Robert E. Doan, *Story Re-Visions: Narrative Therapy in the Postmodern World* (New York: The Guildford Press, 1994), pp. 42-43.

¹⁰⁷ 'Doing Narrative Therapy in a Destoried World', in Parry and Doan, 1994, pp. 12-43.

¹⁰⁸ Parry and Doan, 1994, p. 44.

schools of thought, is an appropriate one. It is only by engaging with the complexities and contradictions of female subjectivity that new core female selves can begin to emerge. A particularly relevant summary of the uses of 'narrative therapy' to a feminist reauthoring of female subjectivity is provided by Parry and Doan:

Such techniques will enable a person to establish the basis for a story revision - based no longer on reactions over which she/he feels little control or even responsibility, but upon immediate choices and improvisations. No one ever fully becomes the author of her/his own story; any such assumption can only lead back into the illusions of control, individual autonomy, isolated selfhood, and single truth. The person goes forth instead to join with others in the universal human action of multiple authorship.¹⁰⁹

This definition of the process of story re-visioning reflects both the desire of women to create a solid and autonomous sense of self, and the awareness of 'the subject as constructed through *relationship*'.¹¹⁰ It also recognises the limitations of authorship: the self, male or female, is always a social self, and any notion of separateness or individuality is illusory. The story of each individual, therefore, interlocks with those of others to form a huge network of intertwined stories, and similarly, each individual story, whilst expressing the unique inner world of that subject, will also embody fragments of the narratives of countless other subjects.

1.10 Double Bind

An earlier section of this chapter argued that the concept of 'double bind' acquires a new, and more positive, meaning when it is viewed as a state of creative tension between two polarities. The polarities do not represent complementary opposites, neither does the space between them represent a synthesis of opposing perspectives. Rather, it is an experimental space in which new ideas and theories can be generated. In this sense, the concept of 'double bind', viewed positively, becomes analogous to Winnicott's notion of the transitional space. On the other hand, the transitional space, viewed through the lens of the 'double bind', becomes a more dangerous and negative concept than that implied by Winnicott. As Flax points out,

¹⁰⁹Parry and Doan, 1992, p. 43.

¹¹⁰Waugh, 1989, p. 13.

the danger becomes more acute for those who have restricted access to subjecthood, in this case female subjects. Nonetheless, as Flax argues, the contradictions and threats inherent in the transitional space need to be tolerated if women are to have access to new possibilities for female subjectivity. Inevitably, the experience of this space, which is also reminiscent of the psychoanalytic concept of the unconscious, can be both bleak and negative. It involves relinquishing, at least temporarily, reassuring certainties, and an abandonment to the state of 'not-knowing', an experience all the more threatening to those who have never been accorded status of 'knower'. It is also necessary to avoid the temptation to produce alternative certainties to replace those which have been abandoned: every new theory generated will take up its position in the network of polarities, and will spawn further gaps and fissures, or transitional spaces.

The psychoanalytic concept of the 'double bind' which has been augmented by Derrida's theory of the 'interval' or 'supplement', and Winnicott's notion of the 'transitional space' has a particular relevance to the works of both Elfriede Jelinek and Anne Duden, the two writers to be considered in the following chapters. Jelinek, as the next two chapters will seek to demonstrate, engages directly with the dualisms which structure Western philosophical thought. The textual practice of this writer operates on and through both sides of a binary opposition, according neither privileged status. Her deconstructive aims are effected through language, and her focus is the everyday discourses which act as carriers for particular power interests. While her personal statements make clear that her sympathies are feminist, in her work she is as merciless in her deconstruction of the discourses pertaining to women as she is of those which structure male subjectivity. Jelinek's deconstruction of dualistic thinking generates a particularly pessimistic and empty transitional space, in which no suggestion of an alternative vision can be discerned. Anne Duden's work, on the other hand, whilst also concerned with the deconstruction of dualistic thinking, takes a more classically psychoanalytical form, in that she seeks to stage a 'Wiederkehr des Verdrängten' to the cultural consciousness. Further, whereas Jelinek's writing practice focuses on the elements which comprise a dualism, Duden's textual practice is to be located within the transitional space itself, in her

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exploration of 'Zwischenräume' and 'Übergangsbereich[e]'.¹¹¹ The vision of this writer, whilst eschewing the sarcastic and contemptuous tone of Jelinek's textual practice, is suffused by the feelings of terror induced by her exploration of the transitional space, as juxtaposed to an equally unacceptable alternative: to remain trapped within an alien identity.

¹¹¹Anne Duden and Sigrid Weigel, 'Schrei und Körper - Zum Verhältnis von Bildern und Schrift. Ein Gespräch über *Das Judasschaf*', in Thomas Koebner (ed.), *Laokoon und kein Ende: Der Wettstreit der Künste* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1989), 121 and 134.

2.1 Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek

Elfriede Jelinek was born in Styria in 1946. She describes her heritage as a typically Viennese mixture: her father was a Czechoslovakian Jew, while her mother originated from an Austrian Catholic background.¹ Jelinek grew up in Vienna where, from early childhood, she was educated with a musical career in mind. Jelinek studied both music at the Wiener Konservatorium and Theatre Studies and History of Art at the University of Vienna. Her father, who is described by Jelinek as having been completely overshadowed by her mother, became mentally ill during her childhood and had to be committed to a mental institution, where he later died. Jelinek herself was not free of signs of emotional disturbance during childhood, and her mother at one point believed that she suffered from an autistic disorder known as Asperger's Syndrome. As a result, Jelinek was referred to a psychiatric clinic run by Asperger himself in Vienna, an experience which she describes as deeply traumatising: 'Mich da hinzuschicken war schon ein Verbrechen von meiner Mutter, und das kann ich ihr auch nicht verzeihen. Statt mich in die Gesellschaft von Gleichaltrigen zu schicken, bin ich in die Gesellschaft von schwergestörten Neurotikern und Psychopathen geraten.'² In addition, Jelinek experienced the symptoms of her father's mental illness, which caused him to withdraw frequently from the family, as extremely distressing. These difficulties culminated in a complete nervous breakdown when Jelinek reached the age of eighteen.³ As a result, she has experienced a great deal of psychiatric and psychoanalytic treatment, which appears to have resulted in both a certain fascination with, and a revulsion for psychoanalysis.⁴

From 1969 onwards Jelinek became involved in the student movement and began to experiment with writing. Since this time, her *oeuvre* has grown to comprise poetry, prose texts, radio plays, plays for the theatre and essays. She has received

¹ See Elfriede Jelinek, Jutta Heinrich, Adolf-Ernst Meyer, *Sturm und Zwang: Schreiben als Geschlechterkampf* (Hamburg: Klein, 1995), p. 14; and Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality: An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), p. 1.

² Jelinek, Heinrich, Meyer, 1994, p. 7.

³ Ulrike Haß, 'Elfriede Jelinek', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed), *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* - KLG, 59. Nachlieferung (1998), p. 1. Also available on Elfriede Jelinek's website, which can be consulted at:

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/elfriede/index.htm>.

⁴ Jelinek, Heinrich, Meyer, 1994, p. 7.

numerous literary prizes, the most prestigious of which is the Georg Büchner-Preis, the highest literary accolade in Germany, which she was awarded in 1998. A well-known Marxist, from 1974 to 1991 Jelinek was a member of the the KPÖ, the Austrian communist party.⁵ She is an overtly political writer, as Marlies Janz emphasises, arguing that Jelinek's Marxist and anti-fascist views are frequently suppressed in analyses of her work.⁶ Allyson Fiddler describes Jelinek's work as falling into three distinct phases.⁷ The first of these is that represented by works published before 1975, which 'display a much more experimental style and employ avant-garde techniques.' After this time, according to Fiddler, Jelinek embraced a more conventional narrative style, of which the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, the focus of this chapter, is the most obvious example. In the mid 1980s a return to a more avant-garde approach is to be observed, as evidenced by the novel *Lust*, which is analysed in the third chapter of this thesis. Jelinek has written a significant number of plays for radio and theatre, and Chapter 3 also takes as its focus the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, first performed in 1987. In Jelinek's work as a whole, and particularly in the period in question - the 1980s - two main themes can be viewed as dominant. The first of these is female (and, by extension, male) subjectivity, and this thesis focusses on texts which represent this strand. The second engages with the author's 'Heimat', and involves a deconstruction of the sociocultural, political and historical discourses which structure the country's self-image. The second strand in the 1980s is represented, among others, by such works as the prose text *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr*,⁸ and the plays *Burgtheater* and *Clara S.*⁹

2.2 Theoretical introduction

The theoretical framework to the analysis of three works by Jelinek has been drawn mainly from the theories of Freud and Lacan. The aspects of Freudian theory which are relevant to this and the following chapter are those which relate to the

⁵ These biographical details are available from Elfriede Jelinek's website.

⁶ Marlies Janz, *Elfriede Jelinek* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), Vorbemerkung, p. VIII.

⁷ Fiddler, 1994, pp. 7-8.

⁸ Elfriede Jelinek, *Oh Wildnis, oh Schutz vor ihr* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1985).

⁹ Elfriede Jelinek, *Burgtheater* and *Clara S. Musikalische Tragödie*, both in *Theaterstücke*, ed. by Ute Nyssen [1984], (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992).

acquisition of gendered identity in infancy and early childhood. The chief mechanism by which this process takes place, according to Freud, is what he terms 'der Ödipuskomplex'. This theory is elaborated in the essay 'Das Ich und das Über-Ich (Ichideal)'.¹⁰ In this essay Freud argues that a triangular configuration of relationships, consisting of the child and his or her parents, develops between the ages of approximately two and five years of age, replacing the dyadic bond between mother and child which exists in early infancy. Within the framework of the Oedipus complex, and against a background of intensified genital desires, the child becomes aware of its father as a rival for the affections of the mother.¹¹ The child is forced to recognise that it is not central to mother's life, as it had hitherto believed. According to the gender of the child, s/he takes up a position *vis-à-vis* his or her parents which sets a pattern for the remainder of childhood, and which underlies all the relationships which that individual will make in later life. Freud's insistence on the bisexuality of the human subject is also crucial to an understanding of his theory of the Oedipus complex and its role in determining gender and sexual orientation.¹²

The path through the Oedipus complex outlined by Freud is not identical for male and female infants. For a boy successful resolution of the complex requires him to renounce the close bond with his mother which obtained in early infancy. This is replaced by an intensification of his identification with his father. Termed normal development by Freud, this outcome is brought about by the mechanisms of the 'Kastrationskomplex'. The male infant has an unconscious fear that his father will castrate him if he tries to gain sexual access to his mother's body, and so he gives up his Oedipal wishes in favour of the promise of one day inheriting both his father's masculine status, and a love-object who will not be his mother, but may resemble her.¹³ Thus, through the 'shattering' of his Oedipus complex, as Freud describes it, the boy has his own masculinity reinforced and fixed.¹⁴ The schematic nature of this account is recognised by Freud, and he stresses that it is rarely negotiated in this relatively straightforward manner. It is more usually the case that the boy undergoes

¹⁰Sigmund Freud, 'Das Ich und das Über-Ich (Ichideal)', in *Das Ich und das Es: Metapsychologische Schriften* [1923], with an introduction by Alex Holder (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992), pp. 267-277.

¹¹Freud [1923], 1992, pp. 270-271.

¹²Freud [1923], 1992, pp. 270.

¹³Sigmund Freud [1932], 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), pp. 126-127.

¹⁴Freud [1923], 1992, pp. 271.

what Freud terms 'der vollständigere Komplex', which has both positive and negative elements:

[..] d.h. der Knabe hat nicht nur eine ambivalente Einstellung zum Vater und eine zärtliche Objektwahl für die Mutter, sondern er benimmt sich auch gleichzeitig wie ein Mädchen, er zeigt die zärtliche feminine Einstellung zum Vater und die ihr entsprechende eifersüchtig - feindselige gegen die Mutter.¹⁵

Freud attributes this ambivalence in the resolution of the boy's Oedipus complex to the child's fundamental bisexuality. The conflict between the positive and negative manifestations of the complex remain in the personality in the form of a 'precipitate' which gives rise to the Über-Ich or Ichideal, the parental voice within the psyche.¹⁶ The existence of the superego, then, is the direct legacy of the successful dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Although apparently far removed from the demands of the id, the superego is in fact closely related to it, representing the ego's defence against the unacceptable Oedipal wishes of the id. Whereas the ego stands in relation to the external world, the superego represents the inner world and the mastery of the id. Freud also sees in the superego the source of morality, religion and the 'higher nature' of mankind.¹⁷

The girl's Oedipus complex is not described in great detail in this essay, although Freud does mention that its successful negotiation involves an identification with the girl's mother which will confirm her feminine character. In his paper 'Die Weiblichkeit', published in 1932, Freud returns to the girl's Oedipus complex and develops it in more depth.¹⁸ He stresses firstly, as a result of his clinical observations, the intensity of the pre-Oedipal attachment of the girl to her mother, to which her later passionate attachment to her father is the direct heir. The female complex is complicated by the fact that the girl has to give up her mother as love-object and replace her with her father, whereas the boy can retain his original object in the form of a relationship with a woman when he is older. Freud sees the pre-Oedipal girl child as a 'ein kleiner Mann', dominated by sensations from her clitoris, her equivalent of the male penis.¹⁹ She finds it exceptionally difficult, Freud believes, to give up her 'masculinity', and clings until the last possible moment to her

¹⁵Freud [1923], 1992, p. 272.

¹⁶Freud [1923], 1992, p. 273.

¹⁷Freud [1923], 1992, pp. 272-275.

¹⁸Freud [1932], 1991, p. 127.

¹⁹Freud [1923], 1991, p. 116.

hope of one day possessing a penis. Whereas the resolution of the boy's Oedipus complex is a direct result of his castration complex, it is the girl's castration complex, namely the acceptance of the fact of her own castration, and the relinquishing of her desire to possess a penis of her own, which makes possible her entry into the Oedipus complex in the first place. Penis envy then becomes sublimated into the desire to give birth to a baby of her own when she is older.²⁰ Further, whereas the boy's Oedipus complex is resolved reasonably rapidly through its shattering by the castration complex, the girl has a much harder route to negotiate, particularly in the light of her reluctance to give up her pre-Oedipal closeness to her mother. Ultimately, and extremely controversially, Freud suggests that the girl's Oedipus complex is only ever partially resolved, resulting in a weaker and less well-developed superego in women than in men.²¹

In Lacanian theory, the Oedipus complex occurs slightly earlier than in the Freudian version, at about eighteen months. However, it is preceded by a first crucial stage in the development of an autonomous sense of self which Lacan describes as the 'mirror stage'.²² This stage occurs at approximately six months and is characterised by the infant's sudden recognition of its own mirror reflection.²³ This recognition, however, is structured by some particularly complex dynamics. The infant experiences enormous pleasure at the sight of its holistic body image in the mirror, not least because its inner world is still structured by a terrifying feeling of fragmentation and dispersal.²⁴ At the same time, though, a misrecognition takes place: the infant concludes that its mirror image is its 'real' self, initiating a subjectivity which is defined through the field of the other (and ultimately the Other).²⁵ The identity, then, which begins to emerge in the mirror stage is a social

²⁰Freud [1923], 1991, p. 126.

²¹Freud [1923], 1991, p. 127. See also Sigmund Freud [1905], *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, with an introduction by Reimut Reiche (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 93 for a description of the 'polymorph perverse Veranlagung' which, according to Freud, occurs more easily in women than in men.

²²Jacques Lacan [1966], 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in the psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*, translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-7.

²³Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 1.

²⁴Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 2.

²⁵Lacan [1966], 1989, pp. 2-3. The 'other' (objet petit 'a') in Lacanian theory refers to the child's objects, that is the significant others in its environment. The 'Other', or 'Autre' enters the picture with the advent of the Oedipus complex, and represents culture/language, or, as Grosz argues, it 'is embodied in the figure of the symbolic father, who intervenes into the narcissistic, imaginary, and incestual structure of identifications and gratifications.' See

one, signalling, 'a relationship between the organism and its reality - or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*'.²⁶ At this stage, the subject is not gendered, whereas the successful resolution of the Oedipus complex inevitably involves the assumption of a gendered identity. On the other hand, as the infant's realisation of its holistic body image is predicated on its visual experience of the bodies of others, particularly its mother, it seems likely that it will therefore also include an embryonic gender awareness.²⁷

The theories of Jacques Lacan follow closely the broad outlines of Freudian theory.²⁸ The biggest difference is that, whereas Freud describes a collision between biological drives and the requirements of culture, Lacan views the Oedipus complex as the subject's capitulation to the paternal 'law' which governs language.²⁹ The oedipalised subject, therefore, in Lacanian terms, is a subject who speaks, using the pronoun 'I' to describe him-/herself. Both sexes can only become full speaking subjects on the basis of the acceptance of an irrevocable lack; namely, that of pre-Oedipal merging with the maternal body.³⁰ The acceptance of this lack produces both desire, and the unconscious. The unconscious is formed as the subject separates from the mother's body, and embraces autonomous existence. At the same time, the subject becomes a victim to the desire to return to blissful unity with its mother, a state in which there is no gap between a need arising, and its satisfaction. An inevitable accompaniment of full subjecthood, then, is the awareness of needs which can only be articulated in the form of demands. Desire, therefore, represents the interstice between need and demand, in the sense that a demand can only ever represent a shadowy and incomplete reflection of a need.³¹ Language is structured by the paternal law, the name-of-the father, as evidenced by the symbol of the phallus, described by Lacan as the 'primary signifier', the signifier which contains and

Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 74.

²⁶Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 4.

²⁷See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xiv (Introduction and Acknowledgements, pp. vii-xvi).

²⁸See also Jenny Lanyon, 'The De(con)struction of Female Subjectivity in Elfriede Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen*', in *Centre Stage: Contemporary Drama in Austria*, edited and with an introduction by Frank Finlay and Ralf Jeutter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 77-79.

²⁹Grosz, 1990, pp. 70-71.

³⁰Grosz, 1990, p. 71.

³¹Lacan [1966], 1989, pp. 286-287.

organises all other signifiers.³² Both sexes are subject to the domination of the phallus; however, the male, through his identification with the father occupies the stronger position. The female subject, not only embodies lack in the form of desire, but also personifies it in her 'castrated' state; she can never be the bearer of the phallus unless she renounces her femininity.³³ At the same time, the disempowered female subject is deeply threatening because she embodies not only lack, but also the memory of the omnipotent pre-Oedipal 'phallic' mother. The female subject, according to Lacan, is compelled to accept the phallic law which governs language, unjust though this may appear. The only alternative to this would be a psychotic state which would preclude the possibility of communication and contact with others.

The use of a Lacanian and Freudian framework is not intended to suggest that Jelinek has made direct use of these theoretical underpinnings in her writing. On the other hand, there are enough direct references to Freud to suggest that she is at least familiar with the basic tenets of his developmental theory. There are no direct quotations from the work of Lacan in the three texts under consideration; however, there are clear resonances with his theory in Jelinek's view of the female speaking subject expressed in the following quotation: 'Unsere weibliche Problematik besteht ja darin, einerseits eine weibliche Identität ausbilden zu müssen und andererseits zu realisieren, daß das Sprechen einer Frau als Anmaßung angesehen wird.'³⁴ Jelinek argues here that the establishment of a viable identity is predicated on the ability to express oneself as a speaking subject. However, as Jelinek, in common with many feminists, argues the Western cultural context designates any attempts by a woman to speak as a presumption, a departure from feminine principles, placing the female subject in a further double bind situation. These arguments recall Lacan's assertion of the phallic law, which produces a 'castrated' female subject who cannot speak in her own right, as this would necessitate the possession of the phallus. The female subject, then, is doomed to articulate only her desire for the phallus that would enable her to function as an autonomous speaking subject.³⁵ This theme is elaborated in the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, as the following analysis will attempt to demonstrate.

³²Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 285.

³³Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 290.

³⁴Jelinek, Heinrich, Meyer, 1994, p. 9.

³⁵Lacan [1966], 1989, pp. 289-290.

2.3 Introduction to *Die Klavierspielerin*

The novel, *Die Klavierspielerin*³⁶, one of the most memorable works published by a woman in Germany in the 1980s, depicts the troubled and tormented subjectivity of its main character, Erika Kohut. The publication of the novel represented a turning-point in Jelinek's career, elevating a promising young writer to the status of one of Germany's best known women authors. Nonetheless, the reception of the novel in Germany was highly controversial, and its meanings have been hotly disputed. The impact of the text on its reader is evaluated in the following terms by Christa Gürtler:

Ich selbst habe selten so große emotionale Abwehr von Frauen gegenüber einem Text einer Frau erlebt wie bei Jelineks Roman *Die Klavierspielerin*. Im Sommersemester 1986 wollten einige Studentinnen im Proseminar "Tendenzen der zeitgenössischen Frauenliteratur" die Autorin gleich als Fall für die Psychiatrie sehen [...]' ³⁷

The anxiety produced by the text on this group of readers is paralleled by the wider reaction in the critical press. In an evaluation of the reception of Jelinek's works in the German-speaking press, Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger perceives a marked dichotomy between the national and international acclaim accorded to Jelinek in the course of her writing career and the critical condemnation which her works have received on publication.³⁸ With reference to the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*, Lamb-Faffelberger comments particularly on the extraordinarily wide spectrum of reactions, describing the text on the one hand as 'spit in book form' (Reinhard Beuth, *Die Welt*, Bonn, 21 March 1983), and as a 'toxic cascade of words, sentences and comparisons' (Eleanor Thun, *Wochenpresse*, Vienna, 5 April 1983), and as an 'outstanding literary achievement' (Lothar Baier, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Munich, 16 July 1993), and a 'magnifying text' (Alfred Warnes, *Wiener Zeitung*, Vienna, 4 June 1983) on the other.³⁹

³⁶Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Klavierspielerin* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1983).

³⁷Christa Gürtler, 'Der böse Blick der Elfriede Jelinek. Dürfen Frauen so schreiben?', in *Frauenbilder - Frauenrollen - Frauenforschung*, edited by Christa Gürtler and others (Wien: Verlag Geyer-Edition, 1987), p. 51.

³⁸Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger, 'In the Eyes of the Press: Provocation - Production - Prominence. A Critical Documentation of Elfriede Jelinek's Reception', in *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*, edited by Jorun B. Johns and Katherine Arens (Riverside, CA: Ariadne: 1994), p. 287.

³⁹Lamb-Faffelberger, in Johns and Arens, pp. 291-2.

The strength of the reactions to the text has, to a certain extent, been reinforced by Jelinek's own insistence on the autobiographical content of the novel, and much speculation has occurred regarding the relationship of the main character, Erika Kohut, to Jelinek herself. Some reviewers appear to have jumped to the conclusion that there is an exact correspondence between the subjectivity of the fictional figure, and her creator, who is portrayed as a: 'despiser of mankind' who hates everything: 'she hates music, she hates Vienna, she hates people. And above all, she hates herself' (Reinhard Beuth, *Die Welt*, Bonn, 21 May 1983).⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the confidence with which judgements regarding the character of the author are delivered is somewhat surprising, particularly as *Die Klavierspielerin* is Jelinek's only overtly autobiographical work. In the majority of her texts, Jelinek's preference is to efface any traces of her biography, rather than to continue the process of self-revelation begun in the novel under discussion: 'Außer der »Klavierspielerin« habe ich ja den Zwang, so zu verschlüsseln, daß ich unkenntlich bin. Andere Autoren können ja immer nur über sich schreiben.'⁴¹ A possible explanation for the fascination of this text is suggested by Marlies Janz⁴² in her analysis of Jelinek's later play, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*. The play is prefaced by a quotation from the work of the philosopher Eva Meyer which illuminates precisely the tendency to view female literary products as indistinguishable from the person of the writer herself:

*In chinesischen Legenden steht geschrieben, daß große Meister in ihre Bilder hineingingen und verschwunden sind. Die Frau ist kein großer Meister. Deshalb wird ihr Verschwinden nie vollkommen sein. Sie taucht wieder auf, beschäftigt wie sie ist, mit dem Verschwinden.*⁴³

Janz interprets the quotation as referring to the female subject's exclusion from the construction of crucial metanarratives.⁴⁴ A further implication of the quotation is that, as the great male artist's status as subject is not questioned, his aesthetic products can be viewed as independent from the subjectivity of their creator. Female subjectivity in the Western world, on the other hand, it is suggested, is far less tangible than its male counterpart, and the woman artist, therefore, is viewed as

⁴⁰Lamb-Faffelberger, in Johns and Arens, pp. 292.

⁴¹Jelinek, Heinrich, Meyer, p. 35.

⁴²Marlies Janz, 'Falsche Spiegel: Über die Umkehrung als Verfahren bei Elfriede Jelinek', in *Gegen den schönen Schein: Texte zu Elfriede Jelinek* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1990), pp. 81-2.

⁴³Eva Meyer, quoted in Elfriede Jelinek, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort von Regine Friedrich (Köln: Prometh, 1987), p. 5.

⁴⁴Janz, 1990, p. 81.

irrevocably entangled with her works. Whereas some male writers are permitted to produce texts which contain scenes of obscenity and sexual violence without repeated attacks on the personality which gave rise to this material, the female writer is expected to confine herself to more delicate subject matter. A female writer, then, appears not to be credited with creativity of the same magnitude as a male writer: her literary products are deemed to be identical with her 'self'.⁴⁵ Where a woman strays into the traditional male domains of pornography and perversion, this is deemed to be an expression of her own dysfunction. It is possible, then, that Jelinek's attempts to 'disappear' into her texts are subject to the process described by Meyer's reference to Chinese legend, with the result that she is dogged by the premise of the quotation, namely: 'wie die Frau sozusagen in ihrem Werk nicht aufgeht, sondern immer wieder, auch wenn sie es vielleicht gar nicht will, zurückkommt'.⁴⁶

Christel Dormagen identifies the profound uncertainty produced in critics by Jelinek's work, which leads to an astonishing diversity of evaluation and judgements, suggesting that readers are frequently at a loss as to how to categorise the texts:

Einmal also ist der »Giftregen« ihrer Sprache großartig, das andere Mal böseartig; ebenso taucht ihre »Geschmacklosigkeit« mal als »aggressiv« im Gut-Kontext und mal als »brutale Obszönität« im Schlecht-Kontext auf [...] Mal ist es prima, daß die Figuren konstruierte Prototypen und keine realistischen Wesen sind, und ein andermal ist eben dies die Katastrophe, »daß ihre Figuren Buchstabengebilde« sind: »alles aus Papier«. ⁴⁷

Jelinek's writing, then, clearly has the power to disorientate, to mystify, and to provoke extreme anxiety and disgust, a tendency which is exemplified by the reaction to the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*. While it would be convenient to apply a gender framework to the two contexts identified by Dormagen in reviews of Jelinek's work, with the 'Schlecht-Kontext' being identified primarily with male critics, this is not, in fact, accurate. She detects no gender divide among the positive and negative reviews and, if anything, female reviewers in the 'Schlecht-Kontext' tend to be even more vituperative in their condemnation of Jelinek than their male counterparts.⁴⁸

⁴⁵This theme is explored with reference to Anglo-American literature by Mary Ellmann in *Thinking About Women* (New York: Harcourt, 1968).

⁴⁶Jelinek, Heinrich and Meyer, 1995, p. 11.

⁴⁷Christel Dormagen, 'Scheitern: sehr gut. Elfriede muß sich in Zukunft mehr zügeln. Einige Bemerkungen zur Feuilletonkritik', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, *Elfriede Jelinek* (Munich: edition text + kritik, Januar 1993), 86-94 (89).

⁴⁸Clearly these comments relate only to newspaper criticism of Jelinek's work. With regard to

One factor on which the vast majority of critics are agreed, however, is on the extraordinary originality of Jelinek's use of language. As an earlier section of this chapter sought to demonstrate, aspects of Lacanian theory identify speech and language as 'phallic' activities. Any attempt by a woman to speak, in these terms, is viewed as a presumptuous assumption of a 'male' role. A female authorial voice, therefore, that is hesitant, vulnerable and deferential might be deemed to be almost acceptable. However, it seems that Jelinek provokes extreme reactions in both male and female readers by not only speaking, but speaking with such strikingly defiant and transgressive virtuosity. An examination of the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* will now seek to identify possible reasons for the explosive effect of the text.

2.4 The Text: Introduction

The novel *Die Klavierspielerin* is the story of Erika Kohut, the eponymous piano player. Erika, who is in her late thirties, lives in a state of submission and bondage to her autocratic elderly mother, described in particularly sinister terms as: 'Inquisitor und Erschießungskommando in einer Person'.⁴⁹ Born to her parents late in life ('Die Mutter könnte, was ihr Alter betrifft, leicht Erikas Großmutter sein'),⁵⁰ Erika became the receptacle for the full force of her mother's sublimated aspirations and ambitions. These all revolved around the Austrian national institution of music, and Erika's mother had planned for her a career as a concert pianist. However, having failed to win a crucial competition, this career path had to be abandoned, and the disgraced Erika now occupies 'das Lehramt für Klavier am Konservatorium der Stadt Wien'.⁵¹ In order to assuage her disappointment at her daughter's failure, Erika's mother forbids her to promote solo careers in any of her students, however promising: 'Du selbst hast es nicht geschafft, warum sollen es jetzt andere an deiner Stelle und auch noch aus deinem pianistischen Stall erreichen?'⁵²

academic research, Jelinek herself laments the fact that the vast majority of those engaged in this work are female: 'Und Sie können sich anschauen, wer über meine Arbeit schreibt und forscht, das sind zu 95 Prozent Frauen. Das Werk einer Frau ist nicht der Mühe wert, vom anderen Geschlecht gewürdigt zu werden.' (Jelinek, Heinrich and Meyer, 1995, p. 9).

⁴⁹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Jelinek, 1983, p. 5.

⁵¹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 8.

⁵² Jelinek, 1983, p. 11.

Erika's life is organised and dictated by her mother, who will only tolerate her absence from home if she is either working, or engaged in other musical activities. When she is out of the flat, Erika is required to leave a phone number where she can be contacted by her mother if necessary, and 'von diesem Recht macht sie [die Mutter] freizügig Gebrauch'.⁵³ Nonetheless, Erika has evolved strategies for avoiding her mother's dictatorial rule. One of these is the purchase of fashionable clothes which she never wears, but hoards in her wardrobe. This arouses her mother's fury because it involves spending money which is intended to be saved towards the purchase of a new, and larger, flat. More controversially, Erika also indulges a clandestine interest in pornography, visiting 'peepshows' and pornographic films when she is not teaching and, at night, she acts as a voyeur, spying on copulating couples in the Prater. In an even more disturbing attempt to obtain release, Erika practises self-mutilation, ironically described in the novel as a 'Hobby',⁵⁴ by inflicting wounds on her arms and body with a knife, and then observing the flow of blood.

Having been discouraged by her mother all her life from establishing friendships, and particularly, relationships with men, Erika has become a loner. She has no partner, few real friends, and she has no social life that is not connected with her musical career. Her earlier attempts at sexual experimentation having failed, Erika has given up any hope of finding a relationship outside of the mother/daughter dyad. Her initial reaction, therefore, to attempts by a talented student of hers, Walther Klemmer, to initiate an affair is one of disbelief and disgust: Erika cannot believe that she could possibly be the object of another's lust. However, as time passes, and Klemmer redoubles his efforts to seduce his teacher, the idea of a relationship becomes more attractive to Erika, and she begins to offer encouragement to the student. To Klemmer's disappointment, though, and ultimately, to his utter fury, Erika's view of the distribution of power within the relationship is very different from his own. She seizes control of their interactions, forbidding Klemmer to approach her on any other than her own terms. This desire for control extends to their sexual relationship, within which Erika hopes to realise the elaborate sado-masochistic fantasies which she has nurtured for many years. Shocked and repelled by the letter in which Erika details the precise nature of the 'scenes' in which she wishes Klemmer to participate, and following a further sexual encounter in

⁵³ Jelinek, 1983, p. 8.

⁵⁴ 'Ihr Hobby ist das Schneiden am eigenen Körper', in Jelinek, 1983, p. 88.

which he becomes impotent, the student's frustration and disappointment explode in a brutal rape of the teacher.

The novel ends with a further scene of self-mutilation, the only release which Erika is capable of achieving for herself. Having left the house with a knife, ostensibly to be used against Klemmer, Erika observes him laughing and joking with his young friends, reinforcing for her the pointlessness of any attempt at retribution. She is finished and Klemmer, with both masculinity and youth on his side, has everything. Obeying the exigencies of time-honoured patterns, the knife is turned against Erika herself, inflicting a superficial flesh wound:

Ihr Rücken wärmt sich durch Sonne auf. Blut sickert aus ihr heraus. Menschen blicken von der Schulter zum Gesicht empor. Einige wenden sich sogar um. Es sind nicht alle. Erika weiß die Richtung, in die sie gehen muß. Sie geht nach Hause. Sie geht und beschleunigt langsam ihren Schritt.⁵⁵

Erika's isolation is reinforced by the fact that nobody comes to her rescue as, like a bewildered escaped battery hen, she trudges home to the only place where anybody has ever paid any attention to her.

2.5 The character of Erika

Erika Kohut's name is one of many intertextual references in the novel. It is derived from the name of the controversial psychoanalyst, Heinz Kohut, the founder of Self-Psychology, who developed a theory of the development and treatment of narcissism.⁵⁶ Although there are no further references to Kohut in the novel, the text as a whole can be viewed as a depiction of a deeply narcissistic personality. Erika is an example of the type of narcissistically wounded personality which Kohut describes as 'the overstimulated self'.⁵⁷ A person suffering from this form of personality disorder, according to Kohut, has been exposed to inadequate and patchy mirroring during childhood. While the child's emergent self as a whole may have been largely ignored or suppressed, one skill or talent which appeals particularly to

⁵⁵ Jelinek, 1983, p. 283.

⁵⁶ A comprehensive introduction to Kohut's life and work is provided by Allen M. Siegel, *Heinz Kohut and the Psychology of the Self* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵⁷ Heinz Kohut and Ernest S. Wolf, 'The Disorders of the Self and their Treatment: An Outline', in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 59 (1978), 413-425 (419).

the parent has been over-stimulated, with the result that the child grows up with a fragile and incomplete sense of who they are. Although they may possess exceptional ability, the individual may also feel terrified of the expectations placed on them as a result of that talent, and the fear that they won't live up to them. They may also be tormented by the feeling that, when viewed apart from their ability, they are nothing, merely an empty shell. These anxieties may lead to unconscious sabotage of their careers.⁵⁸ The result of this form of inadequate parenting, as Kohut describes it, is a frail and incomplete sense of self, which has access to a transitory strength only when carrying out the one activity which has received parental recognition. However, by the same token, the practice of that activity has the effect of further draining an already depleted self.

The similarity between the theories described above, and the story of the troubled Erika Kohut are obvious. However, whereas Kohut locates responsibility for the deformations of the individual within the family, Jelinek shifts this into the social sphere. Thus, Erika's mother, domineering though she may be, is also the victim of society's prescriptions and injunctions. Deprived of any social outlet for her own intelligence, talents and aspirations, Erika's mother projects all of this energy onto her only daughter, inadvertently crushing and suffocating her developing personality. The process of forcing the unsuspecting child into the parental mould is described, appropriately enough, in terms of a brutal sculpture metaphor:

Erika, die Heideblume. Von dieser Blume hat diese Frau den Namen. Ihrer Mutter schwebte vorgeburtlich etwas Scheues und Zartes vor Augen. Als sie dann den aus ihrem Leib hervorschießenden Lehmklumpen betrachtete, ging sie sofort daran, ohne Rücksicht ihn zurechtzuhalten, um Reinheit und Feinheit zu erhalten. Dort ein Stück weg und dort auch noch.⁵⁹

On the other hand, the restrictive upbringing to which Erika has been subjected is in itself only an exaggeration of conventional expectations of parenthood. The exclusive investment of mothers in their children is the object of Jelinek's bitterest satire: 'Die Mutter klappert Freunden und Verwandten, [...] daß sie ein Genie geboren habe [...] Die Geburt des Jesusknaben war ein Dreck dagegen.'⁶⁰ This

⁵⁸ A very obvious example of this type of individual would be the pianist, David Helfgott, whose life story is portrayed in the film 'Shine' (first released in 1996 and directed by Scott Hicks).

⁵⁹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 25.

⁶⁰ Jelinek, 1983, p. 27.

self-sacrifice for the adored child is revealed to be a sublimation of the mother's own egocentricity, and her desire to control her offspring's every movement: 'Das Kind ist der Abgott seiner Mutter, welche dem Kind dafür nur geringe Gebühr abverlangt: sein Leben. Die Mutter will das Kinderleben selbst auswerten dürfen.'⁶¹

Erika's mother's internalisation of the Austrian reverence for classical music results in an attempt by her to direct her daughter into the career she might have chosen for herself. Thus, Erika has been schooled for a musical career from infancy onwards. The idealisation of the rigours of a musical training and education forms a central focus in the novel for Jelinek's satire. This is effected through a description of the damage inflicted on Erika's developing subjectivity as a result of her enforced dedication to musical practice: 'Der Habicht Mutter und der Bussard Omutter verbieten dem ihnen anvertrauten Kind das Verlassen des Horsts. In dicken Scheiben schneiden sie IHR das Leben ab.'⁶² Thus, as Juliet Wigmore argues,⁶³ Erika is prevented from participating in any activities normally pursued by young people, and her life becomes a relationship of bondage to her musical training:

In dieses Notationssystem ist Erika seit frühester Kindheit eingespannt. Diese fünf Linien beherrschen sie, seit sie denkt. Sie darf an nichts als an diese fünf schwarzen Linien denken. Dieses Rastersystem hat sie, im Verein mit ihrer Mutter, in ein unzerreißbares Netz von Vorschriften, Verordnungen, von präzisen Geboten geschnürt wie einen rosigen Rollschinken am Haken eines Fleischhauers.⁶⁴

The extraordinary juxtaposition in the above quotation of the lines of the musical stave, and the string nets used for hanging meat at a butcher's shop, continues the metaphor begun in the previous quotation. The discipline of music is portrayed as inimical to 'fleshly' existence: it necessitates either a hacking away of 'life', or 'flesh', or, alternatively, the flesh must be tightly bound in order to constrain it, so that it doesn't compromise the attainment of the Elysian fields of artistic achievement. In both cases the imposition of a demanding and uncompromising musical training on a child is viewed in the novel as an act of violence against that developing individual.

⁶¹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 28.

⁶² Jelinek, 1983, p. 36.

⁶³ Juliet Wigmore, 'Power, Politics and Pornography: Elfriede Jelinek's Satirical Exposés', in Arthur Williams, Stuart Parkes and Roland Smith (eds), *Literature on the Threshold: The German Novel in the 1980s* (New York, Oxford and Munich: Berg, 1990), p. 211 and p. 213.

⁶⁴ Jelinek, 1983, p. 191.

In her juxtaposition of the formal deadness of art (der Fleischhauer), to the messy plenitude of life (Fleisch), Jelinek's field of vision widens to encompass German idealism and, by extension, Cartesian dualism. Her focus is the pretensions of idealism, which postulate the possibility of a superior, cognitive, existence, once corporeality has been transcended. Jelinek's concern, as Elizabeth Wright argues, is to expose the violence done by 'Geist' to 'Materie': 'Der Text legt seine innere Dialektik offen: Ein feststehendes kulturelles Ideal steht gegen die hartnäckige Materialität des Lebens.'⁶⁵ In Erika's case, the metaphorical 'binding' of her flesh in the interests of musical achievement has resulted in an almost complete estrangement from her own body, ironically applauded as '[...] das Zeichen dafür, daß das Kind über die Tonleiter in höhere Sphären aufgestiegen und der Körper als tote Hülle untegeblieben ist.'⁶⁶ In the interests of promoting an unsullied pursuit of art, Erika's mother, aided and abetted by her grandmother, is determined to prevent any awakening of her daughter's sexuality, viewed as an uncontainable force which would almost certainly lure the young woman away from her ultimate goal:

Die abgestreife Körperhülle der Tochter wird sorgfältig nach den Spuren männlicher Benutzung abgeklopft und dann energisch ausgeschüttelt. Frisch kann sie nach dem Spiel wieder übergestreift werden, schön trocken und raschelnd steif gestärkt. Fühllos und keinem zum Fühlen preisgegeben.⁶⁷

All attempts, then, by Erika's sexuality to assert itself against the maternal regime having been systematically quelled, her defence is a total dissociation from her inconvenient and troublesome body, as her naive but nonetheless, perceptive, future lover, Klemmer, observes: 'Ich habe das Gefühl, daß Sie ihren Körper verachten, nur die Kunst gelten lassen, Frau Professor.'⁶⁸

Erika's repressed corporeality, however, asserts itself in ways which, at the beginning of the love affair, are beyond the scope of Klemmer's imagination. Unable to obtain sexual release in any conventional manner, Erika uses bizarre methods to coax some sensation out of her unresponsive body. These sometimes involve self-mutilation, described in particularly gruesome and graphic terms by Jelinek.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Wright, 'Eine Ästhetik des Ekels. Elfriede Jelineks Roman »Die Klavierspielerin«, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, Januar 1993, 51.

⁶⁶ Jelinek, 1983, p. 36.

⁶⁷ Jelinek, 1983, pp. 36-37.

⁶⁸ Jelinek, 1983, p. 67.

One of these episodes, dating from Erika's adolescence, results in a spilling of blood which has the quality of an orgasmic release:

Es rinnt ohne Pause. Es färbt alles rot ein. Vier Schlitze, aus denen es pausenlos herausquillt [...] Und es rinnt immer weiter. Es rinnt und rinnt und rinnt und rinnt.⁶⁹

The cuts inflicted by Erika on her own body with a knife are, therefore, the eroticised expression of the mortification of her flesh which has been wrought by the rigours of her musical education, and her mother's excessive control.

The ultimate expression, though, of Erika's dissociation from all corporeal sexual expression lies in her voyeurism. The origins of this tendency are evoked in an episode involving 'Burschi', Erika's young male cousin. Jelinek describes in deeply ironic terms the attraction exerted by Burschi's uninhibited male sexuality on the women in the area. Even Erika's mother and grandmother are unable to resist his charisma and, whereas Erika is obliged to sit at the piano and practise for hours at a time, Burschi's boisterous physicality is both encouraged and celebrated:

Plötzlich ist Leben in das Haus eingekehrt, denn ein Mann bringt doch immer Leben ins Haus. Nachsichtig lächelnd, doch voll Stolz blicken die Frauen des Hauses auf den jungen Mann, der sich austoben muß.⁷⁰

Forbidden to take part in any of the antics of the young people who are not wedded to the altar of art, the collapse of Erika's frustrated adolescent sexual drive into the voyeuristic gaze is encapsulated in a scene in which, exceptionally, she manages to escape from her practice room and join the group of women worshipping the god-like Burschi. Against her mother's wishes, Erika is drawn into a mock wrestling match with Burschi, during the course of which when she catches sight of his genitals:

Das rote Päckchen voll Geschlecht gerät ins Schlingern, es kreiselt verführerisch vor IHREN Augen. Es gehört einem Verführer, dem keine widersteht. Daran lehnt sie für einen kurzen Augenblick nur ihre Wange. Weiß selbst nicht, wieso. Sie will es nur einmal spüren, sie will diese glitzernde Christbaumkugel nur ein einziges Mal mit den Lippen berühren. Einen Augenblick ist SIE die Empfängerin dieses Pakets. SIE streift mit den Lippen darüber hin oder war es mit dem Kinn? Es war

⁶⁹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 45.

⁷⁰ Jelinek, 1983, p. 40.

wider die eigene freie Absicht. Der Burschi weiß nicht, daß er eine Steinlawine losgetreten hat bei seiner Cousine. Sie schaut und schaut. Das Päckchen ist ihr wie ein Präparat unter dem Mikroskop zurechtgelegt worden. Dieser Augenblick soll bitte verweilen, er ist so schön.⁷¹

The ironic reference to Goethe's *Faust*⁷² in the above quotation proves to be prophetic: after this time Erika experiences her sexuality almost exclusively by watching the activities of others, a theme which follows her into her adult life. The thirty-eight year old Erika also 'schaut und schaut', but, by this stage her 'Schaulust' has become directed towards pornography, arguably, the ultimate expression of voyeurism. Erika visits cinemas showing pornographic films, and, in a particularly surrealistic episode, she visits a seedy pornographic peepshow, patronised mainly by impoverished Turkish 'Gastarbeiter'. Erika's social confidence enables her to cut a swathe through the curious glances she receives on arrival at the peepshow: 'Erika betritt, ganz Frau Lehrerin, die Lokalität. Eine Hand streckt sich, schon zögernd, nach ihr aus, zuckt aber zurück.'⁷³ Erika's purpose in her visit differs from that of the other clients: whereas they indulge in masturbation in the scanty privacy of the peepshow's booths, she cannot overcome the maternal injunction regarding her body. She and her mother still sleep in the same bed, ironically termed the 'Ehebett', and thus Erika has never been allowed to masturbate, reflecting the overall ban on sexual activity imposed by her mother: 'Diese Hände sollen üben, sie sollen nicht wie die Ameisen unter die Decke huschen und dort an das Marmaladeglas fahren.'⁷⁴ Erika's erotic fulfilment, then, occurs entirely through the medium of her gaze:

Erika schaut ganz genau zu. Nicht um zu lernen. In ihr rührt und regt sich weiter nichts. Doch schauen muß sie trotzdem. Zu ihrem eigenen Vergnügen. Immer wenn sie fortgehen möchte, drückt etwas von oben ihren gut frisierten Kopf energisch wieder gegen die Scheibe, und sie muß weiterhin blicken. Die Drehscheibe, auf der die schöne Frau sitzt, fährt im Kreis herum. Erika kann nichts dafür. Sie muß und muß schauen. Sie ist für sich selbst tabu. Anfassen gibt es nicht.⁷⁵

This theme reaches its transgressive apotheosis in Erika's nocturnal expeditions to the Prater, where she spies on courting couples. Erika's vicarious sexual fulfilment

⁷¹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 44.

⁷² Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Faust*. Erster Teil (Frankfurt: Insel, 1976), p. 78.

⁷³ Jelinek, 1983, p. 53.

⁷⁴ Jelinek, 1983, p. 54.

⁷⁵ Jelinek, 1983, p. 56.

operates through her clandestine observation of a scene of sexual intercourse between two complete strangers: 'Wie der Heimat Haus fickt sich das Paar aus dem schönsten Wiesengrunde heraus und in Erikas Augäpfel hinein.'⁷⁶ Her presence at this intimate moment produces a fantasy of control of the activities of the couple: 'Sie will nicht teilnehmen, aber es soll auch nicht ohne sie stattfinden.'⁷⁷ In a scene which mirrors Erika's scene of self-mutilation described earlier, her sexual release is symbolised by the ejaculatory release of urine: 'Sie läßt es nur, starr vor sich die Stirn runzelnd, aus sich herausrinnen. Es wird immer leerer in ihr, und der Boden saugt sich voll [...] Sie läßt Muskeln locker, und es wird von einem anfänglichen Prasseln zu einem sanften, stetigen Rinnen.'⁷⁸

2.6 Erika's Femininity

Erika's problems coalesce around the difficulty which she has experienced in establishing for herself a viable subjectivity. In terms of Kohut's theory, Erika's grandiosity, defined as the normal desire on the part of any child for parental admiration, has been over-stimulated to the detriment of her other qualities, producing in her an inflated sense of her own superiority. This is conveyed at the textual level by the use of capitalised pronouns to refer to Erika in descriptions of episodes from her childhood, 'Es erschließt sich IHR eine Welt, von der andere nichts ahnen [...] eine Welt voll Musik.'⁷⁹ Kohut's theory, though, does not include a gendered perspective, and he does not, for example, consider the different impact on the male and female child of particular forms of parental 'failure'. While Erika's authoritarian upbringing could have been inflicted on either sex, the particular form which it takes would have been deemed inappropriate in the case of a boy. The novel *Die Klavierspielerin* demonstrates the very different rules which obtain in Erika's milieu regarding the behaviour of young male and female individuals. Thus, 'Burschi', a medical student, is promoted in his exuberant physicality, whereas his equally gifted cousin is expected to maintain strict control over her bodily movements. Similarly, 'Burschi's' sexual aura is celebrated and encouraged, whilst Erika is discouraged from any form of sexual expression. The young man is viewed

⁷⁶Jelinek, 1983, p. 141.

⁷⁷Jelinek, 1983, p. 143.

⁷⁸Jelinek, 1983, p. 148.

⁷⁹Jelinek, 1983, p. 61.

as infusing energy into the surrounding neighbourhood, revitalising, in particular, the women with whom he comes into contact. At the same time, the deadening process which is occurring within Erika is not recognised or acknowledged: 'SIE übt Klavier und ignoriert die Salven von Gelächter, die stoßweise emporschießen. IHRE Mutter hat dringend empfohlen, nicht darauf zu achten.'⁸⁰

The particular form which Erika's troubled femininity takes is articulated in the novel in terms which are reminiscent of Freudian and Lacanian theory, reflecting the love/hate relationship which Jelinek has with psychoanalytic theory.⁸¹ As this discourse is woven into the text, the reader is deprived of the possibility of producing a straightforward Freudian reading of Erika's difficulties. As Marlies Janz demonstrates, the interpretation is already integral to the text:

Die Pointe des erzählerischen Verfahrens von *Die Klavierspielerin* ist es geradezu, daß der Text gleichsam nichts mehr zu deuten übrig läßt, sondern selber die Psychoanalyse der Figuren ausspricht und sie zu deren Figurationen werden läßt.⁸²

On the one hand, it is clear that, viewed from a Freudian perspective, Erika suffers from an unresolved Oedipus complex. Her dominating mother completely eclipsed her weak and unassertive father, a situation which was exacerbated by his worsening mental state, and his eventual committal to a mental institution. Erika was, therefore, subject to a confusion regarding her identity, and the dyadic relationship between mother and daughter, into which the father 'normally' intervenes in the Oedipus complex, remained unbroken. Similarly, her father, who, according to Freud, is the bearer of the 'phallus', the symbol of male social power, seemed unable to bear this burden, with the result that Erika's mother has remained the all-powerful, pre-Oedipal 'phallic mother'.⁸³

However, the Oedipal material of the text is conveyed in a far more ambivalent manner than the above description would suggest. This is particularly striking in the case of the symbol of the phallus, which, as Janz describes, recurs throughout the text in the form of a network of symbols.⁸⁴ As a result, the reader is deprived of the opportunity of making a classical Freudian interpretation with regard to Erika of, for

⁸⁰ Jelinek, 1983, p. 41.

⁸¹ Jelinek, Heinrich and Meyer, 1995, pp. 7-8.

⁸² Marlies Janz, 'Die Klavierspielerin', in *Elfriede Jelinek* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), p. 72.

⁸³ Jacques Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 282.

⁸⁴ Janz, 1995, p. 78.

example, 'Penisneid', as it is not clear from the text at any one moment who possesses the penis, and where it is to be found. In one sense, Erika's mother appears to be the bearer of the phallus, in her ability to unite in one person the qualities of both a father and a mother. However, Erika also has what might be described as 'phallic pretensions', as the text reminds us: 'Nach vielen harten Ehejahren erst kam Erika damals auf die Welt. Sofort gab der Vater den Stab an seine Tochter weiter und trat ab.'⁸⁵ So, in some sense, Erika's father has handed to his daughter his fragile phallic power, bypassing the mother altogether. In fact, neither father nor daughter, phallus or no phallus, are able to assert themselves against the omnipotent mother, and by inheriting her father's 'phallus', Erika merely consolidates her position as her mother's creature.

The links between the father's phallus and his daughter proliferate throughout the text. In Lacanian theory the gaze is viewed as a masculine, penetrative function of the human subject, and Erika, of course, is a voyeur, a role which is rarely adopted by a woman.⁸⁶ In this sense, then, Erika invades male territory, as is strikingly obvious when she enters the 'inner sanctum' of the peepshow, where a woman is normally only permitted to be present as the object of the male gaze. In a clear and ironic reference to Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex, at which point a child becomes aware of his mother's anatomical 'deficiency' in her lack of a penis, Jelinek describes the activities of the male visitors to the peepshow in the following terms: 'Der Mann schaut auf das Nichts, er schaut auf den reinen Mangel. Zuerst schaut er auf dieses Nichts, dann kommt die restliche Mutti noch dran.'⁸⁷ The irony in this statement inheres in the contradiction between the male denigration of the female within psychoanalytic theory, as juxtaposed to the eagerness of the users of the peepshow to pay money to view that same 'Nichts'. The complexity of the relations of power between men and women is revealed by the fact that, although the guest workers are very much Erika's social inferiors, the denigration of women is carried out by men throughout the social spectrum: 'Geduldig stellen sich die ausländischen Arbeitnehmer gruppenweise hintereinander an. Sie vertreiben sich die Zeit mit Witzen über Frauen.'⁸⁸ Mirroring the relations in society as a whole, the male occupies the subject position in the sphere of pornography, observing the female

⁸⁵ Jelinek, 1983, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Grosz, 1990, p. 77.

⁸⁷ Jelinek, 1983, p. 54.

⁸⁸ Jelinek, 1983, p. 52.

object. However, Erika infiltrates the position of the subject gazing at the subjected object (also herself), imagining that she can transcend and dominate the dynamic of power inherent in the pornographic industry.

Erika's apparent phallic power is crucially linked with her voyeuristic gaze and, as Janz argues, the symbols used in the text to represent the phallus reflect this visual quality:

Im Zweiten Teil von *Die Klavierspielerin* scheint der Tod des Vaters die voyeuristische Perversion Erikas endgültig zum Ausbruch gebracht zu haben. Mit dem Fernglas *des Vaters* (K 140) als ihrem ›verlängerten Auge‹ beobachtet Erika ein Liebespaar in den Praterauen. Die Identifikation mit der väterlichen Position scheint hier vollkommen zu sein. Ist der Vater »vollständig umnachtet« in Steinhof gestorben, so scheint Erika sein Leben fortzusetzen, indem sie sich sein »Nachtglas« (K 141) zu eigen macht. In ihrem Voyeurismus also verleugnet sie die ›Kastration‹ - die Blindheit - des Vaters wie auch seinen Tod: Sie selbst ist zum Auge des Vaters geworden.⁸⁹

Erika, then, is able to perpetuate in her voyeuristic activities a fantasy of total control of the objects of her gaze. This is commensurate with her Oedipal, or rather, pre-Oedipal status, evoking as it does Lacan's account of the mirror stage.⁹⁰ In common with the Lacanian infant, Erika is transfixed by images, in effect, her own reflection in the mirror, as the pornographic images by which she is fascinated consist almost entirely of women. To continue the association with Lacanian theory, Erika also misrecognises this specular world as the real world, just as the infant assumes its mirror reflection to be its real self.⁹¹ As the pre-Oedipal stage also precedes the acquisition of a socially acceptable gender identity in Freudian and Lacanian theory, in this sense, Erika has never become a 'woman'. Her femininity has neither been celebrated, nor has she been fully cut down to size by the Oedipus

⁸⁹ Janz, 1995, p. 78.

⁹⁰ Described in Lacan [1966], 1989, pp. 1-7.

⁹¹ As Lacan summarises this: 'The fact is that the total form of the body by which the subject anticipates in mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as a *Gestalt*, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted, but in which it appears to him above all in a contrasting size (*un relief de stature*) that fixes it and in a symmetry that inverts it, in contrast with the turbulent movements that the subject feels are animating him. Thus, this *Gestalt* - whose pregnancy should be regarded as bound up with the species, though its motor style remains scarcely recognizable - by these two aspects of its appearance, symbolizes the mental permanence of the *I*, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination; it is still pregnant with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue in which man projects himself, with the phantoms that dominate him, or with the automaton in which, in an ambiguous relation, the world of his own making tends to find completion.' Lacan [1966], 1989, pp. 2-3.

complex, and she, therefore, persists in the illusion that she is still 'a little man', as Freud described the female infant. Erika has never worn: '[...] die goldene Pappkrone des als Fräulein Prinzessin auf den Kinderball geschickten kleinen Mädchens. Doch auf Kinderfaschingsbälle ist SIE nie gegangen, die Krone hat sie nicht kennengelernt. Plötzlich ist dann der Königinnschmuck in die Hose gerutscht, und die Frau kennt ihren Platz im Leben.'⁹² Clearly, Erika has not learnt her place in life, however, although femininity is represented in the novel as a 'poisoned chalice', equally, to be denied the opportunity of constructing some sort of subjectivity out of the possibilities available is just as unsatisfactory. Erika's tortured clothes-buying experiences represent her desperate attempts to purchase for herself a version of femininity, and it is significant that the clothes, once acquired, remain hanging unworn in the wardrobe, as: 'Die Mutter bestimmt darüber, wie Erika aus dem Haus geht. So gehst du mir nicht aus dem Haus, bestimmt die Mutter, welche befürchtet, daß Erika fremde Häuser mit fremden Männern darin betritt.'⁹³

2.7 Erika's relationship with Klemmer

The description of the relationship which develops between Walter Klemmer and Erika Kohut is coloured by Jelinek's deeply pessimistic view of all male/female relationships, expressed succinctly in the statement: 'Beide Geschlechter wollen immer etwas grundsätzlich Gegensätzliches'.⁹⁴ Rejecting any notion of love or romance, men and women's mutual need is revealed to be driven primarily by self-interest. Significantly, then, Klemmer's thoughts regarding Erika in the novel are dominated by metaphors drawn from economics, demonstrating the economic basis which Jelinek perceives to all male/female relationships.⁹⁵ However, although both

⁹²Jelinek, 1983, p. 90.

⁹³Jelinek, 1983, p. 11.

⁹⁴Jelinek, 1983, p. 142.

⁹⁵This theme forms a central focus in Jelinek's earlier novel, *Die Liebhaberinnen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1975). In this novel, the two main protagonists, Brigitte and Paula, know that their only escape route from tedious work in the local factory is through marriage. Even then, chance and strategy play a large part: Brigitte succeeds in building a viable, if dull, life with Heinz, a local businessman, whereas, Paula, who has been influenced by images in glossy magazines, chooses a handsome but feckless forester, a route which eventually takes her into prostitution. As the narrator summarises Brigitte's dependence on Heinz's earning capacity to bring her a better life: 'brigitte und heinz haben keine geschichte. brigitte und heinz haben nur eine arbeit. heinz soll die geschichte von brigitte werden, er soll ihr ein eigenes leben machen, dann soll er ihr ein kind machen, dessen zukunft wiederum von heinz und seinem beruf geprägt sein wird.' (p. 10.).

sexes in Jelinek's works have a view of the opposite gender which is fundamentally exploitative, her severest condemnation is reserved for the male sex. This reflects the imbalance of social power which, she believes, still works in favour of men, however disempowered they may be in terms of society as a whole. This is depicted in starkly denunciatory terms in the section of the novel which describes the prostitution industry in the Prater, an industry which, having been carefully concealed from view during the daytime, comes to life at nightfall. In Jelinek's description of prostitution the concepts of economics and misogyny converge:

Der Jugoslawe, auch der Türke verachtet die Frau von Natur aus, der Schlosser verachtet sie nur dann, wenn sie unsauber ist oder fürs Pudern Geld nimmt. Dieses Geld kann man anderswo besser ausgeben, wo man länger etwas davon hat. Er hat es auch nicht nötig, für etwas, das so kurz ist wie das Abspritzen, auch noch zu bezahlen, denn schließlich hat die Frau bei ihm das Vergnügen, das sie bei anderen Männern nicht hätte.⁹⁶

A central driving force in the male need for women is revealed by Jelinek to be not love, but hate and contempt: 'Sie mögen die Frau nicht, nie würden sie sich freiwillig in ihre Gesellschaft begeben. Aber da sie nun einmal vorhanden ist, was mit ihr zu tun bietet sich auf den ersten Blick an?'⁹⁷ In particular, it appears, men cannot forgive women for rendering them needy, and, in their sexual exploitation of the 'weaker' sex, they exact revenge for this fundamental narcissistic wound. As this tendency is reinforced by power structures within society as a whole, it is impossible to disentangle cause and effect: the causes of male oppression of women are simultaneously personal and social. The asymmetrical power relations between men and women in the novel are epitomised in their sexual dealings with each other, a theme which is exemplified by the relationship which develops between the student, Klemmer, and his piano teacher, Erika.

2.7.1 Klemmer

In Erika's relationship with Klemmer, the discourses of both femininity and masculinity are brought into collision, and the complex workings of the power relations inherent in them are exposed. This bizarre courtship is characterised by the

⁹⁶ Jelinek, 1983, p. 133.

⁹⁷ Jelinek, 1983, p. 134.

tension which develops between Erika's elevated social and professional status on the one hand, and Klemmer's pretensions to patriarchal superiority on the other. Klemmer views the desired relationship with his teacher as an initiation, with minimal risk to himself, into relationships with women. Erika, as a mature, professional and gifted woman, is therefore viewed as a rather better than average testing ground:

Er wird bald die Anfängerstufe verlassen können, genau wie der Anfänger beim Autofahren sich zuerst ein gebrauchtes Kleinauto kauft und dann, beherrscht er es einmal, auf ein größeres und neues Modell umsteigt. Fräulein Erika besteht ganz aus Musik, und sie ist eigentlich noch gar nicht so alt, wertet der Schüler sein Versuchsmodell auf. Klemmer fängt sogar eine Stufe höher an, kein VW, sondern Opel Kadett.⁹⁸

However, the differences in the ages and social positions of the two future lovers produce feelings of inferiority in Klemmer, challenging his belief that a man is automatically dominant in heterosexual relationships. This provokes the student into repeated attempts to draw up a mental balance sheet which places him in a superior position to Erika within the power hierarchy. Klemmer's feelings of superiority rest in his belief that Erika is sexually inexperienced, and that she is alienated from her body. He approaches the task of seducing her with the conviction that he will not only be able to reconcile her with her sexuality, but will also retain a dominant position within the relationship: 'Erika ist Lehrerin und gleichzeitig noch ein Kind. Klemmer ist zwar Schüler, aber gleichzeitig der Erwachsene von ihnen beiden. Er hat erfaßt, daß er in dieser Situation der bestimmende Teil ist, nicht seine Lehrerin.'⁹⁹ Klemmer's vision of a relationship with Erika is predicated on his need to play the leading role by acting as her sexual mentor: 'Er wird ihr alles behutsam beibringen, was sie für die Liebe benötigt [...] Nun wird einmal er ihr Lehrer sein'.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Klemmer feels encouraged in his suit by the fact that Erika is approaching middle age, and is therefore unlikely to be overwhelmed by other offers:

Scheu hat Klemmer noch wegen des verflixten Altersunterschieds. Doch daß er ein Mann ist, gleichen die zehn Jahre, die Erika ihm voraus hat, leicht wieder aus. Außerdem nimmt weiblicher Wert mit

⁹⁸ Jelinek, 1983, pp. 65-66.

⁹⁹ Jelinek, 1983, p. 176.

¹⁰⁰ Jelinek, 1983, pp. 66-67.

zunehmenden Jahren und zunehmender Intelligenz stark ab. Der Techniker in Klemmer rechnet alles durch, und die Summe seiner Kalkulationen ergibt unter dem Strich, daß Erika gerade noch eine kleine Weile Zeit hat, bevor sie in die Grube wandert.¹⁰¹

Symbolic of Klemmer's, the emergent patriarch's need to dominate Erika and, by extension, all womanhood are his canoeing activities, which he pursues in his spare time. In cultural terms, as Chapter 1 sought to demonstrate, women are frequently associated with the unconscious mind, whereas men are viewed in terms of their direct relationship to consciousness. In the novel, in an ironic recapitulation of the frequent association within psychoanalytic theory of water with the unconscious and, by extension, women, water functions as a metaphor for 'das Rätsel Frau'.¹⁰² Appropriately, Klemmer's hobby is white water canoeing, which challenges him to tame and overcome the unruly female element:

Walter Klemmer fährt im Sommer und schon im Frühjahr auf Wildwassern Padelboot, sogar Tore umrundet er dabei. Er bezwingt ein Element, und Erika Kohut, seine Lehrerin, wird er auch noch unterwerfen.¹⁰³

Similarly, Klemmer dreams of taking Erika with him on one of his canoeing expeditions, believing that he would then be able to seize the territorial advantage. In musical situations, on other hand, Erika always has the upper hand:

[...] auf einem See, einem Fluß, wäre Klemmer im ureigensten Element. Er könnte Erikas hektische Bewegungen dirigieren und koordinieren. Hier auf der Klaviatur, in der Tonspur, ist wieder sie in ihrem Element [...]¹⁰⁴

However, at a later stage in the affair, shocked by Erika's letter, and her presumptuous insistence on Klemmer's compliance with her sado-masochistic fantasies, the student loses control of the watery female element. An attempted sexual encounter takes place at the Konservatorium in the somewhat ludicrous location of the cleaner's broom cupboard. On this occasion, in an attempted act of

¹⁰¹Jelinek, 1983, pp. 168-9.

¹⁰²Jelinek, 1983, p. 67. This is an ironic reference to Freud's famous description of 'Das Rätsel der Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* [1932] (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 111.

¹⁰³Jelinek, 1983, p. 67.

¹⁰⁴Jelinek, 1983, p. 161.

oral sex performed by the teacher on the student, he is unable to achieve an erection. His resulting humiliation is expressed in terms of a triumph of the female element over the male canoe/penis: 'Sein schlaffer Schwanz schwimmt, ein fühlloser Korke, auf ihren Gewässern.'¹⁰⁵ Initially, Klemmer's fantasy of sex with Erika was closely linked to his desire to dominate and manipulate her. She was to experience pleasure on his terms, and then, when he had tired of her, he would discard her: '[...] doch anschließend wird er sich lohnenderen Zielen und schwierigeren Aufgaben zuwenden, was das Rätsel Frau betrifft.'¹⁰⁶ Erika, however, attempts to play a dramatically different role in the scenario initiated by the student from that which he had imagined for her. Klemmer's final act of revenge, then, expressed in the rape scene which occurs towards the end of the novel, can be viewed as an attempt to reestablish the 'natural' order, in which the rational male exercises control over the chaotic female: 'Er sagt zu Erika: damit das gleich klar ist. Nichts Schlimmeres als eine Frau, welche die Schöpfung neu schreiben will.'¹⁰⁷

2.7.2 Erika

Erika's first reaction to Klemmer's approaches is a strong aversion to the idea of any physical contact with another human being, reflecting her rejection of body in favour of mind: 'Das Kreatürlich-Körperliche ist Erika ein Abscheu'.¹⁰⁸ Klemmer represents forcibly for Erika the memory of a life path which she was compelled to abandon in the interests of her musical training: 'Er ist eine schreckliche Herausforderung des Lebens an sie, Erika, und sie pflegt sich nur den Herausforderungen der werkgetreuen Interpretation zu stellen.'¹⁰⁹ The dissociation from her body also represents a rejection of Erika's femininity, which she has never been allowed to experience. In its place, she embodies a flimsy masculinity, inherited from her father, which is, however, ineffectual in the face of implacable maternal power. In accordance with her integration of the paternal phallus, Erika carries out a symbolic act of defloration, using her father's razor, 'die väterliche Allzweckklinge' to sever

¹⁰⁵Jelinek, 1983, p. 245.

¹⁰⁶Jelinek, 1983, p. 67.

¹⁰⁷Jelinek, 1983, p. 265.

¹⁰⁸Jelinek, 1983, p. 92.

¹⁰⁹Jelinek, 1983, p. 81.

Chapter 2
Elfriede Jelinek: *Die Klavierspielerin*

her hymen: 'Diese Klinge ist für IHR Fleisch bestimmt'.¹¹⁰ This act could be interpreted as an attempt to initiate herself into femininity, rather than masculinity. However, as Erika carries out the act herself, rather than allowing it to occur through the mechanisms of the Oedipus complex, which always implies a triangular relationship between parents and child, it suggests that she is still operating within a fantasy world of pre-Oedipal omnipotence. Although Erika succeeds in inflicting a much deeper cut on herself than the intended act of defloration demands, she experiences no pain or sensation from her body, 'Es war ihr eigener Körper, doch er ist ihr fürchterlich fremd'.¹¹¹ This alienation from the sensations of her own body, and, therefore, her lack of understanding of sexual arousal, motivates Erika's desire to witness sex scenes, either through her voyeurism, or by visiting cinemas where pornographic films are being shown. Here she demonstrates an aggressive desire to penetrate the mysteries of the body, and particularly the female body:

[...] weil sie, sich in die ineinander verkrallten Leute verbeißend, ergründen will, was nun dahintersteckt, das so sinnezermürend sein soll, daß jeder es tun oder sich wenigstens ansehen will. Ein Gang ins Leibesinnere erklärt das nur unvollkommen, läßt auch Zweifel zu. Man kann die Menschen ja nicht aufschlitzen, um den letzten Rest auch noch aus ihnen herauszubekommen.¹¹²

Her initial rejection of Klemmer, however, is superseded in Erika by curiosity, and, particularly, by the desire to have her repressed desires gratified. So, just as Klemmer views his teacher in terms of her possible uses in terms of his sexual development, so she casts him as the instrument of her carefully orchestrated sexual fantasies. The divergent needs and expectations of men and women in relationships is a dominant theme in the novel. Although this is not ascribed to natural causes, nonetheless, the novel's view of heterosexual relationships within the cultural context from which it originates is deeply pessimistic: 'Schüler und Lehrerin sind jeweils auf ihrem eigenen kleinen Liebesplaneten angeschweißt, auf Eisschollen, die abstoßende, unwirtliche Kontinente voneinander fortreiben'.¹¹³ Erika, therefore, still ensconced in her illusory phallic world, seeks to dominate the relationship by exploiting Klemmer's sexual desire for her. In a clandestine sex scene that occurs

¹¹⁰Jelinek, 1983, p. 88.

¹¹¹Jelinek, 1983, p. 89.

¹¹²Jelinek, 1983, p. 109.

¹¹³Jelinek, 1983, pp. 242-3.

between herself and the student in the girl's toilet in a local Volksschule, having resisted Klemmer's physical advances, Erika becomes an imperious dominatrix, bringing him to the point of orgasm through masturbation, only to withdraw prematurely from the encounter. In addition, Klemmer is forbidden by Erika to stimulate himself to orgasm, so that she can witness the detumescence of his erect penis, thereby confirming her own phallic status.

Following this encounter, Erika's behaviour towards Klemmer becomes increasingly imperious and rejecting. However, she finally permits him to approach her, but only on the understanding that he will first read a letter which she has written to him regarding her sexual wishes. The letter is a warped masterpiece, representing the culmination of sexual fantasies which Erika has nurtured over many years. In it she offers herself to Klemmer as a sex slave in an extended sado-masochistic fantasy, and appropriately enough, the reading of the letter takes place in her home, the site of her enslavement since childhood. The conditions for her submission to Klemmer are that he follows her prescriptions to the letter, and does not deviate from them in any detail. Erika's instructions all involve various forms of bondage, minutely described and employing chains, cords and leather straps which she has collected together. In addition to bondage, Erika requires Klemmer to inflict further physical pain on her immobilised body. To gruesome effect, Erika's directions are expressed in the text in tones so apparently naive that they would not be out of place in a children's story. In addition, well brought up as she is, she does not omit to express her requests politely, emphasising the collision between two apparently diametrically opposed worlds:

Erika zieht sich Klemmer als Strafe zu. Und zwar in der Art, daß er sie mit Genuß so derart fest, stramm, gründlich, ausgiebig, kunstgerecht, grausam, qualvoll, raffiniert mit den Stricken, die ich gesammelt habe, und auch den Lederriemen und sogar Ketten!, die ich ebenfalls habe, fesselt, ver- und zusammenschnürt und zusammenschnallt, wie er es nur kann. Er soll ihr seine Knie dabei in den Leib bohren, bitte sei so gut.¹¹⁴

The scene conjured up by the above description is reminiscent of earlier evocations of Erika's childhood and early musical training. The roots of the erotic fascination of bondage for Erika lie in her relationship with her mother, and the rigid discipline to which she had to conform in order to complete her musical education.

¹¹⁴Jelinek, 1983, pp. 216-7.

Klemmer's function for Erika as a continuation of the strictures she has already experienced in the relationship with her mother is clear:

Erika gibt brieflich an, sie wolle unter ihm ganz vergehen und ausgelöscht sein. Ihre gut eingebürgerten Gehorsamsleistungen bedürfen der Steigerung! Und eine Mutter ist nicht alles, wenn man auch nur jeweils eine hat. Sie ist und bleibt in erster Linie Mutter, doch ein Mann will darüber hinausgehende Leistung.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, Erika's letter also contains a sub-text which is far less transgressive than the grotesque scenarios which she paints: she hopes that her fantasies will remain fantasies, and that Klemmer will refuse to carry out any of her demands, swearing undying love for her. Erika's wish to be abused appears to be the inversion of her desire for love - she has, after all, only ever experienced the latter in combination with the former. Writing the letter, then, provides a catharsis for Erika, and she now desires of Klemmer, 'daß er, anstatt sie zu quälen, die Liebe in der österreichischen Norm an ihr tätigt.'¹¹⁶ It is, however, not surprising that Klemmer is not receptive to the sub-text of Erika's fantasies, and his reaction to her astonishing requests is increasingly contemptuous and hostile. His central objection to her plans is that, although she appears to offer complete submission to her lover, a situation which he had fervently desired until this point, by casting herself as the choreographer of their sexual activities, she places herself in a position of superiority to the man: 'Hat er recht verstanden, daß er dadurch, daß er ihr Herr wird, ihrer niemals Herr werden kann? Indem sie bestimmt, was er mit ihr tut, bleibt immer ein letzter Rest von ihr unergründlich.'¹¹⁷

Following her letter, naively, Erika now desires a 'normal' sexual relationship with Klemmer.¹¹⁸ However, his protest against the power games which she has played with him is to become impotent, thwarting the woman once again: 'Klemmer kann nicht, weil er muß. Das Müssen geht von dieser Frau in magnetischen Wellen aus.'

¹¹⁵Jelinek, 1983, p. 217.

¹¹⁶Jelinek, 1983, p. 232.

¹¹⁷Jelinek, 1983, p. 217.

¹¹⁸The double bind also operates in this unexpressed desire on the part of Erika. As Allyson Fiddler argues, Jelinek's view of sex conducted 'in der österreichischen Norm' is bleak. The implication of this, then, is that, even if Klemmer had read beneath the surface of her sado-masochistic fantasies to the 'normal' female desire which they conceal, she would scarcely have fared any better: 'Nowhere in Jelinek's entire *oeuvre* is sex presented as a mutually satisfying activity for both partners. It is generally violent and brutal, the women being forced in some way by the men'. Fiddler, 1994, p. 147.

Sie ist das Müssen schlechthin.¹¹⁹ Finally, his desire to master this impertinent woman explodes in the rape scene which has already been described: 'Sie versucht zu herrschen und nackte Gewalt nur hindert sie daran. Der Mann ist stärker. Erika geifert, daß er ja nur mit nackter Körperkraft herrschen könne, und wird dafür doppelt und dreifach geschlagen.'¹²⁰ Erika's attempt to convince Klemmer that the writing of a sexually explicit letter hardly warrants such harsh treatment is doomed to failure. It is very clear in this section of the novel that Erika is assaulted because she has dared to occupy a position in society which is reserved for men. Her phallic behaviour, in seeking to control and direct desire, is treated as a gross presumption, for which she must be punished.

Erika's error in her dealings with the male world was to put her sexual fantasies into writing. While she was safely enmeshed in her world of pornographic images, a tenuous balance obtained. However, Erika has failed to understand and comply with the rules of sexual encounter in her social context. To relate the letter back to Lacanian theory: to use or enter language for Lacan is equivalent to the Freudian Oedipus complex. It means that the subject accepts the 'name-of-the-father', the phallic law which structures and channels meaning.¹²¹ When Erika wrote her letter she, in effect, entered language by committing her fantasies to paper and articulating them in words. She is thereby, according to Lacan, compelled to accept the linguistic law, which corresponds to the patriarchal organisation of society.¹²² While she struggles to free herself from Klemmer's assault he reminds her of the words of his letter:

Der Mann schlägt leichthin und fragt ätzend, na wo ist er jetzt, dein Brief. Das hast du nun davon. Er prahlt, daß Fesselung nicht nötig war, wie sie jetzt sieht. Er fragt bei ihr an, ob der Brief jetzt helfen könne? Das ist alles, was du davon hast! Klemmer erläutert der Frau unter Leichtschlägen, daß sie es so und nicht anders gewollt habe. Erika bringt weinend dagegen vor, daß sie es so nicht gewollt habe, sondern anders. Dann mußt du dich das nächste Mal eben präziser ausdrücken, schlägt der Mann vor und auf sie ein.¹²³

¹¹⁹Jelinek, 1983, p. 244.

¹²⁰Jelinek, 1983, p. 270.

¹²¹Lacan [1966], 1989, p. 67.

¹²²Grosz, 1990, pp. 71-72.

¹²³Jelinek, 1983, p. 273.

Klemmer, like many rapists, is unable to distinguish fact from fantasy: he therefore mistakes Erika's fantasies for her authentic desires. However, it is made very clear that Erika's crime is at the linguistic level: she hasn't expressed herself correctly, she has failed to recognise who is in charge of language. Erika is, in fact, unable to express herself accurately, because the language available simply does not allow her to express her ambivalent desires, with the result that Klemmer is completely unable to access her unexpressed, but actually very conventional wishes with regard to him.¹²⁴ Jelinek, in an interview with the feminist publication *Emma* in 1984, addressed precisely the problem of women and language in the following quotation:

Die Geschichte der Frau ist eine Geschichte der Unterdrückung, und die Geschichte der Menschen als denkender Wesen ist die Geschichte vom endlosen Ausschlußverfahren gegen die Frau als Produzentin von Sinn. Realgeschichtlich wie ideengeschichtlich ist die Frau das, was draußen stehen bleibt. Es können hier nicht die Bedingungen untersucht werden, die das Subjekt Frau zum Sprechen bringen sollen, doch es müssen jene benannt werden, die das Subjekt Frau, dieses »Ding«, diesen Noch-Nicht-Menschen, schon vor seinem vielleicht möglichen Sprechen zu zerstören suchen, denn die »Herren« halten es offenkundig für sicherer, den Körper zu vernichten, bevor der Mund, das Gehirn eine eigene Sprache entwickeln könnten.¹²⁵

According to Jelinek, a woman who seeks to define herself as a speaking subject, and therefore a 'male' subject, has to be silenced. It is, therefore, doubly ironic that Erika is not, in fact, the author of her fantasies, she has gathered them from the pornographic media she has studied. Even as she speaks, then, Erika articulates not her own voice, but versions of stereotypical discourses relating to women. By writing the text of her fantasies, Erika has been forced to leave her specular world of images and confront the real world of female masochism.

Following her abortive attempt to stage a sexual encounter with Klemmer on her own terms, Erika turns to the root cause of her difficulties: her relationship with her

¹²⁴As Grosz describes this: 'What occurs in the case of the girl is less clear and explicable. In one sense, in so far as she speaks and says 'I', she too must take up a place as a subject of the symbolic; yet, in another, in so far as she is positioned as castrated, passive, and an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires, her position within the symbolic must be marginal or tenuous: when she speaks as an 'I' it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself. She speaks in a mode of masquerade, in imitation of the masculine, phallic subject; her 'I', then, ambiguously signifies her position as a (pale reflection of the) masculine subject; or it refers to a 'you', the (linguistic) counterpart of the masculine 'I.' In Grosz, 1990, p. 72.

¹²⁵Elfriede Jelinek [1984], 'Im Namen des Vaters', in Schwarzer, Alice (ed.), *Das Neue Emma-Buch* (Köln: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986), p. 241.

mother. Having remained imprisoned in a grotesque state of childlike innocence for most of her adult life, Erika now breaches the boundaries of the 'Ehebett', and lays claim to her mother's body :

Erika weidet das Fleisch der Mutter mit den Zähnen ab. Sie küßt und küßt. Sie küßt die Mutter wild. Die Mutter erklärt es zur Schweinerei, was die aus der Kontrolle geratenene Tochter mit der Mutter aufführt. Es nützt ihr nichts - so ist die Mutter seit Jahrzehnten nicht mehr geküßt worden, und es kommt noch mehr! Dann wird noch heftig weitergeküßt, bis, nach einem endlosen Kußtrommelwirbel, die Tochter erschöpft halb auf der Mutter liegenbleibt.¹²⁶

During this 'rape' scene, which prefigures Erika's actual rape by Klemmer, she experiences ironic closure in the unresolved story of her Oedipus complex. During the physical battle with her mother, Erika succeeds in lifting the latter's nightgown to gaze at a sight which she has never glimpsed: her mother's pubic hair. In this darkly comic recapitulation of Freudian theory, Erika, having glimpsed the 'Nichts' which constitutes her mother's genitals, can become aware that she also lacks a phallus and take up her place among the ranks of women:

Die Tochter hat für ganz kurze Dauer das bereits schütter gewordene dünne Schamhaar der Mutter betrachten können, das den fett gewordenen Mutterbauch unten verschloß. Das hat einen ungewohnten Anblick geboten. Die Mutter hat dieses Schamhaar bislang strengstens unter Verschluß gehalten. Die Tochter hat absichtlich während des Kampfes im Nachthemd der Mutter herumgestiert, damit sie dieses Haar endlich erblicken kann, von dem sie die ganze Zeit wußte: es mußte doch dasein! Die Beleuchtung war leider höchst mangelhaft. Erika hat ihre Mutter sinnvoll aufgedeckt, damit sie alles, aber auch alles betrachten kann.¹²⁷

In keeping with the linguistic focus of this section, the ravishing of her mother is an attempt to gain meaning for herself (Erika hat die Mutter *sinnvoll* aufgedeckt) by establishing the truth regarding her mother's anatomical lack, which in Lacanian terms corresponds to the acceptance of the phallic law governing language. However, even this resolution is ambivalent, as a result of the poor illumination of events. The novel, therefore, leaves unclear to what extent Erika's enlightenment has taken place, or whether she is still 'in the dark' regarding gender roles.

¹²⁶Jelinek, 1983, p. 236.

¹²⁷Jelinek, 1983, pp. 236-237.

2.8 Conclusion

2.8.1 *Die Klavierspielerin* in its literary context

The appearance of this work is to be situated within the context of the change which occurred from the late seventies onwards in the treatment of female subjectivity within German women's writing, a trend which, arguably, began with Jutta Heinrich's *Das Geschlecht der Gedanken*,¹²⁸ and Christa Reinig's *Entmannung*.¹²⁹ This new trend, which parallels the development of poststructuralist and postmodernist theories, is in sharp contrast to earlier, autobiographical attempts at literary *Selbstfindung*, adopting as it does a critical stance towards received notions of female subjectivity, and towards the genre of autobiography as a whole. As Ricarda Schmidt evaluates this development:

[...] der Begriff Subjektivität [beginnt] seine scheinbare Einfachheit und Verfügbarkeit zu verlieren, seine Attraktivität als feministische Opposition gegen patriarchalische Fremdbestimmung einzubüßen. Hatten viele Texte, die der neuen Subjektivität zugerechnet wurden, die Überwindung eines mit rückhaltloser Offenheit geschilderten fremdbestimmten Ichs zugunsten eines wahren Selbst autobiographisch aufgezeichnet, so wurden nun - vermittelt über die Rezeption des französischen Poststrukturalismus - dieser teleologische Gestus, das Denken in Gegensatzpaaren und Konzeption des Subjekts als einer widerspruchsfreien geschlossenen Ganzheit kritisiert als unfreiwillige Nachahmung phallokratischer Subjektkonstruktion. Überdies beginnt die Fetischisierung von Erfahrung als Gegensatz zu den entfremdenden Instanzen Theorie, Abstraktion, Ideologie nachzulassen. Erfahrung und deren literarischer Ausdruck werden nun als stets bereits kulturell vermittelt erkannt.¹³⁰

The novel *Die Klavierspielerin* can be deemed to be exemplary of this new, more transgressive, tendency in German women's writing. On the one hand the novel is, as the author herself describes it, 'sehr unverblümt autobiographisch',¹³¹ and it is therefore a direct successor to the 'radikale Subjektivität' of 1970s German women's writing. On the other hand, in *Die Klavierspielerin* the concept of autobiography

¹²⁸Jutta Heinrich, *Das Geschlecht der Gedanken* (München: Frauenoffensive, 1977).

¹²⁹Christa Reinig [1976], *Entmannung. Die Geschichte Ottos und seiner vier Frauen erzählt von Christa Reinig* (Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1977).

¹³⁰Schmidt, in Brinker-Gabler, 1988, p. 466. A further account of this period is to be found in Margaret Littler, 'Women Writers of the 1980s and 1990s', in *Postwar Women's Writing in German*, edited by Chris Weedon (Providence: Berghahn, 1997), pp. 101-129.

¹³¹Schmidt, 1988, in Brinker-Gabler, p. 467.

receives a radically new treatment which casts doubt on the whole notion of 'authenticity', as personal experience and fictional material are so closely merged in the novel that the reader is unable to disentangle the two elements.

In addition, Jelinek avoids the major pitfalls of female autobiographical writing, identified by Ulrike Strauch as 'die der Selbstlegitimation, der Selbstmystifizierung und -stilisierung',¹³² by inhibiting all possibilities for identification with the twisted inner world of the main character. Similarly, there is no attempt by Jelinek to initiate, on behalf of Erika, a search for her 'true' female self. Rather, she reveals, by means of her portrayal of the main character's sado-masochistic fantasies, the extent to which she has been subject to psychical disfigurement and distortion by the most cherished and revered values of the society in which she has grown up. In the figure of Erika Kohut, Jelinek also challenges a central feminist theme of the 1970s: namely, the belief in a superior female moral sense. In contrast, this female character appears to be almost completely amoral, and the only factors constraining her behaviour are fear of reprisals, or fear of her mother's anger.

2.8.2 Language

The previous section sought to demonstrate that the relationship between Klemmer and Erika produces a focus on language and its function in maintaining the gender hierarchy. In particular, the text draws attention to women's exclusion from language, and the consequences for a woman of directly expressing her desires. In the novel, Jelinek demonstrates an extensive knowledge of Freudian theory and, while there are no direct references to poststructuralist thought, its influence on the text is very marked. In this sense, the novel is a very clear example of the impact of the ideas of poststructuralism, to which Schmidt referred, on German women's writing in the late 1970s and 1980s.¹³³ While the subjectivity of the main character is the central thematic focus, the novel's target is the discourses which created Erika

¹³² Strauch, Ulrike, 'Antwort über Antwort auf die Frage: Gibt es eine weibliche Ästhetik?', in *Frauen sehen ihre Zeit*, Katalog zur Literatúrausstellung des Landesfrauenbeirates Rheinland-Pfalz (Mainz: Ministerium für Soziales, Gesundheit, Umwelt, 1984), p. 79.

¹³³ A detailed account of the assimilation of poststructuralist thought into German women's writing is to be found in: Margarete Brüggemann, 'Weiblichkeit im Spiel der Sprache. Über das Verhältnis von Psychoanalyse und »écriture féminine«', in Hiltrud Gnüg und Renate Möhrmann (eds), *Frauen-Literatur-Geschichte. Schreibende Frauen vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985), pp. 395-415.

Kohut, and which, by extension, are constitutive of female subjectivity as a whole. Through an examination of language, Jelinek aims to expose the invisible power networks which structure hegemonic discourses of subjectivity. In this respect, her position is reminiscent of the theories of Foucault, who emphasised both the discursive construction of the human subject, and the function of discourse in concealing and perpetuating societal power structures.¹³⁴

Similarly, the introduction to this chapter suggested that the power of the text to unsettle, and to enrage, might inhere within its use of language. The language of *Die Klavierspielerin*, and indeed, of Jelinek's work in general, is characterised particularly by its density. The text appears to inhibit all interpretation, concealing its interior from the reader's gaze and forcing him/her to engage with the textures and patterns of the language itself. As Jelinek describes this quality of her writing: 'meine Texte [sind] wie gepresste Heuballen, in die man nicht hinein kann.'¹³⁵ In addition, the cold and denunciatory narrative voice in the novel betrays no allegiances, treating all characters and themes with equal contempt, and apparently glorying in their misfortunes. The text, in its rendering of the familiar as strange and repellent, prohibits all subjective involvement. In the absence of narrative guidance, the reader becomes entangled in the linguistic strategies of the text, producing a sense of disorientation and, as the comments at the beginning of the chapter indicated, feelings of outrage.

This process is particularly evident in the scene of self-mutilation which was described earlier in this chapter. The subject matter alone is extremely transgressive. While the problem of self-mutilation is not infrequently described in popular and psychological literature, the mechanics of the act itself are rarely alluded to. No one, other than a fellow sufferer, would have any idea what self-mutilation actually involves, and what it feels like to engage in this activity. The text effectively holds the head of the reader by emphasising every detail and stage of this gruesome process, with the effect that s/he cannot look away and is compelled to participate in the act of mutilation:

Aus einem vielschichtigen Paket wickelt sie sorgfältig eine Rasierklinge heraus. Die trägt sie immer bei sich, wohin sie sich auch wendet. Die Klinge lacht wie der Bräutigam der Braut entgegen. SIE prüft vorsichtig

¹³⁴See Chapter 1.

¹³⁵Jelinek, Heinrich, Meyer, 1995, p. 74.

die Schneide, sie ist rasierklingenscharf. Dann drückt sie die Klinge mehrere Male tief in den Handrücken hinein, aber wieder nicht so tief, daß Sehnen verletzt würden. Es tut überhaupt nicht weh. Das Metall fräst sich hinein wie in Butter. Einen Augenblick klafft ein Sparkassen-Schlitz im vorher geschlossenen Gewebe, dann rast das mühsam gebändigte Blut hinter der Sperre hervor. Vier Schnitte sind es insgesamt. Dann ist es genug, sonst verblutet sie. Die Rasierklinge wird wieder abgewischt und verpackt. Die ganze Zeit rieselt und rinnt hellrotes Blut aus den Wunden heraus und verschmutzt alles auf seinem Lauf. Es rieselt warm und lautlos und nicht unangenehm. Es ist so stark flüssig. Es rinnt ohne Pause. Es färbt alles rot ein. Vier Schlitze aus denen es pausenlos herausquillt. Auf dem Fußboden und auch schon auf dem Bettzeug vereinigen sich die vier kleinen Bächlein zum reißenden Strom. Folge nach nur meinen Tränen, nimmst dich bald das Bächlein auf. Eine kleine Lache bildet sich. Und es rinnt immer weiter. Es rinnt und rinnt und rinnt und rinnt.¹³⁶

This episode is characterised by the cold and factual tone of the narration, which would be more suited to the description of a mechanical process than of the deliberate wounding of the body of a human being. The focus on mechanics evokes powerfully a picture of an individual who experiences no sensation whatsoever in her body (Es tut überhaupt nicht weh). The act of self-mutilation, whilst an expression of desperation on one level, is also calculated: Erika is careful not to sever tendons, which would destroy her piano-playing career, or to cut so deeply that she would run the risk of bleeding to death. To emphasise the violence of the act, the softness of flesh is ruthlessly juxtaposed to the uncompromising sharpness of the razor blade (Das Metall fräst sich hinein wie in Butter). The first half of this description is devoted to the act of cutting, whereas the second half focusses on the flow of blood from the wounds inflicted by Erika on her hand. The concentration on the flow of blood has a particularly transgressive impact which is related to the taboo status of body fluids as a whole, and of blood in particular. Here, blood is not merely mentioned, rather its fluidity is emphasised and re-emphasised through the repetition of the word 'rinnt'. An earlier section of this chapter also indicated the orgasmic quality of Erika's experience of this act of self-mutilation. Further, there are clear associations with the taboo status of menstrual blood in Western culture. In addition, heavy blood-flow produces fears of death, drawing links between sex, death and femininity.

¹³⁶Jelinek, 1983, p. 45.

However, in spite of the reader's close involvement with the events described, his/her questions are not answered. The reader does not discover why Erika is mutilating herself, what she feels as she does it, or what the tortured emotions which underlie the act of wounding are. The text prohibits this probing by not permitting the reader to gain access to the character's mind. The reader is, therefore, left with just the words on the page, but without the satisfaction of having received an explanation for those same words. S/he is then forced to examine the metaphor of flesh-cutting and bleeding in terms of the text as a whole. This reveals a close connection between the violence which was done to Erika's flesh (*Materie*) in the interests of developing her intellect and musical abilities (*Geist*), as expressed in metaphors associated with butchery and sculpture. Erika's self-mutilation, then, can be interpreted as a reenactment of the insensitive moulding of her body-self which was carried out in early childhood: her physical desires, as one graphic metaphor describes this, were cut away from her core in great chunks. Thus, while the act of self-mutilation and philosophical idealism might appear to be poles apart, the text brings these two ideas together. Erika's cutting of her own flesh is the price which she has had to pay in order to remain the bride of 'Geist', and the razor blade becomes synonymous with high art, an impression which is reinforced by the inappropriately elegiac mood which enters the description in the penultimate line of the quotation.

2.8.3 Dissonance, Deconstruction and Double Bind

The consideration of the scene of self-mutilation described above concludes by analysing the deliberate juxtaposition of apparently divergent ideas which is a recurrent device in *Die Klavierspielerin*. A further important example of this use of dissonance in the novel is the treatment of the theme of motherhood. In the figure of Erika's mother, Jelinek deconstructs and demystifies the myth of the sacred nature of motherhood, prevalent in Western culture as a whole, and particularly in Catholic countries. To darkly comic effect, military vocabulary is used to describe Erika's mother, and her henchwoman, Erika's grandmother:

Mutter und Oma, die Frauenbrigade, steht Gewehr bei Fuß, um sie vor dem männlichen Jäger, der draußen lauert, abzuschirmen und den Jäger

notfalls handgreiflich zu verwarnen. Die beiden älteren Frauen mit ihren zugewachsenen verdorrten Geschlechtsteilen werfen sich vor jeden Mann, damit er zu ihrem Kitz nicht eindringen kann. Dem Jungtier sollen nicht Liebe, nicht Lust etwas anhaben können. Die kieselsäurig erstarrten Schamlippen der beiden alten Frauen schnappen unter trockenem Rasseln wie die Zangen eines sterbenden Hirschkäfers, doch nichts gerät in ihre Fänge. So halten sie sich an das junge Fleisch ihrer Tochter und Enkelin und reißen es langsam in Stücke, während ihre Panzer vor dem jungen Blut wachen, damit kein anderer kommt und es vergiftet.¹³⁷

Maternal concern for the beloved offspring is depicted in the quotation in particularly sinister terms, posing a challenge to received notions of motherhood as virtuous and sainted, and it is clear that it is obsessive protectiveness, not male interference, which has produced the fragmented subject, Erika. Mothering, as it is practised in middle-class Austrian society, then, is depicted as a destructive, rather than a saintly, social force. The above quotation also draws attention to a related technique in Jelinek's writing: that of irreverence in the face of all taboos. This is particularly evident in the description of the withered and atrophied sexual organs of the two older women, with its clear suggestion that it is their own thwarted sexual desires, rather than their protective instincts, which drive them to prohibit Erika's sexual development. Similarly, in the mirror image of the technique described above, Erika's mother is described in terms of metaphors drawn from the domestic sphere, and particularly from the preparation of food. However, as these images describe the lust for power and control which is concealed beneath Erika's mother's veneer of care and concern, they are deprived of their usual homely associations:

Die Mutter schraubt, immer ohne vorherige Anmeldung, IHREN Deckel ab, fährt selbstbewußt mit der Hand oben hinein, wühlt und stöbert. Sie wirft alles durcheinander und legt nichts wieder an seinen angestammten Platz zurück. Sie holt etliches nach kurzer Wahl heraus, betrachtet es unter der Lupe und wirft es dann weg. Anderes wieder legt sich die Mutter zurecht und schrubbt es mit Bürste, Schwamm und Putztuch ab. Es wird dann energisch abgetrocknet und wieder hineingeschraubt. Wie ein Messer in eine Faschiermaschine.¹³⁸

Erika's mother, in all of her industrious domesticity, is revealed as both an instrument, and an agent, of the social milieu in which they are both located, mercilessly clipping and trimming her daughter into a form which that society deems

¹³⁷Jelinek, 1983, p. 35.

¹³⁸Jelinek, 1983, p. 24.

acceptable. This section also resonates with Austria's recent past in terms of its association with Hitler and National Socialism's *Mutterschaftsideologie*.

The narrative process of the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* is reminiscent of the technique of deconstruction expounded by Jacques Derrida, which was described in the first chapter of this thesis. According to Derrida, there is no escape from the framework of metaphysics, and its associated system of dualisms, which dominates Western thought. Deconstruction, then, necessitates a subversion of a thought system from within, effected by means of entering the discursive labyrinth and seeking out its weak points and inherent contradictions. As Brüggman summarises this process:

Derrida behauptet, es gebe keinen Bereich jenseits der Kultur, sondern man müsse die Metaphysik im Innern des Denkens selbst bekämpfen, indem man die logisch-kausal erscheinenden Behauptungen mit ihren eigenen Prämissen kritisch konfrontiert und ihnen so die Grenzen ihrer Wahrheitskonstruktionen zeigt.¹³⁹

This description is reminiscent of the technique employed by Jelinek in *Die Klavierspielerin*. The density of the text, and its prohibition of interpretation, forces the reader to engage with the linguistic surface of the novel and to participate in its discursive strategies.¹⁴⁰ Arguably, the aim of Jelinek's deconstructive efforts is not to produce any utopian counter-vision. Rather, it is, as Derrida also stated, to confront discourses with their own internal contradictions. This is achieved by exaggerating the premises of discourses to the point where they resemble a grotesque parody of themselves. Thus, Erika's mother is portrayed as a power-hungry and self-seeking tyrant, the talented and refined musician is revealed as a sado-masochistic voyeur, and the idealistic young student, Klemmer, conceals a rapist beneath his passion for his teacher. Austrian society as a whole is depicted as exploitative, consumed by its grandiose self-image, and drowning in a sea of consumer rubbish.

However, the purpose of these very negative portrayals is not to suggest that they represent 'reality' any more than more conventional representations. Rather, it is to highlight the absurdity of existing discourses of masculinity and femininity in a particular cultural and historical context, and to expose the power relations which they conceal. Erika's mother, then, is as much a victim of a society which allows women little real power and, particularly, no economic power, as her daughter. Erika

¹³⁹Brüggmann, in Gnüg and Möhrmann (eds), 1985, p. 401.

¹⁴⁰See Wright, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, Januar 1993, 53.

has to discover that a woman who does not conform to accepted standards of feminine behaviour will eventually be brought to book, even if the man in question is much younger than herself. Austrian society as a whole is confronted with its hubris, expressed as its deliberate ignorance of its own shadowy elements - the exploitation of women and guest workers, the pornographic industry, prostitution and associated acts of violence against women, child abuse, the maltreatment of the elderly and mentally unstable, and environmental pollution - in favour of its love affair with the intellect and classical music.

Wright argues that the metaphor of the double bind functions at a number of levels in the text *Die Klavierspielerin*: 'Die symbiotische Einheit von Mutter und Tochter wird unterminiert von einer Double-Bind-Beziehung, die sich auch in der generellen Strategie des Texts wiederfindet.'¹⁴¹ The relationship between Erika Kohut and her mother takes the form of a classical double bind situation. Erika as a child is continually torn between equally unacceptable alternatives: to obey her mother and eschew all forms of corporeal existence, or to disobey her mother and risk losing her all-important love, affection and support. This paradox is further reinforced by social and cultural messages promoting filial obedience and obligation. Ultimately, Erika's mother's view of the world becomes her own, and she appears to embrace the prison which has been created for her. On the other hand, the effects of the massive act of repression which Erika's capitulation has required of her are acted out through her unconventional leisure pursuits. Also, as Erika's mother's treatment of her daughter is both sanctioned and celebrated by society, her escape attempts take the form of activities which are not only clandestine in terms of the rules created by her mother, but also by society as a whole. Yet, even as Erika rebels against her mother's repressive regime, she capitulates to her injunction against any sexual experience involving her own body by confining her exploration to observations of the sexual activities of others.

The double bind motif, as has already been described, is also reflected at the linguistic level by Jelinek's textual practice, which can profoundly unsettle, disorientate and disturb the reader. Thus, although the reader is invited to witness disturbing scenes which inevitably arouse not only revulsion, but also curiosity, s/he is prohibited from ever penetrating the surface of those scenes, and uncovering their

¹⁴¹Wright, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, Januar 1993, 52.

'meaning'. Just as Erika Kohut prohibits anyone from entering into her intimate sphere, so the text remains coldly distant *vis-à-vis* the reader, to the extent that, as Janz argues, the psychoanalytic 'meaning' of the events portrayed is threaded through the textual surface of the novel, thereby discouraging interpretations of a psychological nature.¹⁴² Wright also elucidates the confusion which the narrative strategies of the text produce in the reader as an absence of a consistent perspective from which to view the text. Once again, this is a classical feature of a double bind relationship in which the victim, usually a child, loses the ability to grasp reality:

Denn während der Text die Pathologie seiner Figuren eindringlich zur Schau stellt, behindern seine Intertextualität und die ungewisse Erzählposition immer wieder die Festlegung des Standpunkts der Figur oder der Autorin, mit deren Hilfe der Leser auch seinen eigenen Fixpunkt finden könnte. Auf diese Weise ist auch er in eine Double-Bind-Beziehung verstrickt, genarrt von den Strategien des Textes, unfähig, einen verlässlichen Überblick zu gewinnen.¹⁴³

Equally, Jelinek's deconstructive practice is applied to all aspects of the social and cultural sphere, permitting no refuge or place of safety for the reader. Thus, while many texts by women writers enable female readers to identify with the characters or situations depicted, this is rarely the case in Jelinek's work - it is unlikely that anyone would wish to identify with the monstrous Erika. The world portrayed by the text is, ultimately, the real world, at least to an Austrian reader, and yet its surreal depiction renders it uniquely repellent. However, no alternative vision of social life is supplied by the text, and its ending, as is so frequently the case in Jelinek's work, suggests that any attempts to escape from discursive prisons only result in the fugitive becoming even further enmeshed. By avoiding any temptation to relieve the reader's anxiety by providing a refuge from the relentless operations of the text, s/he can either reject the text completely, or try to unravel some of its convoluted messages. The result of the latter choice, however, as Flax argues, is the awareness of a reality which appears 'even more unstable, complex and disorderly than it does now'.¹⁴⁴ In these terms, then, it is certainly appropriate to describe Jelinek as 'an enemy of civilisation'.¹⁴⁵ In

¹⁴²Janz, 1995, p. 72.

¹⁴³Wright, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, Januar 1993, 52.

¹⁴⁴See Chapter 1, 1.5.

¹⁴⁵As previous footnote.

this sense, 'double bind' acquires the more dynamic meaning suggested by the conclusions to Chapter 1.

In terms of female subjectivity, the outlook is equally bleak. Femininity is constructed in the text as a complex of discourses of restriction and constriction. Thus, the girls who form an admiring cluster around Erika's cousin, 'Burschi', are dependent on male attention and approval for their own sense of self-worth, fantasising as they do about becoming the wife of a future doctor, and the social status and material advantages that this would bring. The idea that a woman might achieve success and status in her own right does not occur to them. Similarly, while Erika's upbringing prohibits her from developing some areas of her femininity, her subjugation to her mother is merely an exaggerated version of the stereotypical mother/daughter bond, and it is to be located within conventional discourses of femininity. Erika's mother, also, in spite of her domination of the family, is depicted as socially disempowered: in her retirement she has only a small pension, and she is therefore dependent on her daughter's income, a circumstance which underlies her imperious control of Erika's spending. Her daughter's marriage would represent a genuine economic disaster for her mother, as she would be left without visible means of support. Further, although aspects of Erika's upbringing could have been experienced by any child whose parents aspired to producing a musical genius, the form it takes, as has already been argued in this chapter, is peculiarly feminine. Thus, Erika's fascination with bondage does not merely represent the exigencies of a professional musical training, it is also a grotesque metaphor for the limitations of femininity, and the masochistic pleasure derived from women in allowing themselves to be subjugated to its dictates. When Erika asks Klemmer to become her master, she is therefore also asking him to initiate her into the mysteries of 'full' adult femininity.

Rather than revealing the path towards a truly fulfilled womanhood, Jelinek depicts the impossibility for a woman of constructing any kind of viable subjectivity¹⁴⁶ in the society which she describes. To conform to the norm involves subjugation to the dictates and requirements of men, usually in the interests of economic security. On the other hand, to live outside of the norms of femininity produces extreme isolation, and the constant danger of violent suppression of the

¹⁴⁶Or 'core self', to use Flax's terminology. See Chapter 1.

'rebellious woman'. In addition, the text suggests that the children of middle-class intellectuals are forced to live out the cultural split between mind and body in a particularly extreme form and, where this is combined with the restrictive discourses of femininity, the consequences for the individual child are particularly disastrous. These dilemmas are powerfully evocative of the 'double bind' metaphor which forms part of the title of this thesis. Thus, with strong echoes of Derrida, Jelinek attacks the rigidity of dualistic thinking, and the violence which it does to female (and male) individuals living in a society structured by its premises. While no alternative is suggested, the novel can be read as a clear plea for a new conception of the subject which would avoid the need for painful and artificial splitting. These themes are further developed in the other two works by Jelinek to be considered in the following chapter.

3.1 *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*

The play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*¹ was first performed on 12th February 1987 at the Schauspiel Bonn. The play echoes the themes addressed in the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* in its focus on stereotypical constructions of male and female subjectivity. These are exaggerated in the play to the point of absurdity: for example: one of the two main female characters, Emily, described in the *dramatis personae* as both 'Krankenschwester und Vampir', appears clothed in flowing, feminine garments, bearing two bloodstained stakes through her heart, evoking a multivalent image of seductive and yielding femininity, combined with that of the omnipotent and terrifying pre-Oedipal mother. As this example suggests, the play makes extensive use of grotesque and surrealistic elements. Thus, Emily, who is employed as a nurse in Dr Heidkliff's surgery, quenches her thirst while at work by consuming his bottled blood supplies through a straw and, at one point in the play, she enjoins her employer to use his expertise as a dentist to make her vampire's teeth retractable. Similarly, in the final scene of the play, Emily and her lover, Carmilla, in an image of merged bliss, appear as a huge woman with two heads and a single body. In an equally surrealistic scene, Carmilla is subjected to a pelvic examination in which her organs, as represented by inflatable animals, are 'removed' from her body and thrown casually onto the stage. Even more shockingly, after her own death and conversion to vampire status, Carmilla systematically kills and dismembers her own children, storing them in two fridges marked 'Familie'.

This use of the grotesque is a familiar technique employed by Jelinek, as the previous chapter argued. However, the crucial difference between this work and the other two texts by the same writer to be considered in this thesis is the performative aspect. Jelinek is very clear that her intentions in writing for the theatre are not conventional: 'Ich will keine fremden Leute vor den Zuschauern zum Leben erwecken. Ich weiß auch nicht, aber ich will keinen sakralen Geschmack von göttlichem zum Leben erwecken auf der Bühne haben. Ich will kein Theater.'² Nonetheless, in spite of this assertion on the part of Jelinek, the play employs

¹ Elfriede Jelinek, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, edited and with an afterword by Regine Friedrich (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1987).

² Elfriede Jelinek, 'Ich möchte seicht sein', in Christa Gürtler, *Gegen den schönen Schein: Texte zu Elfriede Jelinek* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1990), p. 157.

strikingly theatrical effects, as the previous paragraph has demonstrated. The stage directions to the play indicate that the stage should be divided into two parts, of which one half is occupied by a doctor's practice, symbolised by a chair which represents a hybrid of that used by both gynaecologists and dentists. The other side of the stage takes the form of a wild heath land inspired by the novel *Wuthering Heights*, whose creator and main male character both appear in Jelinek's play.³ The binary set, therefore, stages the very structure of Western culture, criticised by Derrida. One side represents male-dominated culture, in the form of medical science, personified by Dr Heidkliff who, appropriately enough, is qualified to correct both oral and gynaecological abnormalities in his female patients, symbolising male control of both female speech and sexuality. The heath land is clearly intended to represent wild and untamed nature, although Dr Heidkliff's confident use of it for his sporting pursuits suggests that even this is subject to male cultural control. In the play, the stereotypical association between female subjectivity and nature forms a central target for deconstruction, an impression which is reinforced by the structure of the stage set.

Ulrike Haß argues that Jelinek's plays make use of the stage as a '*Schauplatz* [...] als traditionellen Ort des ›schönen Scheins‹, dem ein anderer Schein entgegengesetzt werden soll.'⁴ The visual aspect, according to Haß, is crucial to Jelinek's dramatic technique. The actors, according to Jelinek's definition of theatre, serve as carriers for the language of the play; they are not otherwise required to provide any interpretation of their 'roles':

Wer kann schon sagen, welche Figuren im Theater ein Sprechen vollziehen sollen? Ich lasse beliebig viele gegeneinander auftreten, aber wer ist wer? Ich kenn diese Leute ja nicht! Jeder kann ein anderer sein und von einem Dritten dargestellt werden, der mit einem Vierten identisch ist, ohne daß es jemandem auffiele.⁵

The spectator is not required to scrutinise the actors for clues to their motivation; there is no inner world of meaning to be uncovered or revealed, as that which is

³ Emily is named after the author of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë, and Dr Heidkliff is the namesake of the character Heathcliff, who represents an example of rugged and tortured masculinity.

⁴ Ulrike Haß, 'Grausige Bilder. Große Musik: Zu den Theaterstücken Elfriede Jelineks', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, *Elfriede Jelinek* (Munich: edition text + kritik, Januar 1993), 21.

⁵ Jelinek, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 158.

normally hidden is present on the visual and textual surfaces of the play. The only evidence available to the spectator is in the actual language used, or in the physical appearance of the participants. Jelinek likens her use of actors to that of models in a 'Modeschau': they embody no concealed meanings or sub-texts which can be deduced from the interpretations of their roles. Just as the clothes in a fashion show could be presented independently of their models, so the words of the play can exist independently of the actors.⁶ This reduces the actors to the function of 'Schaubjekte' within the 'Schauplatz', immediately also casting the spectator in the more transgressive role of voyeur.⁷ At the same time, as Ingeborg Hoesterey argues, the transgressive nature of the images presented provokes and unsettles the spectator, evoking repressed images from the personal unconscious and, by extension, from the social and cultural 'unconscious'.⁸

For Haß there is a strong connection in Jelinek's use of the physical space provided by the stage with the impossibility for female subjects in acquiring any sense of a 'true' or autonomous identity, saturated as femininity is with received cultural stereotypes and images.⁹ In presenting these ideas in dramatic form, Jelinek focusses attention on the problem of 'Sichtbarkeit'; her aim, as in all her works, is to expose concealed structures by rendering the familiar unfamiliar. In the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* she therefore seeks to make visible the cultural invisibility of women by casting her two main characters as vampires. This is further reinforced in the play, according to Haß's analysis, by the function of the metaphor of the mirror. A vampire is a creature who has no mirror reflection and is in this respect also reminiscent of the female subject who has no autonomous cultural reflection. Any attempt to convey a woman's reflection, then, can only consist of distortions - 'Falscher Spiegel eines schon Falschen',¹⁰ as Marlies Janz describes this - or of absolute emptiness as the vampire, Emily, reminds Dr Heidkliff in her statement: 'In

⁶ Jelinek, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 158.

⁷ Haß, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, Januar 1993, 21-22.

⁸ Ingeborg Hoesterey, 'A Feminist "Theatre of Cruelty"', in Jorun B. Johns and Katherine Arens, *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1994), p.154. This effect in Jelinek's textual practice has already been discussed with reference to the novel *Die Klavierspielerin*.

⁹ Haß, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, Januar 1993, 22.

¹⁰ Marlies Janz, 'Falsche Spiegel: Über die Umkehrung als Verfahren bei Elfriede Jelinek', in Christa Gürtler, *Gegen den schönen Schein: Texte zu Elfriede Jelinek* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1990), p. 86.

einem Spiegel sehe ich gar nichts.¹¹ This metaphor, according to Haß, is also embodied in Jelinek's use of 'die Bühne als leerer Spiegel'.¹² This use of the stage, she argues, is more akin to a flat screen than a three-dimensional space onto which images are projected and in front of which textual constructions are paraded. The spectator has no possibilities for identification with the action of the play, or its characters. As a result, the actors have a tendency to disappear behind their speeches, which are frequently delivered in the form of lengthy monologues. The disjointed nature of the speeches reinforces the impression of fragmentation which characterises the language of the play: the characters do not produce cohesive and fluent sentences; rather, their staccato, cliché-ridden speech emphasises the extent to which they are themselves merely constructs of dominant discourses. The apparent intention of this performance is to draw attention to its own artifice. Thus, at the end of the play, the spectators are reminded in no uncertain terms of the illusory nature of theatre by subjecting them to a process of *disillusionment* before they have even left their seats:

Auf Wiedersehn. Jetztat bitte weggehen. Licht aufdrehen und in Helligkeit weggehn! Bald! Sofort! Hinauslaufen! Licht im Raum aufdrehn und hinaus! Gleich raus! Gleich wenn jetzten Helligkeit hinausgehen! Weg! Verschwinden! Abtauchen! Verpissen! Abschäumen! Licht an und fort! Presto weg! Noch immer nicht hell? Noch immer da? Dann jetzt sofort hell machen! Jetzt Licht und sofort fort bitte! Jetzt! Jetzt Licht und ab! Jetzt!¹³

3.2 Cultural absence: the female vampire

The novel *Die Klavierspielerin* addresses the difficulty faced by women in maintaining a position as autonomous speaking subjects within its Austrian cultural context. When the main character, Erika Kohut, attempts to articulate her desire within the framework provided by existing discourses of sexuality, it provokes a brutal suppression on the part of her intended lover. According to Jelinek's portrayal, a woman's cultural presence can only be tolerated as long as she adopts a

¹¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 39.

¹² Haß, in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, Januar 1993, 28.

¹³ Jelinek, 1987, p.76. Janz draws attention to the allusion to Goethe in this quotation, suggesting that, 'die Männerfiguren des Stücks [...] besiegeln das Ende des klassischen Humanismus und wohl auch seines Theaters', Janz, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 94.

position of shadowy and silent marginality. The marginalisation of female voices has formed a recurrent topic for feminist theorists and critics, of whom Simone de Beauvoir is the most prominent. It is a central dilemma for women's writing, as Silvia Bovenschen argues:

So scheint zum Beispiel der literarische Diskurs einer der wenigen zu sein, in denen das Weibliche stets eine auffällige und offensichtliche Rolle gespielt hat. Dieser erste Eindruck bestätigt sich jedoch bei genauerer Prüfung nur teilweise. Es ist wiederum nur *ein* Moment des Literarischen, in dem das Weibliche diese Bedeutung erlangen konnte: nur in der Fiktion, als Ergebnis des Phantasierens, des Imaginierens, *als Thema* ist es üppig und vielfältig präsentiert worden; als Thema war es eine schier unerschöpfliche Quelle künstlerischer Kreativität; als Thema hat es eine große literarische Tradition. Die Geschichte der Bilder, der Entwürfe, der metaphorischen Ausstattungen des Weiblichen ist ebenso materialreich, wie die Geschichte der realen Frauen arm an überlieferten Fakten ist.¹⁴

The marginal location of the female subject within culture is structured by a central paradox: although denied her own voice, she is nonetheless continuously bombarded with images of femininity. Western culture is replete with descriptions, depictions and portrayals of women, demonstrating the almost insatiable fascination on the part of the male artist for the female subject.¹⁵ As a result of their historical exclusion from cultural agency, then, women who wish to become culturally 'active' are confronted not only by the pantheon of received images of female experience, but also by the awareness that the raw material and tools of cultural production are not their own.

This difficulty was addressed by the author of one of the first and best-known texts by a woman to appear in Germany in the context of the Women's Movement: Verena Stefan's *Häutungen*.¹⁶ In her introduction to the text, Stefan articulates the technical and theoretical difficulties faced by a female writer in negotiating unfamiliar literary terrain: 'Beim schreiben dieses buches, dessen inhalt hierzulande überfällig ist, bin ich wort um wort und begriff um begriff an der vorhandenen

¹⁴Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit: Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979), p. 11.

¹⁵See Chapter 1.

¹⁶See also Jenny Lanyon, 'The De(con)struction of Female Subjectivity in Elfriede Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen*', in *Centre Stage: Contemporary Drama in Austria*, edited and with an introduction by Frank Finlay and Ralf Jeutter (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 74-75.

sprache angeeckt.¹⁷ According to Stefan's analysis, the difficulties coalesce around the woman writer's use of language.¹⁸ On the one hand, she has no choice but to make use of the linguistic system in which she is located; on the other hand, she is locked into a continuous confrontation with sexism, as it is inscribed in language itself. Stefan cites as a central example of her argument the difficulty faced by women writers in finding a language to describe female sexuality, rejecting most existing terms as degrading and exploitative. She finds no refuge in the discourses of left-wing politics which, she argues, merely reproduce patterns of the exploitation and degradation of women. Stefan therefore concludes that there is no language available for the autonomous description of female bodily experience:

Die sprache versagt, sobald ich über neue erfahrungen berichten will. angeblich neue erfahrungen, die im geläufigen jargon wiedergegeben werden, können nicht wirklich neu sein. artikel und bücher, die zum thema sexualität verfasst werden, ohne dass das problem sprache behandelt wird, taugen nichts. sie erhalten den gegenwärtigen zustand.¹⁹

Her solution to this dilemma is to attempt to create her own vocabulary for the description of female bodily and sexual experience, drawing on natural imagery. Her text, however, as has been clearly documented by many critics,²⁰ fails to avoid all of the pitfalls inherent in language. Whilst rejecting the misogyny of sexual terminology of the seventies, she unwittingly reproduces the dualism which aligns women with nature, and men with the domain of culture. While clearly flawed, though, Stefan's first work has been somewhat unfairly maligned, representing as it does one of the first attempts by a woman writer to reveal the patterns of exploitation which structure language. Her approach, moreover, is very relevant to

¹⁷ Verena Stefan, *Häutungen* (München: Verlag Frauenoffensive: 1975), p. 3.

¹⁸ This is also reminiscent of Lacan's theory of the patriarchal structure of language (see previous chapter).

¹⁹ *Häutungen*, p. 3.

²⁰ The following quotation is indicative of the tenor of the many critical appraisals of Stefan's text: 'Frau hat, darf sie Verena Stefan's »Häutungen« glauben, wenig Aussicht auf Veränderung. Schon in »Brehms Tierleben« könnte sie erfahren, daß bei dem Prozeß der Häutung zwar eine neuere und bessere, doch bis ins Detail gleiche Haut nachwächst. Die Oberfläche mag in Verenas Fall neu sein, kurze Haare statt langer, Bauernhof statt Großstadt, Frau statt Mann, aber immer noch gilt die gleiche Biologie: die der Frau als Mädchen, Blondine, Mutter und Natur, dumm und unsicher ihren Emotionen ausgeliefert, von pflanzenhafter Passivität und Trägheit. Das Bild, das man und nun auch frau von frau machen, ist fast deckungsgleich. Brigitte Classen und Gabriele Goettle, '»Häutungen« - eine Verwechslung von Anemone und Amazone', in Gabriele Dietze, *Die Überwindung der Sprachlosigkeit: Texte aus der neuen Frauenbewegung* (Frankfurt: Sammlung Luchterhand, 1979), p. 105.

Jelinek's work, which accords a central position to language, and which apprehends social structures as they are articulated through language.

The quotation which precedes the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, and which was referred to in the previous chapter, engages with precisely the problem of female absence and visibility within culture, thereby introducing the central theme of the play.²¹ The quotation addresses particularly the question of female creativity, suggesting that it is a direct result of the fascination exerted by the female subject herself that her work cannot be viewed separately from her life. Its argument, however, can be applied to female subjectivity in general. Sigrid Weigel elucidates the complex cultural position of women as an uneasy tension between marginality and inclusion:

Die Frauen werden in ihren Eigenschaften, Verhaltensweisen etc. stets in Bezug auf die Männer definiert. In der männlichen Ordnung hat die Frau gelernt, sich selbst als untergeordnet, uneigentlich und unvollkommen zu betrachten. Da die kulturelle Ordnung von Männern regiert wird, aber die Frauen ihr dennoch angehören, benutzen auch diese die Normen, deren Objekt sie selbst sind. D.h. Die Frau in der männlichen Ordnung ist zugleich *beteiligt und ausgegrenzt*.²²

Weigel emphasises women's complicity in their own cultural marginalisation: having no access to an autonomous subjectivity, they are obliged to make the optimum use of the discursive possibilities available to them. However, this same obligation serves to reinforce their marginalisation, as stereotypical images of women emphasise their submission to patriarchal norms and values which prohibit inclusion. When a woman attempts to transcend her object status and function as a speaking subject in her own right, she becomes enmeshed in a complex dance in which she is compelled to occupy both subject and object positions simultaneously:

Wenn diese [Frauen] versuchen, das, was aus den herrschenden Redeweisen und Überlieferungen ausgeschlossen ist, zu beschreiben, dann müssen sie den Ort, von dem aus gesprochen wird, einnehmen; und dort sind sie immer schon die *Beschriebenen*. Die Stimme der Medusa bzw. die Sprache der Frauen ist daher nichts einfach Gegebenes

²¹ See Chapter 2.

²² Sigrid Weigel, 'Der schielende Blick: Thesen zur Geschichte weiblicher Schreibpraxis' in Inge Stephan and Sigrid Weigel, *Die verborgene Frau: Sechs Beiträge zu einer feministischen Literaturwissenschaft*, 3. Auflage (Hamburg und Berlin: Argument, 1988), p. 85.

oder zu Konstruierendes, sondern eine Bewegung, der ein ständiger Perspektivwechsel einhergeht [...]²³

Jelinek dramatises the problem identified by Weigel by casting her two main female characters as vampires, creatures which are capable of both absence and visibility. Conventionally, vampires only appear at night, a time which, in cultural terms, is associated with the female (as opposed to solid 'masculine' daytime). There is, therefore, a parallel between the vampire's exclusion from the daylight world, and female exclusion from the 'male' domain of cultural production. Similarly, one of the most striking characteristics of the vampire figure, as opposed to ghosts and other wraithlike figures, is its ability to participate in human society, assuming what appears to be a solid physical form. At other times, it can disappear at will, defying the constraints of corporeality. This is strongly evocative of the marginal position which women are forced to adopt within culture, both excluded and accorded a central and exalted position.

The figure of the vampire is also an embodiment of transgression. Oliver Claes, analysing the history of the vampire motif in literature of the 18th and 19th centuries, suggests that, particularly where the figure of a female vampire occurs, this is frequently associated with sexual transgression.²⁴ This is particularly true of one of Jelinek's sources, the vampire story *Carmilla*, by Sheridan Le Fanu, which gives its name to one of the two main female characters in the play.²⁵ In Le Fanu's story, the vampire figure, Carmilla, does not merely wish to suck her victim, the virginal Laura's, blood, she also desires union with her in a passionate friendship which has strong lesbian overtones.²⁶ This transgressive relationship provokes a brutal response on the part of the male figures in the story, who frame their revenge in terms of the defence of an innocent virgin who is subject to the predations of the debauched and unnatural Carmilla.²⁷ Significantly, also, Carmilla is an independent woman: she does not require the protection of men and therefore stands outside the norms and constraints applicable to other women.²⁸ As Claes argues: 'Eine der

²³ Sigrid Weigel, *Die Stimme der Medusa: Schreibweisen in der Gegenwartsliteratur von Frauen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), p. 8.

²⁴ Oliver Claes, *Fremde. Vampire. Sexualität, Tod und Kunst bei Elfriede Jelinek und Adolf Muschg* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 1994), pp. 27-28.

²⁵ Sheridan Le Fanu, *Carmilla*, in *In a Glass Darkly*, edited and with an introduction by Robert Tracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Robert Tracy, introduction to *In a Glass Darkly* (see above), p. xix.

²⁷ Le Fanu, 1993, pp. 315-316.

²⁸ See Lanyon, in Finlay and Jeutter (eds.), 1999, p. 84.

heterosexuellen Norm sich entziehende Form der Sexualität wird in Gestalt des weiblichen Vampirs als zerstörerische Kraft und Gefahr charakterisiert, die von den Männern beseitigt werden muß.²⁹ The figure of the vampire, then, can be viewed as embodying both the abject aspects of female social and cultural status, and its more defiant and transgressive counterpart: the rebellious feminist.

The central female vampire in the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* is Emily, described in the *dramatis personae* as 'Krankenschwester und Vampir'.³⁰ She personifies fear of the liberated, castrating woman, as exemplified by her lust for blood, which she satisfies by drinking the blood supplies in her employer, Dr Heidkliff's, surgery. In Freudian terms, Emily occupies a phallic position on the spectrum of femininity; that is, her pre-Oedipal desire for her mother's body has not been modified by the mechanisms of the Oedipus complex. As Emily expresses this when declaring her love for the other female character in the play, Carmilla: 'Ich gebäre nicht. Ich begehre dich.'³¹ Thus, her desire to possess the phallus has not been transmuted into the wish to give birth to a baby which, for Freud, represented the 'normal' resolution of the Oedipal complex for a woman.³² This is expressed succinctly by Emily herself in terms of her pun derived from the words 'begehren' and 'gebären'. Emily's lesbianism is further evidence of her apparent autonomy from the male of the species: she does not need him either for procreation, or to satisfy her desire. Her disparagement of the 'father' also extends to the archetypal father, God, and her speech is punctuated by blasphemous references to the Bible and the sacrament: 'Ich bin der Anfang und das Ende. Von dem ich esse, der wird ewig leben.'³³ In making this outrageous statement, Emily parodies the hubris of the (male) Cartesian subject who posits his own mind as the locus of a God-given rationality and truth.

Emily is also a writer, modelled on the original creator of Heathcliff, Emily Brontë, a further measure of her cultural independence, and she asserts her ability to

²⁹ Claes, 1994, p. 33.

³⁰ Jelinek, 1987, p. 5.

³¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 21.

³² 'Die weibliche Situation ist aber erst hergestellt, wenn sich der Wunsch nach dem Penis durch den nach dem Kind ersetzt, das Kind also nach alter symbolischer Äquivalenz an die Stelle des Penis tritt.' Sigmund Freud [1932], 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 126.

³³ Jelinek, 1987, p. 22.

navigate the cultural rapids, occupying a position which is both inside and outside of language:

Ich spreche in der Kunst. Ich bin international. Ich bin nicht abstrakt, dennoch tauche ich an dem einen und sofort an dem anderen Ort auf. Dann wieder bin ich absolut fort.³⁴

As a female artist, Emily presents a defiant and provocative version of femininity, expressed in terms of frequent repudiations of masculine phallic authority: 'Aus dir wächst ja etwas heraus, das Mutter Natur unmöglich in dieser Form so gemeint haben kann.'³⁵ Nonetheless, her cultural confidence is not invulnerable and, in an ironic recasting of the Freudian concept of penis envy, she seeks to enhance her phallic properties by asking Dr Heidkliff (Facharzt für Kiefer- und Frauenheilkunde) to make her vampire's teeth both extendable and retractable:

Ich wünsche mir diese beiden wesentlichen Zähne ausfahrbar gemacht! Sie sollen hervorlugen und wieder verschwinden können. Wie ich ja auch. Ich brauche einen ähnlichen Apparat wie ihr Männer ihn habt! Ich möchte imponieren können. Ich möchte Lust vorzeigen können! Ich habe Säfte, aber die gelten im Alltag wenig. Ich möchte auch nach einem Prinzip funktionieren dürfen!³⁶

Emily accords her vampirism phallic status, equating her ability to appear and disappear at will with the mechanism of the phallus. However, the alteration to her teeth would further consolidate her assumed phallic capacities by enabling her to express her desire openly, a function normally available to men, but not to women. By espousing the phallic 'principle' Emily seeks to occupy the subject position alongside the male when she deems it appropriate. She will no longer be forced to maintain a marginalised position within culture, it will be within her conscious control to make herself visible or invisible when necessary. Her phallicism, though, has the advantage that she can retreat into shadowy female marginality when she chooses, the male has no choice but to retain his subject status.

Carmilla, on the other hand, represents Emily's more conventional counterpart. Until her meeting with Emily, which follows her death during the birth of her sixth child, she is content to exist in the shadow of her husband, Benno Hundekoffer. In

³⁴ Jelinek, 1987, p. 22.

³⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 7.

³⁶ Jelinek, 1987, p. 33.

comparison with Emily, Carmilla has little sense of self, and no identity outside of her role as wife and mother: 'Ich bin gottlos. Ich bin eine Dilettantin des Existierens. Ein Wunder, daß ich spreche. Ich bin restlos gar nichts.'³⁷ Devoid of any substantiality of her own, in the first scene of the play, Benno describes her as little more than a container for his offspring: 'An dir ist nichts. Aber in dir entsteht vieles.'³⁸ Similarly, Carmilla views her pregnancy as Benno's achievement, rather than her own: 'Ich werde an dich denken, wenn das Kind herauskommt. Ich danke dir, daß du mich erneut vollgefüllt hast.'³⁹ Carmilla questions her right to bestow life on a human being as, unlike her husband, she has not been created in the image of God: 'Ich bin kein geschickter Kunstgriff vom Herrn Gott. Er ist so einfältig, das Wunder der Schöpfung ausgerechnet jemandem wie mir anzuvertrauen.'⁴⁰ The child's future human appearance, then, must be a function of Benno's influence on the procreative process, not her own: 'Ich hoffe, du hast dir gestattet, diesem Kind ein menschliches Bild zu geben? Ich meine nur. Damit man es später, wo gewünscht, als Mensch erkennen kann.'⁴¹ The final link in the procreative chain, according to Carmilla, is the male gynaecologist, Dr Heidkliff, who continues and completes the process initiated by her husband: 'Ich hoffe, der Arzt kommt bald zu mir und macht dein Werk fertig. Er soll bitte das Tüpfelchen auf das I setzen.'⁴²

It is not, therefore, surprising that no one appears to notice when Carmilla dies in childbirth, having safely delivered Benno's sixth child. However, the fact of her death does not escape the attention of the lesbian nurse and vampire, Emily, who falls in love with Carmilla. Following Emily's amorous vampire's bite, Carmilla is also converted to vampire status. Having rejected their menfolk, both women retire to a women-only space in the form of a vampire's boudoir, where they sit on a double bed consisting of two coffins. Her former dependence on Benno has now been exchanged for female vampirism, and Carmilla's emptiness has been replaced by an ecstatic surrender to 'illness':

Ich bin krank, und es geht mir gut. Ich leide, und ich fühle mich wohl.
Krank zu sein bedarf es wenig. Ich kann es, und ich fühle mich sehr sehr

³⁷ Jelinek, 1987, p. 15.

³⁸ Jelinek, 1987, p. 13.

³⁹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Jelinek, 1987, p. 15.

⁴¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 17.

⁴² Jelinek, 1987, p. 17.

schlecht. Gesundheit ist nicht alles, und mein Körper hält sie nun gar nicht aus. Angesichts von Gesundheitigen verwandle ich mich in ein Sieb, das alles durchfallen läßt. Ich bin schön krank! Krank! Krank! Krank!⁴³

Carmilla's illness represents an inversion of every aspect of her former life: she has exchanged her marriage for a lesbian relationship with Emily, and she has also transformed her former mothering activities into their mirror image. In the first scene of the play, Carmilla had lamented to Emily that her children devoured her time and resources: 'Ich bin keine Lieblingspeise. Trotzdem fressen mich die Kinder auf. Ich habe keine Zeit fürs Kino.'⁴⁴ Now, having killed and dismembered several of her children, Carmilla has stored them in two fridges marked 'Familie' until she is ready to devour *them*. Nonetheless, 'illness' does not represent 'identity' for Carmilla, but merely the inversion of the emptiness which characterised her (lack of) subjectivity in her former existence, as her appropriation of the Cartesian Cogito demonstrates: 'Ich bin krank, daher bin ich. Ich rufe zuhause an, es meldet sich keiner. Sofort kommt mir der Gedanke: Auch ein anderer ist krank! Ich bin krank und daher berechtigt. Ohne Krankheit wäre ich nichts.'⁴⁵ Illness is therefore revealed not merely as a description of Carmilla's present transgressive existence, but as a 'Metapher für die Existenz der Frau schlechthin'.⁴⁶ As Janz analyses Carmilla's illness:

Denn wenn sie krank ist, so erläutert sie Emily höchst sophistisch, wird sie von den anderen gemieden und ausgegrenzt und erhält somit den Beweis dafür, daß sie nicht einfach »Nichts« ist, sondern ein zu vermeidendes Etwas.⁴⁷

By embracing illness, however, according to Janz, Carmilla has unwittingly colluded with, rather than escaped from, patriarchal denigration of female subjectivity, with the result that: 'Die vermeintliche Opposition durch Krankheit [...] als Angleichung an die männliche Ausgrenzungstrategie dekuviert [wird].'⁴⁸ The male idealisation of women, then, in typical Jelinek style, is represented as a thin veneer concealing male

⁴³ Jelinek, 1987, p. 45.

⁴⁴ Jelinek, 1987, p. 20.

⁴⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Regine Friedrich, 'Nachwort', in Jelinek, 1987, p. 84.

⁴⁷ Janz, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, pp. 89.

⁴⁸ Janz, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 90.

hatred and fear of female otherness, which is conceived, according to Benno, as diseased: 'Ihr seid eine einzige Geschichte der Krankheit. Ihr gebt es ja zu!⁴⁹

3.3 Cultural presence: the male 'principle'

The cultural fragility embodied by the figures of Emily and Carmilla is juxtaposed to male presence and self-confidence in the form of Dr Heidkliff: 'Ich entstehe durch das, was sich an meine Mittelachse angelagert hat: Material.⁵⁰ Freudian developmental theory posits sexual difference as predicated on the young child's visual apprehension of the anatomical asymmetry of the sexes: the male child possesses a visible symbol of difference, whereas the female child's genitalia are located inside the body, and cannot be viewed.⁵¹ Similarly, whereas the female subject occupies a complex and shifting position between visibility and invisibility, the male subject is visible within culture, as Heidkliff affirms: 'Ich bin aus nächster Nähe wie aus der Ferne sichtbar.'⁵² In the first scene of the play *Heidkliff*, a sports fanatic, is happily swimming, confident of his mastery of the female element. In contrast to Emily's ambivalent presence (*Ich bin hier und dort*),⁵³ and Carmilla's lack of any autonomous identity (*Ich bin restlos gar nichts*),⁵⁴ Heidkliff is supremely confident of his own cultural location: 'Ich bin hier, aber nicht dort' and 'Verrückt hat mich keiner'.⁵⁵ His confidence is bolstered by his belief that his voice will be heard, 'Ich spreche jetzt', and in his economic clout, 'Ich zahle [...] Ich kaufe etwas. Ich frage nach dem Preis. Es ist mir erlaubt.'⁵⁶ Heidkliff, convinced of his own social superiority, posits himself as an ideal standard of humanity, 'Ich bin der, an dem sich ein anderer mißt.'⁵⁷ In similar terms, the monologue ends in the following ejaculatory assertion: 'Ich bin ein Maß. Ich bin ein Muß'.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 53. See also Lanyon, in Finlay and Jeutter (eds.), 1999, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Jelinek, 1987, p. 6.

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, with an introduction by Reimut Reiche (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), pp. 96-97.

⁵² Jelinek, 1987, p. 6.

⁵³ Jelinek, 1987, p. 22.

⁵⁴ Jelinek, 1987, p. 15.

⁵⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 6.

⁵⁶ Jelinek, 1987, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Jelinek, 1987, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Jelinek, 1987, p. 7.

Although Benno, 'Steuerberater und Carmillas Mann', represents the family man in contrast to Heidkliff's bachelor lifestyle, there is no discernible difference between the self-presentation of the two men; in fact, they are characterised by their mutual agreement on every subject. Benno shares Heidkliff's self-confident assertion of his own importance, and together, following the death of Carmilla, they congratulate themselves on their triumphant embodiment of the male principle: 'Wir sind angenehme Erscheinungsformen von ein- und derselben Sache.'⁵⁹ Their token attempts to define some form of individuality seem doomed to failure:

HEIDKLIFF zu Benno: Ich sehe zwar: Wir sind austauschbar. Aber ich bin ich! Wir verdienen etwa gleich viel. Wie sollten wir also das, was wir sprechen, untereinander gerecht aufteilen? Es geht nicht. Wir sind total unterschiedliche Individuen. Wir sind total dasselbe. Wir sprechen nicht mit Unterschieden. Sogar unsere Tennisschläger sind gleich. Sie sind gleich.⁶⁰

This continues Jelinek's critique of bourgeois individualism, also addressed in *Die Klavierspielerin*. Although the deluded subject may believe that any number of possibilities are open to him for the development of his subjectivity, ultimately he becomes a carbon copy of other similarly located individuals.⁶¹ The male view of women is shaped by the Freudian notion of the female as unfathomable,⁶² and Heidkliff's examination of Carmilla post-mortem, closely observed by Benno, becomes an investigation of the nature of womanhood. Their excavation of Carmilla's pelvis is therefore an attempt to penetrate the mystery of femininity, but the task, as Heidkliff observes, represents almost insurmountable challenges: 'Dieses Loch hier sieht so einfach aus und ist doch derart kompliziert, daß ein Mann wie ich jahrelang hart studieren mußte, um sich darin halbwegs zurechtzufinden. Ich mußte Prüfungen ablegen!'⁶³ Nonetheless, the two men are quick to assert their phallic solidity in the face of the diffuse and intangible qualities of femininity: 'Sie sind ländlich-wässrig. Ungegliedert. Sie haben keinen Fixpunkt im All. Linien enden mit ihnen irgendwo. Sie sind die Wüste, wir der hohe Fels, an den sie sich haltsuchend klammern. Sie sind da und nicht da.'⁶⁴

⁵⁹Jelinek, 1987, p. 25.

⁶⁰Jelinek, 1987, p. 25.

⁶¹See also Janz, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 86.

⁶²Freud [1932], 1991, p. 111.

⁶³Jelinek, 1987, p. 27.

⁶⁴Jelinek, 1987, p. 31.

The female is viewed by the two men, in Cartesian terms, as closely allied to nature: 'In der Tat handelt es sich bei meiner Frau Carmilla mehr um Natur als um irgend etwas sonst.'⁶⁵ The association between women and nature is alluded to in ironic terms by Emily in the first scene, which revealed the expedience of the power dynamic which locates the male within the sphere of culture, relegating the female to the 'heath land' which lies beyond it: 'Natur bin ich, erinnere daher oft an Kunst.'⁶⁶ Thus, Heidkliff's response to Benno's comment is that women must be treated with the same reverence, and the same contempt, as nature, a recurrent Jelinek theme: 'Für die Natur wie für die Frau gilt: Verwalten, nicht vergewaltigen!'⁶⁷ Once again, though, fear of feminine power underlies the apparently implacable self-belief of the two men, as exemplified by Benno's anxious enquiry of Dr Heidkliff in the context of their post-partum and post-mortem contemplation of her genitals: 'Meine Frage lautet nun, und sie liegt nahe: Kann ich mich noch ein weiteres Mal gefahrlos in dieses verästelte Labyrinth wagen? Ich bin kein Held, müssen Sie wissen.'⁶⁸ The monstrous female, then, can only be mastered by the same techniques used to outwit the minotaur: 'Wenn Sie sich wieder hineinbegeben, müssen Sie zuvor natürlich einen Faden am Eingang festbinden. Damit Sie wieder zurückfinden.'⁶⁹

In common with Freud, Benno and Heidkliff view the male as the embodiment of the active principle, in contrast to female receptivity. This preference for action also extends to male gametes: 'Zu guter Stunde entdeckte ich gebrauchte Präservative. Der Samen zuckt ruhelos in seinem aufgeblasenen Häuschen. Er will hinaus ins Leben! Er will arbeiten. Er darf nicht.'⁷⁰

Following the defection of the two women, however, this tendency becomes exaggerated to comic and grotesque proportions, and the two men are so consumed

⁶⁵Jelinek, 1987, p. 26.

⁶⁶Jelinek, 1987, p. 8.

⁶⁷Jelinek, 1987, p. 26.

⁶⁸Jelinek, 1987, p. 26.

⁶⁹Jelinek, 1987, p. 30.

⁷⁰Jelinek, 1987, p. 7. Once again this is strongly reminiscent of the Freud's view of femininity, equated with passivity and masochism, and masculinity, which is deemed to represent the active sexual principle. An analogy for this is found by Freud in the behaviour of male and female gametes: 'Die männliche Geschlechtszelle ist aktiv beweglich, sucht die weibliche auf, und diese, das Ei, ist unbeweglich, passiv erwartend. Dies Verhalten der geschlechtlichen Elementarorganismen ist sogar vorbildlich für das Benehmen der Geschlechtsindividuen beim Sexualverkehr'. Sigmund Freud [1932], 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 112.

by their own energy that they are scarcely able to function, as the stage directions to the second scene in the second act of the play indicate:

Plötzlich helles, gleißendes Licht über die Landschaft. Heidkliff und Benno Hundekoffer kommen im Tennisdreß und mit Tennisschlägern dynamisch-federnd herbeigetrabt, über die Landschaft hinweg. Sie halten keinen Moment still, bersten vor Aktivität. Federn, hüpfen, schlagen mit den Schlägern in der Luft herum, schlagen Bälle [...] Vor Kraft können sie kaum gehen.⁷¹

Their abandonment to pure and unmitigated activity has also affected their speech to the extent that they are no longer able to construct sentences: 'Wir sportieren. Wir segelfliegen. Wir radfahren. Wir tennis.'⁷² As the play progresses, the active male principle, deprived of its feminine counterweight intensifies into murderous bloodlust. This is expressed in terms of a further deterioration in the language employed by the two men.

3.4 A 'war of the wor(I)ds'

The 'war' which takes place between the sexes in 'Krankheit', whilst containing highly theatrical elements, is essentially a battle of words. As Dagmar von Hoff argues, describing Jelinek's characters as 'Sprechmaschinen': Es [das signifikante Material] »quillt« quasi ständig aus ihnen heraus'.⁷³ The war takes the form of a collision of the discourses of masculinity and femininity, the catalyst for which is the lesbian relationship between Carmilla and Emily. This act of defiance destabilises the gender system, exposing the power relationships by which it is structured. The war is initiated and waged by the two men in the face of what they consider to be blatant provocation on the part of the women. In their furious reaction to perceived female transgression, Benno and Heidkliff, in an attempt to bring them back within male control, hurl fragments of the discourses of masculinity and femininity at the two women, revealing a contempt for women which is normally obscured by their

⁷¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

⁷² Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

⁷³ Dagmar von Hoff, 'Stücke für das Theater: Überlegungen zu Elfriede Jelinek's Methode der Destruktion', in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 113.

polite deference towards the opposite sex: 'Und vor so etwas habe ich mich früher höflich verbeugt'.⁷⁴

At the beginning of Part II of the play, Emily and Carmilla have retreated to a women-only space in the form of a bedroom in which they sit on a double bed constructed from two coffins. The menfolk pace furiously outside, discussing the deviant behaviour of the two women. Their behaviour is described in the stage directions as 'manisch',⁷⁵ and stands in stark contrast to the tenderness displayed by the two women to each other in the previous scene. It appears that the disengagement of the two genders from each other has produced a grotesque and self-defeating intensification of stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics, reinforcing the sense of gender as a system which is crucially dependent on its opposite pole for its survival. The speech of the two men is peppered with fantasies of revenge and violence against the two vampire-women: 'Ja! Ja! Ja! Ja! Das Knirschen des Pfahls beim Eindringen in den Knochen, der sich windende Leib, der blutige Schaum vor dem Mund, das Erbrochene.'⁷⁶ The self-righteous fury expressed by Benno and Heidkliff has strong overtones of facism, an impression which intensifies as the 'war' progresses. The two women are viewed as unclean: 'Verlaßt euer bakterienverseuchtes Milieu! Schabt euch den Schimmelpilz ab!'⁷⁷ The men, therefore, view their proposed actions against the vampires as a form of cleansing of humanity: 'Wir dürfen uns daran erinnern: Es muß sein. Es dient der Menschheit,'⁷⁸ and: 'Sie gehören radikal weggemacht. Gesundheitsgründe!'⁷⁹

At this first stage of the conflict, the concern of the two men is to detail the ways in which the two women have diverged from what they consider to be the 'natural' path of femininity. The 'unnatural' self-assertion displayed by the two women has also disrupted the sexual desire which the men normally experience in their presence, predicated as it is on female passivity and obedience. In the light of female rebellion, this impulse has to be resisted at all costs: 'Der unwillkürliche Reflex, der uns ansonsten zwingt, vor einer schönen Frau instinktiv halt zu machen, darf uns

⁷⁴ Jelinek, 1987, p. 55.

⁷⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

⁷⁶ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

⁷⁷ Jelinek, 1987, p. 53.

⁷⁸ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

⁷⁹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

trotzdem nicht leiten.¹⁸⁰ The men's reaction to the defection of their female counterparts is, however, characterised by ambivalence. On the one hand, they are consumed by their anger in the face of female disobedience, on the other, they are overcome periodically by their need for maternal attention on the part of the two women. As always, there is no discernible difference between the needs of the two men, expressed in this case by almost total symmetry of the language used:

BENNO *heult, immer noch hopsend*: Ach, Carmilla, könnte ich meinen Kopf noch einmal in deine weiße Schürze legen! Einmal, für eine Stunde nur!

HEIDKLIFF *ebenso*: Ach, Emily, könnte ich meinen Kopf noch einmal in deine weiße Schürze legen! Einmal, für eine Stunde nur!¹⁸¹

Their anger has been provoked by the abandonment on the part of the two women of their 'natural' role as birthgivers and nurturers: 'Werdendes Leben weigern sie sich auszutragen. Dabei spricht es schon in ihnen, geht herum, singt!¹⁸² The procreative role of the female of the species is crucially connected to the central motif of the play: that of blood. Women are viewed, when not pregnant, as framed and contained by the menstrual cycle, and the transgression of Emily and Carmilla therefore represents a departure from its rhythms: 'Meine Emily! Sie gehorcht nicht mehr dem natürlichen Monatszyklus.¹⁸³ At the same time, though, the fact of female menstruation is a source of suspicion and disgust to the men, involving as it does the mysterious and profuse discharge of blood: 'In einer Frau muß jeder unwillkürlich das Blut sehen.¹⁸⁴ The lesbian vampirism of Emily and Carmilla represents a shocking inversion of the 'natural' order, one of the most horrific manifestations of which is Carmilla's consumption of blood in the form of the murder of her children. In her husband's eyes, this reversal has resulted in an alarming change in Carmilla from docile and submissive wife to powerful, self-sufficient woman:

Das Blut wird viel. Einmal ist es dann soweit, daß die Gattin aus ihm Kraft zieht. Sie wird plötzlich durch ihr rinnendes Blut nicht länger geschwächt. Dieses Säugetier! Und damit nicht genug: Jetzt sucht sie

¹⁸⁰ Jelinek, 1987, p. 48.

¹⁸¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 51.

¹⁸² Jelinek, 1987, p. 49.

¹⁸³ Jelinek, 1987, p. 52.

¹⁸⁴ Jelinek, 1987, p. 53.

auch noch mein Blut! Das meiner Kinder! Diese Trinkerin. Sie wird mir entschieden zu stark.⁸⁵

The shedding of blood through menstruation, then, is viewed as consolidating and maintaining femininity in its 'natural' state, whereas its ingestion is imbued with qualities deemed to be masculine, such as self-sufficiency, self-determination and strength: 'Ich glaube: Dadurch, daß meine Frau Carmilla jetzt Blut ißt, hat sie etwas Männliches bekommen, das mir nicht gefällt.'⁸⁶ While Benno and Heidkliff berate the two womenfolk for their departure from 'natural' feminine qualities, their language also betrays the cultural construction of gender: 'Ist ohnedies ein halber Mann, was man in diesem Land Frau nennt.'⁸⁷ While Heidkliff's comment is intended as a routine denigration of modern woman, it also betrays the fact that the set of qualities and behaviours known as 'masculinity' lies dormant in the female, and similarly 'femininity' in the male, banished to the unconscious by social convention. Whereas Emily, in her role as artist, already had access to aspects of these forbidden qualities, Carmilla can only aspire to them through her conversion to vampire status.

However, the most shocking facet of the female transgression embodied by Emily and Carmilla, in the eyes of their menfolk, is their lustful embrace of a life of unmitigated lesbian ecstasy and passion. The views expressed by the two men are an almost verbatim account of the Freudian description of the acquisition of gender.⁸⁸ They are clear that desire is the property of the male. Further, masculinity is seen as predicated on active desiring of the passive female, who helps to maintain the gender system by renouncing her own claim to desire when she assumes the mantle of femininity. A woman who 'reclaims' her desire, then, threatens the male by extracting from him the founding principle of his masculine identity:

Gebt unsere Lust wieder heraus! Gebt etwas von euch her! Verbindet euch mit uns! Seid fraulich. Sonst würden wir mit der Zeit ebenfalls stumpfe Rockträger. Werdet wieder leer! Wir oder ihr!⁸⁹

Women who have evaded male control, therefore, are depicted as consumed by lust, reflecting the Freudian view of the weaker superego of the female, and her greater

⁸⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 51.

⁸⁶ Jelinek, 1987, p. 52.

⁸⁷ Jelinek, 1987, p. 52.

⁸⁸ Freud [1932], 1991, pp. 113-114 and pp. 128-130.

⁸⁹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 53.

tendency to degenerate into a life of perversity.⁹⁰ 'Grausam wütet nichts als Vergnügen in ihrem [Carmillas] Körper.'⁹¹ The lesbian relationship in which the two women are engaged has resulted in the exclusion of the male, thereby also threatening his social function and status: 'Und jetzt macht ihr alles kaputt. Ihr werdet wieder Jungfrauen! Ihr werdet rückläufig. Eine graue Gesellschaft von Tanten und Nichten. Schwestern.'⁹² Even the male's indispensability to the procreative process is under threat in the light of the advent of artificial insemination and test-tube babies:

HEIDKLIFF: Der Zeugungsvorgang ist unerlässlich. Der Mann muß nicht als Person anwesen. Das Ei aber schon.

BENNO: Der Kinder Samen kaufen. In einer Bank. In einem Supermercato. In einer rechtschaffenen Geschäftsstelle.⁹³

Similar insecurities are provoked in the men by further invasion of male territory, such as that represented by the discovery of female 'ejaculation':

Ist es nicht so, Doktor, daß ihnen bei Bedarf eine milchig-schmutzige Flut grausig aus ihrem kleinen verstümmelten Organ stürzt? Ich habe es entsetzt in einem Buch gelesen und bin zurückgewichen. Sie als Arzt haben es sicher schon gesehen.⁹⁴

In compensation for the defection of Emily and Carmilla, and the resulting feelings of inadequacy which it produces in the two men, they resort to a reaffirmation of 'male' 'rationality' over female irrationality. The capacity for rational thought is viewed as superior to other forms of experience, reflecting the cultural privileging of reason to which Derrida refers. In addition, reason is viewed as a male quality to which the female does not have access:

⁹⁰Der Kastrationskomplex bereitet den Ödipuskomplex vor, anstatt ihn zu zerstören, durch den Einfluß des Penisneides wird das Mädchen aus der Mutterbindung vertrieben und läuft in die Ödipussituation wie in einen Hafen ein. Mit dem Wegfall der Kastrationsangst entfällt das Hauptmotiv, das den Knaben gedrängt hatte, den Ödipuskomplex zu überwinden. Das Mädchen verbleibt in ihm unbestimmt lange, baut ihn nur spät und dann unvollkommen ab. Die Bildung des Über-Ichs muß unter diesen Verhältnissen leiden, es kann nicht die Stärke und die Unabhängigkeit erreichen, die ihm seine kulturelle Bedeutung verleihen, und - Feministen hören es nicht gerne, wenn man die Auswirkungen dieses Moments für den durchschnittlichen weiblichen Charakter hinweist' (Freud [1932], p. 127).

⁹¹Jelinek, 1987, p. 51.

⁹²Jelinek, 1987, p. 55.

⁹³Jelinek, 1987, p. 49.

⁹⁴Jelinek, 1987, p. 55.

Ich denke sehr gern. Ich habe die Kraft der Überlegung, die dem Vampir versagt ist. Der Vampir ist geistig Kind. Ich mache wissenschaftliche Erfahrungen. Ich denke. Ich handle. Ich widme mich einem Ziel und denke nicht an mich dabei. Ihr sucht doch immer nur den praktischen Nutzen.⁹⁵

In this speech also, the convergence between the concepts of 'vampire' and 'woman' becomes clear, exposing it as a metaphor for femininity as a whole, rather than as a description of the deviant behaviour of two women. As their fury with recalcitrant womanhood reaches climactic proportions, the speech of the two men becomes increasingly disrupted by uncontrollable fits of barking, demonstrating their degeneration into the status of hunting dogs.⁹⁶

The two women seem impervious to the eruption of male fury around them, immersed as they are in an orgy of blood-sucking following their murder of Carmilla's remaining children. They also fail to recognise the increasing hostility of the two men, symbolised by the stage set which becomes increasingly heaped with weapons. By this stage Benno and Heidkliff have lost the capacity for connected speech, and they communicate only in staccato, truncated and distorted phrases which convey forcefully their hatred and contempt. Their pursuit of the two women has become an attack on womanhood as a whole, which is perceived as hindrance to male self-fulfilment: 'Unsere Auflehnung gegen das Weib ist ein schöpferisch Akten. Fühls! Epochen brechen zusammen. Ende davon!'⁹⁷ The association between the behaviour of the two men and Nazism becomes clearer: 'Mir werden euch niederkugeln. Dann Lüge fort Rübe ab Mund zu'⁹⁸ and 'Krieg ist Gas.'⁹⁹ The destruction of the women is viewed as an act of purification of the human race: 'Damit mir zu mehren leben können, müßt ihr tot sein. Klar! Mir brauchen merhrn Raum und nehmen ihn gleich hier von.'¹⁰⁰ A vision of a life free of both the seductions and demands of women has emerged, 'Die Frau hat jetzt keinen Zweck mehr'.¹⁰¹ In the post-women society, Benno and Heidkliff, believe, they will be able to discover their true, masculine identity: 'Ich sage darauf: Vater, es wird vollbracht

⁹⁵ Jelinek, 1987, p. 56.

⁹⁶ Jelinek, 1987, p. 57.

⁹⁷ Jelinek, 1987, p. 59.

⁹⁸ Jelinek, 1987, p. 62.

⁹⁹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Jelinek, 1987, p. 64.

¹⁰¹ Jelinek, 1987, p. 65.

sein. Wir werden wieder in die weiße Jungfräulichkeit der Berge gehen. Wir werden uns dort wiederfinden. Wir werden tief atmen.’¹⁰²

The progress of the ‘war’ is temporarily halted when the women take refuge in the ultimate women-only space, a ladies’ toilet. The cessation of hostilities is marked by the return of Benno and Heidkliff’s speech to normal: ‘Unsere revolutionäre Tätigkeit ist unterbrochen’.¹⁰³ However, the purpose of this scene is to permit the appearance of two female figures who voice the themes of the play with regard to female subjectivity. The first of these is a female martyr, who appears bearing her breasts before her on a platter. The story she tells is of passive acceptance of her female lot - ‘Mit sechzehn das erste Kind, noch unehelich’¹⁰⁴ - and exploitation by others, both within the family and in her working life. The second figure does not appear in person on-stage, but is represented by a disembodied recorded female voice. While the recording plays in the background, the women present in the toilet, all dressed in a style of exaggerated elegance, enact a visual desecration of femininity by tearing off their finery, and rolling in the sand which covers the toilet floor.

The recorded voice which accompanies this spectacle carries out a deconstruction of aspects of the discursive construction of femininity. The deconstruction is effected, as is frequently the case in Jelinek’s writing, through the use of abrupt sentence fragments in which the meaning of a concept is explored, inverted, and deconstructed. As the recorded voice forms a background to events on-stage, it is clearly also not intended that every word will be heard, reinforcing the sense of fragmentation. The cultural context is sketched in by means of a reference to the foregrounding of rationality within the Cartesian philosophical framework, and its subsequent exclusion of women (the *irrational sex*) from hegemonic cultural networks:

Die Denker haben nur ein Geschlecht, das der Idee. Sie sind trockene Leichen. Geben nichts heraus. Wir müssen noch zum Fleischhauer um Wurst gehen. Wir müssen uns noch beschauen lassen. Wir könnten ja Trichinen sein in einem Fleisch! Parasiten.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Jelinek, 1987, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰³Jelinek, 1987, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴Jelinek, 1987, p. 67.

¹⁰⁵Jelinek, 1987, p. 67.

The Western philosophical tradition, the focus of the postmodernist critiques, offers nothing to women, composed as it is of 'trockene Leichen'. Barred from inclusion within the mainstream of rationality, women are forced into a form of cultural prostitution. This ambivalent position requires them to collude with feminine stereotypes, thereby gaining access to a tenuous sense of cultural inclusion. The relationship of women to dominant culture networks is equated to that of a parasite feeding on mammalian flesh: they are both enmeshed and alien, totally dependent and yet also deeply threatening.

The remainder of the speech develops the notion of the relationship between women and dominant images of femininity in terms of the perceived dichotomy between nature (associated with the female), and culture (the dominant principle, associated with the male). In the following quotation, the importance of the female body to the construction of female subjectivity is first emphasised: 'Die Frau und der Körper gehören untrennbar zusammen. Geht der Körper, geht auch die Frau.'¹⁰⁶ The speech then explores the relationship between 'woman' and images of femininity.¹⁰⁷ The section begins by asserting a relatively harmonious equivalence between 'woman' and her image: 'Die Frau gehört in vielen Ländern zum Alltag des Straßenbilds. Das Bild der Frau läßt sich in vielen Ländern im Alltag nachvollziehen.'¹⁰⁸ However, the centre of gravity shifts rapidly away from the 'real' woman towards her cultural image, revealing the extent to which women are governed by stereotypes of femininity: 'Der Alltag der Frau vollzieht sich im großen und ganzen vor den Bildern der Frau [...] Groß die einen Frauen, die anderen klein.'¹⁰⁹ Then in a dramatic gesture, the word 'Alltag' is separated into its component parts. 'All' becomes 'das All', the universe: 'Vor dem Bild der Frau verblaßt sogar das All.'¹¹⁰ This invokes the reverence inherent within Western culture for contrived images of womanhood, rather than the reality of female existence. The sundering of the word 'Alltag', therefore, conveys symbolically the separation of the 'real' woman from her image. The fate of the 'real' woman is of a very different order, and is redolent of 'Alltag': 'Die Frauen haben Tage.'¹¹¹ Finally,

¹⁰⁶Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹⁰⁷Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹⁰⁸Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹⁰⁹Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹¹⁰Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹¹¹Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

the complete subordination of woman to her image is articulated succinctly in the following phrase: 'Die Frau ist das Kleine neben ihrem Bild. Das Vermögen der Frau ist von ihrer Größe abhängig.'¹¹²

The focus of the deconstruction then moves to the relationship between woman and nature, addressing the contradiction that, although woman is apprehended in Western culture predominantly in terms of cultural *images*, yet she is also deemed to be closer to nature than the male: 'Die Größe des Bildes [der Frau] besteht in dessen Abhängigkeit von der Natur. Die Frau ist Natur.'¹¹³ The close association between woman and nature is also the source of male fear of the mysterious and dangerous aspects of femininity, alluded to in an earlier scene by both Benno and Heidkliff in the context of their examination of Carmilla's dead body¹¹⁴: 'Das Innere der Natur verkörpert in der Frau. Der Körper der Frau geht ins Innere [...] Ein wahrer Abhang ist der Körper der Frau. Abhängige Naturen gehen von der Frau fort.'¹¹⁵ The implications for women of the perceived connection between femininity and nature are equally deadly: 'Der Körper und die Frau gehen zusammen in die Natur. Keine Frau mehr. Die Natur drängt es zu Bildern.'¹¹⁶ The speech ends with a frenetic accumulation of discursive fragments which culminates in the extinction of the 'real' woman, and her subsumption into nature/image:

Die Frau muß ab. Trennen Sie den Körper vom Land. Der Vollzug tagt. Alle Tage Frauen. Ganz groß. Natürlich ein Bild vom Gehalt. Fort die Frau. Ab Trennung natürlich körpern. Das Bild ist blaß. Frauen erhalten Tritte. Zusammenhalt im All. Natur von innen. Abhängig von Bildern. Kein Gehalt in Natur. Körper an Land. Kleine Frau. Naturvollzug. Alltägliche Länder. Der Tag macht das Bild. Es geht bei der Frau trennend nach innen. Ein Bild die Frau. Her Natur. Fort Frau.¹¹⁷

Female alienation from the culture in which she is located, and the subordination of woman to her image, are viewed as mirrored in the female genitalia. This image is a graphic illustration of the interweaving of nature and culture. While female physical morphology predates its cultural interpretation, nonetheless, the alienation to which women have become subject within the Western cultural mainstream appears to

¹¹²Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹¹³Jelinek, 1987, p. 68.

¹¹⁴Jelinek, 1987, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁵Jelinek, 1987, pp. 68-69

¹¹⁶Jelinek, 1987, pp. 68-69

¹¹⁷Jelinek, 1987, p.69

have been assimilated into the interior of the female body, thereby blurring the boundary between nature and culture. The 'real' woman is viewed as coterminous with her cultural reflection, and this is apparently borne out at the physical level, thereby reifying a cultural projection as the truth about woman. In typical Jelinek style, the speech ends on a deeply pessimistic note, relying for its deconstructive effect on the manipulation of discursive fragments, and the exposure of their underlying assumptions.

Following their retreat to the ladies' toilet, Emily and Carmilla leave the stage only to reappear in a grotesquely mutated form, as a 'Doppelgeschöpf', a giantess with a single body, crowned by the heads of the two main female characters. This figure has a nightmarish quality, and it is reminiscent of Freud's *Traumdeutung*, condensing as it does a number of cultural stereotypes.¹¹⁸ Firstly, the 'Doppelgeschöpf' is very large, evoking the fear of maternal power, widely described in psychoanalytic theory, which results from the infant's interaction with its mother. This primal fear is frequently projected onto larger women, who, arguably, trigger this unconscious reminder of infantile vulnerability in the face of maternal omnipotence.¹¹⁹ When Benno first spots the creature, his reaction is one of shock and disgust: 'Ich seh. Was du nicht siehst. Natur ohne das wär schöner!'¹²⁰ The revulsion displayed by both men increases in contemplation of the sheer abundance of flesh displayed by the 'Doppelgeschöpf': 'Talg. Margarinenhauf. Märtyrerin. Cholesterin Kompost. Schuhunter quatschig und gelb. Als Angebot von der Post mit Schnürl zusamm. Spezialität aus dem Weinviertel. Ein Braten in einem Netz.'¹²¹ The revulsion soon reawakens the murderous hatred experienced by the men towards the women, and they plan their revenge on the grotesque icon of recalcitrant womanhood, their language punctuated by religious symbolism:

Augen instrumental herauskratzen. Mit Blutfinger dann in Augenhöhlen herumwurln wie Ameisen. Weh! Ehrungen und Erhebungen tauchen aus dem Weinviertel auf. Eine Tierschlacht. Tote. Katholisch von Blut auf. Römische Kathoden austun. Löschen. Weh. Weh [...] Freu mich wie ein Kind auf Erstkommunion. Wir essen ja auch die Hostien.¹²²

¹¹⁸Sigmund Freud, *Die Traumdeutung* [1900] (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1997), p. 285.

¹¹⁹See also Lanyon, in Finlay and Jeutter (eds.), 1999, p. 85.

¹²⁰Jelinek, 1987, p. 74.

¹²¹Jelinek, 1987, p. 74.

¹²²Jelinek, 1987, p. 74.

The extinction of the women and, by extension, all womanhood, will, the men believe, give rise to a new race of men, freed from the seductions and ‘softness’ of femininity. However, their anxiety that this proposed course of action may also cause them damage is clear: ‘Graben mir uns ein Loch in unsere Weichteil!’¹²³ The last scene of the play, however, suggests otherwise: having gunned down the ‘Doppelgeschöpf’, the two men are themselves reduced to a form of vampirism which is also reminiscent of infant feeding, as the stage directions indicate:

BENNO und HEIDKLIFF *bis zum Schluß immer beide gemeinsam, aber auch durcheinander, jeweils abwechselnd den Kopf heben. Sie saugen nämlich beide am Hals des Doppelgeschöpfs.*¹²⁴

The image suggests that existence for one gender independently of the other is impossible, based as the system is on otherness, rather than presence: femininity has no ontological status of its own, and it is predicated merely on an absence of masculinity. The same logic can also be applied to male subjectivity. Therefore, by destroying their other, the two men have, in effect, destroyed themselves, compelling them to drain the blood of the ‘Doppelgeschöpf’, perhaps in an attempt to ingest the illusory essence of femininity, which would ensure their continued survival.

3.5 Conclusion

The play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* is unique among the works considered in the thesis in taking as its central focus the discursive construction of female subjectivity, rather than the subjectivity of an individual female subject. The four characters in the play are two-dimensional carriers for the discourses of male and female subjectivity. The play takes as its central target Freudian theories and their impact on female subjectivity. This is not to suggest that Freud is viewed as the cultural *bête noire*; rather, it is the assimilation of those theories into a culture which already marginalises and oppresses women which is the focus of Jelinek’s critique. The work of this writer is always located in a specifically Austrian milieu, and it is therefore particularly appropriate that Freudian theory, which arose out of that same context, is accorded a central position. The chief protagonist is therefore the

¹²³Jelinek, 1987, p. 75.

¹²⁴Jelinek, 1987, p. 75.

language of subjectivity, rather than subjectivity itself. Discourses, as Foucault describes, are notoriously difficult to isolate and analyse. They are hidden in the bodies of human subjects, who misrecognise them as their own creations. In dramatising discourses, rather than individual conflicts, Jelinek reinforces effectively the power of language in shaping the lives of human subjects, who are depicted as flailing around helplessly in the face of cultural formulae and prescriptions.

The play personifies dislocations between the discourses of male and female subjectivity. In staging this subject matter as a war, Jelinek refuses to subscribe to any notions of complementarity between the two genders. Males and females, according to this writer, can never form a whole: they possess opposing world-views, and harmonious co-existence is an impossibility unless one sex is compelled to adopt a submissive position. It is significant that there is considerably more comment on the part of the two male characters in the play with regard to the nature of womanhood. The two women rarely comment on the nature of masculinity. This is because the female subject in the cultural context of the play is *ipso facto* an object who can never fight her way towards full subjecthood. The system simply does not permit it, and the struggle of the two women to achieve autonomous subjectivities are therefore doomed to failure from the outset. While Emily's artist status at least accords her a more powerful position than Carmilla, ultimately, both women walk straight into the trap which has been laid for them by patriarchy, with the result that they are destroyed. At the end of the play, as Friedrich argues, Emily and Carmilla, in their merged bliss, form such a huge and cumbersome target that the two men merely need to take aim and fire to expunge diseased womanhood from the planet.¹²⁵ Having abandoned themselves to a life of 'sickness' outside of female cultural norms, the wheel comes full circle when the two men indicate that secretly they had always viewed women as diseased.

The males in the play project onto the two women qualities which are unacceptable to their conceptions of masculinity, such as motherliness, gentleness, tenderness and purity. This is ideally combined with a child-like persona which firmly establishes the male in a controlling position within the cultural universe. These projections appear to protect the male from awareness of his unconscious

¹²⁵Regine Friedrich, 'Nachwort', in Jelinek, 1987, p. 86.

attitudes towards women, which are characterised by murderous rage, contempt and deep anxiety. Unconscious fear of women, expressed as a need to control and dominate, has been widely discussed in psychoanalytic literature. The psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott, for example, views this as a function of the unequal power balance between mother and infant, which results in the infant experiencing the mother as all-powerful and terrifying. If the infant progresses to achieve a healthy ego, then the awareness of infantile powerlessness will be assimilated into the personality, but, where this does not happen, fear of women persists, a phenomenon which is to be observed in both sexes. Winnicott points to a 'general failure of recognition of absolute dependence at the start', which in turn 'contributes to the fear of WOMAN that is the lot of both men and women.'¹²⁶ When in the play the two women attempt to refuse the projections of the men by embracing an autonomous existence as lesbian lovers, Heidkliff and Benno are no longer protected from the hostility which underlies their normally reverential treatment of women. This hostility then plays itself out in the form of a murderous hunting expedition in which the two women are their prey. The hunt itself centres around an analysis of the discourses of female subjectivity, and the extent to which the two women have departed from its prescriptions. The hopelessness of the situation faced by Emily and Carmilla reaches its apotheosis in the scene which takes place inside a ladies' toilet. In this scene, a deconstruction takes place of the discourses of female subjectivity, revealing their maze-like structure, which ultimately offers no means of escape.

The concluding scene of the play, as is a recurrent feature in Jelinek's work, offers little hope to 'moderne Frauen'. Her view of liberation within the gender system as it stands is unremittingly bleak. The difficulty, as is almost universally the case in this writer's work, is located not in the psyches of individuals, but in the social system as a whole. The individual psyche functions as a repository of traces of the discursive systems which both reinforce and construct dominant power structures, or, as the novel *Lust* expresses this: 'So läuft die Welt. Direkt in uns hinein.'¹²⁷ All characteristics of individuality are effaced in the majority of Jelinek's work, and particularly in this play, in order to reinforce this message. The reader's gaze is therefore directed outwards toward the social context, and away from the individual

¹²⁶ D.W. Winnicott [1958], *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis: Collected Papers*, with an introduction by Masud Khan (London: Karnac), p. 304.

¹²⁷ Elfriede Jelinek, *Lust* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1989), p. 88.

characters. The play revolves particularly around concepts of absence and presence, and on the location of desire. The problem faced by female subjects is more complex even than their marginalisation within culture, or the fact that language is 'man-made'. According to the play, the underlying problem is cultural intolerance of female desire within a Christian and Freudian cultural context. When women seek direct expression of their desire, the social system will always conspire to produce a brutal repression. Female desire will always be transgressive within prevailing discourses of gender because those same discourses do not permit its existence. Desire is viewed as male terrain and women only have access to desire by obeying the prescriptions of a patriarchal society. Women are viewed in Jelinek's work as the servants of male desire, whether in marriage, or in the pornographic industry. Ultimately, the suppression of female desire serves to reinforce a social system which privileges the interests of men.

3.6 Lust: Introduction

The theme of desire discussed in the previous section provides a central focus in the next work to be considered, as is evidenced by the novel's title. In addition, the associated theme of pornography, which was explored in *Die Klavierspielerin*, undergoes significant development and expansion in the later novel. In the discussion of the earlier novel, this thesis has already argued that Jelinek draws parallels between the power relations embodied by pornographic images, and those in circulation in society as a whole. However, whereas in *Die Klavierspielerin* pornography occupies a location outside of the social and cultural mainstream, forming its disavowed alter ego, in the later novel pornography invades the sanctity of marriage in the Catholic country of Austria through the transgressive portrayal of 'normal' sexual relations as a sadistic assault on the female body by the male. As is so frequently the case in Jelinek's work, the power structures revealed in the microcosm of the family are reflected by those inherent in the macrocosm of the total social fabric. Thus, in this novel, Jelinek both depicts and deconstructs Austrian society, thereby exposing the exploitative power relationships, and the hypocrisy, which she perceives at every level.

The plot of the novel *Lust* revolves around the family life of one capitalist, the director of the local paper factory, his wife Gerti, and their young son. However, this family is also viewed in terms of their location within their social environment as a whole. Thus, the employees who depend on the director for their livelihoods are also woven into the fabric of the novel, and nature, which furnishes the raw material essential to the products of the paper factory, is of central significance. The Catholic church, a central feature of Austrian village life, is subjected to a critique of its premises through the discrepancy between its idealistic language, and the harsh facts of reality portrayed in the text. The society depicted in the novel offers its members only one dominant mode of expression: that of the satiation of their desire through consumption, whether that be in the sexual act, through the pursuit of culture, or in the purchase of consumer goods. Satiation, though, does not equate with satisfaction, and so the image of the 'double bind' also pervades this novel, and ultimately no individual can find a place of refuge outside of its workings. As in all of Jelinek's works, however, those who have access to greater social power and material resources are able to buy themselves a significantly more bearable life than those who are thus disadvantaged.

3.7 The relationship between the director and his wife

Whereas the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* took as its focus the discourses of male and female subjectivity, the novel *Lust* employs a lens which magnifies one aspect of Freudian theory: the predication of gendered subjectivity on the morphology of the male and female sexual anatomies.¹²⁸ Thus, the director, the most powerful figure in the local community, ironically named 'Hermann', is depicted almost entirely in terms of his possession of a penis. He therefore embodies the grandiosity of the male subject vis-à-vis the culturally disenfranchised female subject. The director is depicted in Lacanian terms¹²⁹ as a speaking subject, as the originator and upholder of the phallic law which structures language, in the face of which the female subject flails helplessly: 'Der Mann. Er ist ein ziemlich großer Raum, in dem Sprechen noch möglich ist.'¹³⁰ In accordance with the Cartesian

¹²⁸Freud [1905], 1991, pp. 96-97.

¹²⁹See Chapter 2.

¹³⁰Jelinek, 1989, p. 8.

tradition which the novel subverts, the male subject, by according himself the right to control language and to direct culture, espouses godlike status. The novel aligns itself with the postmodernist critique of the Enlightenment tradition by parodying the (male) subject's concern to perpetuate his own existence through social and cultural achievement. This act of creation finds its ironic analogy in the sexual act, 'ein Direktor muß seinen Schwanz auf die Welt bringen!'¹³¹ At the same time, however, any attempt to achieve permanence through such creative achievements is subject to the same detumescent fate as the male sexual organ: 'So vergrößern die Männer sich und ihre Werke, die aber bald wieder hinter ihnen zusammenfallen.'¹³² In identifying the male subject with the creator, his task becomes the mastery and improvement of nature, not least the moulding of female 'nature' by the ironic means of its *degradation* through the sexual act:

Der Mann kommt vom zweiten Rasieren, die Frau wie ein Schifferl vor seinem Schwall herzutreiben. Ihre Berge und Täler samt Gezweige sind zwar reichliche Entwürfe, doch es fehlt durch Entwürdigung der letzte Schliff daran.¹³³

As in the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, the male subject is drawn against the background of the expanse of social and cultural territory which he is permitted to occupy, whereas the female subject operates within a more restricted social domain. In addition, just as the male subject in this text is portrayed only in terms of his possession of the phallus, the female subject is viewed entirely in terms of her phallic 'lack'. The male subject's function with regard to the female is portrayed, employing a further sexual analogy, as that of temporary expansion of her smallness: 'Die Frau öffnet die Tür, und er erkennt, daß nichts zu groß für seine Herrschaft ist, aber auch nichts darf zu klein sein, sonst wird's sofort geöffnet.'¹³⁴ This metamorphosis, however, only endures while he is engaged with her, after which she returns to her appointed place, '[...] seine Abfälle läßt er ihr da. Denn bald umschließt sie die Falle des Haushalts wieder, und sie kehrt zurück woher sie kam.'¹³⁵ At the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, the female subject provides

¹³¹Jelinek, 1989, p. 20.

¹³²Jelinek, 1989, p. 16.

¹³³Jelinek, 1989, p. 24.

¹³⁴Jelinek, 1989, p. 15.

¹³⁵Jelinek, 1989, p. 21.

a boundary within which the boundless male subject can experience some containment:

Er will sich (die Familie ist unter sich, einer unter dem anderen) in seine Frau hineinzwängen, damit er seine Grenzen spürt. Er würde über die Ufer treten, ich glaube bald, wenn ihm, dem Steuerlosen, nicht schwindlig würde auf seinem eigenem Pfad. Überhaupt, die Männer würden uns über den Kopf wachsen, wenn wir sie nicht manchmal in uns einschließen, bis sie klein und still von uns umgeben sind.¹³⁶

The quotation alludes ironically to male fantasies of uterine containment, which Jelinek appears to view as the counterpart to the grandiosity of the male subject. It also reinforces a powerful sense of female impotence, as sexual intercourse is depicted almost exclusively in the text as serving the needs of men, rather than women. The power that women exercise over men through sexual attraction, therefore, is both limited and transitory in comparison to the social and cultural monoliths amongst which women experience enduring disempowerment.

Jelinek's description of the marital relationship of the director and his wife consists in its entirety of accounts of their abusive sexual relationship, in which the man repeatedly forces the woman into performing anal and oral sex against her will. A further link with the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* is established through the function of music in the novel. It comes as no surprise that the director is a connoisseur of classical music, and that he plays the violin, descriptions of which are frequently conflated with those of his sexual activities: 'Vorhin hat er sich noch in ihr herumgewälzt, bald werden seine Finger auf der Geige einen guten Ton erzeugen.'¹³⁷ Appropriately enough, the director's sexual subjugation of his wife in the family living room is accompanied by the strains of the music of Bach.¹³⁸ Gerti is portrayed as the embodiment of female passivity and, as such, she is the instrument of her husband, to be played when and as he thinks fit. In an ironic recapitulation of both Freudian and Lacanian theory, reminiscent of those which have already been observed in the analyses of the previous two works, Gerti's lack of autonomous subjectivity is described in the following terms: 'Die Frau ist dem Nichts entwendet worden und wird mit dem Stempel des Mannes jeden Tag aufs neue entwertet.'¹³⁹

¹³⁶Jelinek, 1989, p. 24.

¹³⁷Jelinek, 1989, p. 21.

¹³⁸Jelinek, 1989, p. 16.

¹³⁹Jelinek, 1989, p. 19.

The founding of the psychoanalytic version of female subjectivity on perceived (anatomical) lack, in contradistinction to male (anatomical) presence is deconstructed in the novel by means of a transgressive focus on the female genitalia, and particularly the vagina. The cultural taboo which prevents realistic representation of this organ is subjected to a radical process of subversion in the text, which describes in starkly naturalistic terms the 'hole' which so fascinates Gerti's later male admirer, Michael:

Michael zieht der Frau die Beine wie zwei Oberleitungsbügel über sich drüber. In seinem Forscherdrang beobachtet er zwischendurch aufmerksam ihre ungespülte Spalte, eine knorpelige Sonderausführung von dem, was jede Frau in einem andren Lavendel- oder Fliederton bei sich hat [...] Ohne daß Gerti die Gelegenheit zum Waschen gegeben worden ist, erscheint ihr Loch trüb, wie von einer Plastikhülle überzogen.¹⁴⁰

By emphasising the biological reality which is obscured by multiple layers of cultural prohibition and fantasy, Jelinek attempts a process of demystification, a decoupling of the male and female genitalia from their burden of cultural inscription. This has the effect of diverting the reader's attention to the power structures which are normally obscured by such inscription: 'Die Frau soll die Blicke des Herrn in ihr Geschlecht ertragen lernen, bevor sie zu sehr an seinem Schwanz hängt, denn dort hängt noch viel mehr.'¹⁴¹

Gerti's day is structured by the aggressive sexual assaults inflicted on her by her husband, described by Jelinek using the explicit language and imagery of pornography. The director's sexual urges are directed not merely towards Gerti's vagina, but also to every other available orifice of her body, reinforcing the sense of 'holeiness' which pervades her portrayal in the novel. Thus, every sexual encounter involves both oral and anal assaults on the woman, as well as vaginal sexual intercourse. These graphic descriptions of sexual activity take sexual fantasies to such extremes that they are rendered absurd, a familiar Jelinek technique. In an ironic recapitulation of Freud's assertion that 'Anatomie ist Schicksal', ultimately, the director becomes subsumed by the recurrent image of his erect, thrusting penis, and Gerti is reduced to the status of receptacle, or, more frequently, hole. At the same time, the exploitative sexual acts are coupled with the imagery of everyday Austrian

¹⁴⁰Jelinek, 1989, p. 108.

¹⁴¹Jelinek, 1989, p. 123.

life - that relating to cooking, nature, sport, saving money and other 'homely' pursuits
 - reinforcing the view that the power relations of pornography are to be observed in
 the cosy familiarity of 'normal' domestic and working life:

Das ist ein Gefäß, zur Entnahme bestimmt, und auch er füllt sich in der Nacht immer wieder, dieser Selbstbedienungsladen, dieser Kaufmannsladen für Kinder, wo man unbesorgt auf die kleine Seite gehen kann. Mit dem Haustorschlüssel hat man schon das Anrecht auf das Tagesgericht erworben, und man kann die Klitoris in die Länge ziehen oder die Klotüre zuschmeißen, die rom. kath. Heimat biegt sich, aber sie läßt die Leute zur Schwangerenberatung und zum Heiraten gehn. Und das Haus muß SOS blinken, während die Frau zur Anwendung gebracht wird.¹⁴²

The director's bizarre sexual contortions bear no resemblance to natural 'drives' or 'instincts', and the reader's overwhelming impression is not of the workings of lust or desire, but of violence and coercion. The cultural construction of sexuality is emphasised by this strategy, in whose interests nature is often invoked, but which ultimately has no real link with nature:

Ja, und vielleicht ist das Geschlecht die Natur des Menschen, ich meine, die Natur des Menschen besteht darin, dem Geschlecht hinterherzurennen, bis er, im ganzen und in seinen Grenzen gesehen, genauso wichtig geworden ist wie dieses.¹⁴³

The director's ritual humiliation of his wife through sexual activity has also begun to influence his son, who is the secret observer of his parents' sexual activities. In Freudian theory, the infant perceives his or her mother as omnipotent, or 'phallic' until it reaches the Oedipus complex. Thus, as Jane Gallop argues, the phallic mother is perceived as 'whole' until the child discovers that she is in fact not whole, but a 'hole', that she is, in Freudian terms, castrated.¹⁴⁴ Gerti's son, through his observation of his father's brutal mastery of his mother, and his obsession with her 'hole', has drawn similar conclusions: 'Er sieht sich schon als eine Formulierung seines Vaters'.¹⁴⁵ However, the director's son builds his observations not on his

¹⁴²Jelinek, 1989, p. 57.

¹⁴³Jelinek, 1989, p. 79.

¹⁴⁴Jane Gallop, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1982), p. 22.

¹⁴⁵Jelinek, 1989, p. 64.

awareness of his mother's anatomical 'castration', as psychoanalytic theory suggests, but on his realisation that she is socially 'castrated'.

Gerti, however, has begun to develop strategies for resistance to the domination of her husband, and the control exerted over her by the demands of her role as housewife and mother. She drinks too much in an attempt to escape the harsh realities of her apparently cossetted existence as 'Frau Direktor', and, during these episodes, she wanders away from home in her nightclothes. On one of these occasions, Gerti encounters a young student who lures her to have sex with him in his car, a scene which is strongly reminiscent of Erika Kohut's relationship with the student Klemmer. This student, Michael, who is staying at his parents' second home which is located in Gerti's village, is from a privileged background. In common with his counterpart in the earlier novel, Michael is a sport enthusiast who wishes to partake of the skiing facilities available in the area. For the man in question, meeting the confused and vulnerable Gerti is something of a joke, repeating the same patterns of exploitation which structure her marriage. He is interested in her feelings only in so far as they serve as a conduit to the sexual intercourse which he desires. She is a body to be penetrated in the same manner as that practised by the director, to be discarded after use: 'Sie schüttelt ihre Lebensruine über diesem Menschensohn aus, der nichts will, als möglichst schnell sie fühlen und füllen.'¹⁴⁶ For Gerti, on the other hand, meeting the student has powerful emotional significance, and she sees a relationship with him as a way out of the prison of her marriage: 'Gerti spricht von ihren Gefühlen und bis wohin sie ihnen folgen möchte. Michael staunt, langsam erwachend, was für eine Hand ihm da ins Geschoß gefallen ist.'¹⁴⁷ The sexual encounter between them is memorable only in the fact that it mirrors almost exactly the degradations of Gerti's relationship with her husband. However, following the encounter, Gerti is consumed by the desire to repeat the experience and seeks him out, once again under the influence of alcohol, on the ski slopes, bizarrely dressed in a mink coat and high heels. However, Michael has lost all interest in her, and is merely embarrassed by the differences in their ages. In the company of his friends, therefore, he participates in a brutal sexual assault on the woman:

¹⁴⁶Jelinek, 1989, p. 102.

¹⁴⁷Jelinek, 1989, p. 120.

Es schneit jetzt so herzlich, wie wir es uns vom Winter erwarten. Die letzte Flasche ist weggeworfen worden. Von Gerti will niemand im Ernst einen Schluck nehmen, obwohl sie sich verschenken würde, bis das Grün sich wieder zeigt. Ihre Möse wird nur auseinandergefaltet und, diese Broschüre kennen wir schon, lachend wieder zusammengeklappt. Die Lapperln klatschen in den geübten Händen. So wichtig ist das Ganze wiederum nicht.¹⁴⁸

On her return home, Gerti becomes the focus of attention for her two men, her husband and her son, both of whom wish to take possession of her. To protect herself from the unwanted sexual attentions of the director, she feigns affectionate involvement with her son. However, her strategy is thwarted by her husband, who gives the boy tablets to make him sleep, so that he can claim his wife's body for his own. Following Gerti's unsuccessful attempt to escape in her car into the dubious protection of Michael, the director is successful in recapturing her, and forces himself on her sexually in a particularly brutal fashion. On their return home, Gerti carries out the ultimate act of revenge on the man, by suffocating their anaesthetised child and disposing of his body in the nearby river. By killing her son, Gerti not only destroys the miniature patriarch-to-be - 'Ja, dieses Kind ist noch klein, aber es ist speziell als Mann geplant, glaube ich'¹⁴⁹ - but also offers resistance to the oppressive structures of patriarchy, using the only weapon which she has at her disposal. Her attempt to escape from the abuses of her marriage into an affair with Michael has revealed itself as a dead end, which is structured by the same power relations as her relationship with her husband, a theme which features in all three of the works considered in this thesis.

3.8 The social background

The background against which the director's family is depicted is constituted by the employees who work in the paper factory, and who are dependent on it for their livelihoods and dignity. In imagery which is reminiscent of Zola's *Germinal*,¹⁵⁰ the paper factory squats over the village, devouring its helpless workers: 'Die Fabrik küßt die Erde, wo sie ihr allzu gierig Menschen entnommen hat.'¹⁵¹ However, if the

¹⁴⁸Jelinek, 1989, p. 201.

¹⁴⁹Jelinek, 1989, p. 219.

¹⁵⁰Emile Zola, *Germinal* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1973).

¹⁵¹Jelinek, 1989, p. 69.

status of the employed is unenviable, a far worse fate is suffered by those individuals who are not lucky enough to have secured employment, and who are therefore unable to participate in a world which Jelinek depicts as dominated by consumption: 'Vorbei geht's an den unsterblichen Seelen der Erwerbslosen, die, wie der Papst befahl, von Jahr zu Jahr mehr werden.'¹⁵² In the novel *Die Klavierspielerin* the dominant image, as Juliet Wigmore argues, is one of bondage.¹⁵³ In the later novel, the bondage metaphor is replaced by one of rape, both within the family, between husband and wife, and in society as a whole in the exploitative relationship between labour and capital: 'Der Direktor hält die Frau mit seinem Gewicht nieder. Um die freudig von der Mühe zur Ruh wechselnden Arbeiter niederzuhalten, genügt seine Unterschrift, er muß sich nicht mit seinem Körper drauflegen.'¹⁵⁴ The sexual act, then, functions as a lens through which the power structures inherent in society as a whole are viewed, with the male and female genitalia mirroring symbolically the asymmetry of male and female power. Reflecting the Marxist standpoint which is a feature of Jelinek's oeuvre, the fulcrum of the power relations depicted in the novel, is one of economics: the male acquires the right to force himself on his wife sexually through her economic dependence on him; similarly, his workers are in a submissive relationship to him through their reliance on their employment in his factory.

It is significant that the director runs a paper factory and, once again, it stands in close relationship to his relationship to his wife: 'Der Mann benutzt und beschmiert die Frau wie das Papier, das er herstellt.'¹⁵⁵ Paper serves in the novel as an illustration *par excellence* of the consumerist principle: a natural product is exploited to provide a material which is then used, for the most part, to foster further consumption in an attempt to meet society's insatiable needs: '[...] wir schauen auf das Ufer, das mit leeren Milchpackungen und Konservendosen übersät ist, und lernen die Grenzen kennen, die die Natur unserem Konsum gesetzt hat.'¹⁵⁶ Even the author and the text are affected by the power of the director and his paper factory: 'Ich schreibe es deutlich auf: Ich bin wie Wachs in der Hand des Papiers. So einen Menschen möchte ich auch einmal kennenlernen, der die Macht hat, mich in dem,

¹⁵²Jelinek, 1989, p. 69.

¹⁵³See Chapter 2.

¹⁵⁴Jelinek, 1989, p. 20.

¹⁵⁵Jelinek, 1989, p. 68.

¹⁵⁶Jelinek, 1989, p. 84.

was ich sage neu herzustellen.¹⁵⁷ The text is therefore situated within the consumer society which it portrays. The lives of the majority of families are dominated by visits to the supermarket, where they spend their hard-earned wages on 'Lebensmittel', thereby completing the vicious circle which characterises this text: 'Und so teilt die Natur mit uns, damit wir ihre Produkte essen und von den Besitzern der Fabriken und Banken dafür aufgegessen werden.'¹⁵⁸ Nobody in the text is viewed as free, not even the director, who is under constant pressure from his superiors to maintain the paper factory as a viable concern. As in the other two works analysed, however, the economic perspective is always considered in combination with the question of gender. Thus, men and women, whatever their level in society, will have a different experience of their economic status, and the texts present the standpoint that women, within their social stratum, always occupy a position which is inferior to that of equivalent males. Thus, even the wives of the disenfranchised unemployed are subordinate to their menfolk as a result of their lack of independent income:

Die Frauen stecken den Kopf in die Einkaufstaschen, in denen sie das Arbeitslosengeld fortgetragen haben. Wohl angeführt sind sie von dem Konsumladen, der ihnen die Sonderangebote durchsagt. Ja, besondere Angebote waren sie selbst einmal!¹⁵⁹

The Catholic Church provides the backdrop to the consumerist society depicted in the novel. A favourite target for Jelinek in her portrayal of female subjectivity is its construction within the doctrines of the Church, and particularly, those of the Catholic Church. This version of female subjectivity, still the dominant version in the western European world, and particularly in Austria, is characterised by the organisation of societal power relations in the favour of men, and to the detriment of women. At the same time, the language used to describe women within Catholic doctrine is that of idealisation. In a characteristic example of Jelinek's blasphemous textual technique, the ascension of Christ is equated with the erectile qualities of the penis, and therefore with male domination: 'Jahrhunderte kriegen diesen Mann nicht klein, der steht immer wieder auf. Jesus: der ist auch nicht totzukriegen!'¹⁶⁰ Within Christian thought, traditionally, women are defined according to their maternal role, and their caring and nurturing qualities. However, in terms of Jelinek's textual

¹⁵⁷Jelinek, 1989, p.135.

¹⁵⁸Jelinek, 1989, p. 66.

¹⁵⁹Jelinek, 1989, p. 66.

¹⁶⁰Jelinek, 1989, p. 72.

practice, these qualities are produced in women by a repressive social structure. Her attempted exposure of female oppression is achieved through the blasphemous subversion of religious language and terminology, revealing the brutal ideological structures which, according to the writer, underpin it: 'Einmal muß jeder die Handhabung erlernen, damit er seinem weibl. Partner in ewiger Ruh und in ewigem Frieden das Arschloch durchstoßen kann, denn es gibt keinen weiteren Partner mehr, diese Frau ist weit genug!'¹⁶¹ The power of God over humankind is viewed as analogous in the novel to the power of the director over his employees, and the power which men exert over women, as Gürtler argues:

Der Fabrikdirector ist mit Macht, Geld und unerschöpflicher Potenz (den pornographischen Mythos verdoppelnd) ausgestattet, er ist im Besitz des EINEN: des Phallus. Der Besitz des Phallus verschafft ihm - durch die blasphemischen Metaphern des Textes angedeutet - gottähnliche Schöpfergewalt.¹⁶²

The use of blasphemy, then, is a central tool in the resistance demonstrated in Jelinek's texts to the hubris of the (male) Cartesian subject, his assumption that the workings of his mind are a reflection of its divine creator and the associated exercise of social power. As in the other two works by Jelinek considered in this thesis, patriarchal power is exercised through the violent repression of female rebellion, apparently with the sanction of the Catholic church: 'So wie Sie ging angeblich auch Jesus, dieser ewig durch Österreich und dessen Vertreter Fernreisende, durch seine Umgebung und blickte nach, ob etwas zu verbessern oder bestrafen oder betreffen war.'¹⁶³ In common with both *Die Klavierspielerin* and *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, any attempts by women to escape from this all-pervasive patriarchal network inevitably result in their being caught in a further set of snares.

3.9 Conclusion: 'Die Sprache selbst will jetzt sprechen gehen.'¹⁶⁴

The play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen* demonstrates resistance to patriarchal prescriptions by means of a de(con)struction of their linguistic strategies. A similar focus on language is evident in the novel *Lust*: the plot is skeletal, consisting of only

¹⁶¹Jelinek, 1989, p. 171.

¹⁶²Gürtler, *Die Entschleierung der Mythen von Natur und Sexualität*, in Gürtler (ed.), 1990, p. 127.

¹⁶³Jelinek, 1989, p. 128.

¹⁶⁴Jelinek, 1989, p. 28.

a small number of incidents for a novel of two hundred and fifty-five pages in length. Each episode in the novel is accompanied by several pages of associative and deconstructive language and, in common with *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, it is this language which constitutes the central target in this novel. As the reader is informed by the anonymous narrator, 'Die Sprache selbst will jetzt sprechen gehen!'¹⁶⁵ Jelinek's main linguistic technique, as has already been demonstrated, is the use of exaggeration and distortion of familiar language to the point at which it is rendered absurd and meaningless. In this novel too, Jelinek operates from a standpoint which suggests that, if female subjectivity is constructed through language, it can also be unravelled through the same medium. In addition, the characters are too two-dimensional to provide any possibilities for identification, and they are frequently termed 'die Frau' or 'der Mann' to emphasise their status as representative subjects. Thus, the clichés regarding female passivity used to describe Gerti in the novel are ironically inverted in the violent end to the novel. This demonstrates not, of course, that infanticide is a path to female liberation, but that the stereotypical view of women as passive and subordinate is a cultural construct, the counterpart of which is the aggressive 'nature' of men.

The most controversial feature of this novel, in terms of its reception, concerns its use of the language of pornography to convey its arguments relating to the false patriarchal construction of female subjectivity. Pornography is generally accepted within feminist theory to be a vehicle for the oppression and subordination of women for the gratification of men. From this perspective, then, it is difficult to ascertain how this genre can possibly bring about changes in the construction of female subjectivity. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasise that, although the text makes use of the language of pornography, it cannot be described as a pornographic text. One example of this is the language used to depict the male and female genitalia, and the sexual act. It is also important to emphasise that the sexual act functions in the text as a paradigm of exploitation which is repeated at every level of the society portrayed. Thus, although sexual description is to be found on almost every page of the novel, the intention of this is the reverse of that carried out within classical Freudian theory, which seeks to find a sexual motivation for all human activity. Jelinek works in precisely the opposite direction by starting with the sexual

¹⁶⁵Jelinek, 1989, p. 28.

act, and using it to expose the attitudes and prejudices which structure society as a whole. The sexual organs, therefore, function in the text as lenses through which the minutiae of middle-class Austrian life are viewed. Whereas pornographic literature attempts to inflate biological reality by means of fantasy, Jelinek uses everyday images to deflate the myths which surround the sexual organs. The female genitalia are thus viewed variously in terms of homely analogies, such as 'die Sparbüchse', 'ihre Öse', 'die Tasche ihres Körpers', and '[ihr] Garten, der, stets geöffnet, zum Herumwühlen und Grunzen bestens geeignet ist';¹⁶⁶ whereas their male counterpart is described as '[der] Expreßzug, der daherdonnert', 'die Waffe',¹⁶⁷ or 'der Büchsenöffner'.¹⁶⁸ Male sexual activity is described in even more ludicrous terms: 'der Mann [...] röstet seine schwere Wurst im Blätterteig von Haut und Haar in ihrem Ofen', 'Der Mann will seinen wilden Karren in den Dreck der Frau fahren', or 'die schwere Maschine des Mannes kommt von fern her nach Haus, zerteilt die Furche, die sie mit ihren Zähnen gerissen hat, läßt geschnittenes Gras wie Schaum in die Luft fliegen und die Frau volllaufen'.¹⁶⁹ The effect of these darkly comic metaphors, on the other hand, is overwhelmingly sinister, reinforcing as they do the abuse of power by which they are structured.

Clearly, though, the use of pornographic imagery carries with it the risk that the text will appeal, not to the reader's rational faculties, but to their voyeurism, thereby reinscribing the reality which it seeks to undermine. There is no doubt that this text comes perilously close to that danger at times. However, as Luserke asserts, Jelinek's technique, which he terms an 'Ästhetik des Obszönen', radically subverts rather than duplicates the purpose of pornography, diverting its energies into Jelinek's political purpose. He quotes the writer's own arguments about the use of obscenity as follows:

In dem, was ich schreibe, gibt es immer wieder drastische Stellen, aber die sind politisch. Sie haben nicht die Unschuldigkeit des Daseins und den Zweck des Aufgeilens. Sie sollen den Dingen, der Sexualität, ihre Geschichte wiedergeben, sie nicht in ihrer scheinbaren Unschuld lassen, sondern die Schuldigen benennen. Die nennen, die sich Sexualität aneignen und das Herr/Knecht-Machtverhältnis aufdecken.(-) Das Obszöne ist dann gerechtfertigt, wenn man den Beziehungen zwischen

¹⁶⁶Jelinek, 1989, p. 45.

¹⁶⁷Jelinek, 1989, p. 21.

¹⁶⁸Jelinek, 1989, p. 38.

¹⁶⁹Jelinek, 1989, p. 58.

Männern und Frauen die Unschuld nimmt und die Machtverhältnisse klärt.¹⁷⁰

Although an author's statement of intent is no guarantee that her purpose has been achieved, this thesis argues that the novel *Lust* fulfils the criteria established by Jelinek herself. In this novel she attempts a highly original approach to the problem of female subjectivity, skilfully avoiding the traps which patriarchal discourse sets for 'presumptuous' women. This is not a book about sex at all. It is a text which uses sex as a means to an end, as a conduit to what its author deems to represent true obscenity: the degradation to which the human being is subjected within an exploitative (capitalist) system, and the institutionalised oppression of the female subject by the male at every level, and in every facet of society. Thus, this is less a novel about 'Lust' than about what Susie Orbach terms 'The Impossibility of Sex',¹⁷¹ as no authentic sexual relationship between men and women can take place within the inequalities of the social structure depicted by Jelinek.

3.10 Double Bind

Jelinek's textual practice, then, in this, as in the other two works considered, operates in and around the central metaphor of the 'double bind' relationship. With particular reference to female subjectivity, the three texts analysed all emphasise the impossibility for female subjects of uninformed resistance to patriarchal power structures and, in each case, the escape route chosen by the woman in question is revealed to be a disguised further reflection of these same structures. The texts both destabilise the double bind by subjecting its premises to a process of systematic ridicule, and make playful use of its strategies by enmeshing the reader in a maze of shifting perspectives and interpretative cul-de-sacs. The aim of the texts, as both this and the previous chapter have argued, is the exposure of concealed and exploitative power structures. The destructive power of a double bind relationship in its psychoanalytical manifestation is to be observed particularly in the parent/child relationship, where one party is not in possession of the awareness required to evade its strategies. This is not to suggest that it is not to be observed in other interpersonal

¹⁷⁰Matthias Luserke, 'Ästhetik des Obszönen: Elfriede Jelineks »Lust« als Protokoll einer Mikroskopie des Patriarchats', in Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, Januar 1993, 62-63.

¹⁷¹Susie Orbach, *The Impossibility of Sex* (London: Penguin, 1999).

situations, but its particular potency inheres in the relationship of a young child with its primary caregiver. Thus, Jelinek's work can be viewed as having an educative function. Far from being destructive, a charge which is frequently levelled against this writer's work, it seeks to provide female, and other disempowered, subjects with the knowledge required to outwit the sinuous structure of the patriarchal labyrinth.

The following chapter analyses the role played by the body in the construction of female subjectivity. In particular, this analysis seeks to establish whether or not the double bind metaphor, which pervades constructions of female subjectivity, can be further destabilised by employing the body as 'supplement'.¹⁷²

¹⁷²See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Derrida's notion of the 'supplement'.

4.1 Corporeal Feminist Theory: Introduction

Jelinek's textual practice was analysed using a framework derived from the theories of Freud and Lacan. The purpose of the following examination of corporeal feminist theories is to establish to what extent this branch of feminist postmodernist theory makes a contribution to a reevaluation and redefinition of female subjectivity. An overview of this theoretical field will be followed in the next two chapters by an analysis of three texts by the writer Anne Duden. This is not to suggest, however, that the theoretical framework chosen for each writer could not be applied to the other. This chapter can, therefore, be read as applying equally to the chapters which precede it, as to those which follow. Jelinek's work, as the two preceding chapters have argued, is characterised by powerful corporeal themes, which can be read as an attempt to subvert the conventional Cartesian mind/body dualism. In theoretical terms, though, a progression can be observed in the thesis from an approach which relies on a classical psychoanalytical approach, to one which attempts to integrate a corporeal perspective.

As Chapter 2 of this thesis sought to demonstrate, Jelinek's novel *Die Klavierspielerin* draws attention to the cultural marginalisation of corporeality in its portrayal of the main character's body as a 'tote Hülle'.¹ The focus of corporeal experience for Jelinek is sexuality, which in turn is depicted as fundamental to the construction of gendered subjectivity. In the case of Erika Kohut, she is unable to form any sense of a 'core self' because of the injunction against touch which has been placed on her sexual organs.² As a result, she has only vicarious access to corporeal experience through her voyeuristic activities. In one scene, for example, the text describes a perverse practice pursued by both Erika and her mother, in which they search scraps of discarded garments for evidence of the body which has occupied them: 'Die Lebens- oder Todesabfälle von anderen, möglichst bevor deren Leben noch in die Reinigung gebracht wird. Da läßt sich viel forschen und finden. Für Erika sind diese Abschipsel das eigentlich Wesentliche.'³ This fascination with microscopic body fragments is reminiscent of Kristeva's theory of the 'abject', a term

¹ Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Klavierspielerin* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1986), p. 36.

² See Chapter 1 for a description of Jane Flax's concept of the 'core self', derived from the work of D.W. Winnicott.

³ Jelinek, 1986, p. 127.

used to describe those aspects of corporeal existence which are not deemed to be culturally acceptable. Jelinek's transgressive focus on the 'abject', therefore, represents an attempt to reintegrate the corporeal into a mind-dominated culture. As repression is a dynamic process, which cannot be easily reversed, Jelinek uses shock tactics to effect this, by mocking and manipulating the reader's sensibilities through the use of graphic descriptions of corporeal experience. Further, as disgust frequently involves a corporeal response, the reader's body is drawn into the workings of the text through Jelinek's use of what Wright terms an 'Ästhetik des Ekels'.⁴

The play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*⁵ is characterised by a focus on the discourses relating to the body, rather than naturalistic descriptions of the body itself. Nonetheless, the abject is represented in the text's central focus on one bodily fluid - blood - which features in copious quantities in the play. This central motif encapsulates a number of taboos relating to the female body and menstruation, and the general 'leakiness' of the female body, a subject which is explored further in the conclusion to this chapter. Blood also evokes the archetypal themes of birth and death. Similarly, in Jelinek's work an association between sex and death is a recurrent theme. In the novel *Lust*, however, the body becomes the structuring principle of the text in its transgressive focus on the orifices of the female body, as evidenced by a series of graphic accounts of anal, oral and vaginal sex. These descriptions make use of the genre of pornography, which the novel satirises, as another area in which a focus on body orifices is deemed acceptable. However, Jelinek's purpose represents the mirror image of that embodied in pornographic literature, aiming as it does to demythologise by ridiculing the cultural reinterpretation of the functionality of the body. Jelinek's depiction of the body, as has already been argued, takes a transgressive form, and no pleasant or earthy picture of corporeal experience can be discerned. On the other hand, arguably, there is implicit in this writer's approach a plea for a more holistic conception of subjectivity, which integrates all aspects of corporeal existence. Thus, Jelinek's

⁴ Elizabeth Wright, 'Eine Ästhetik des Ekels. Elfriede Jelineks Roman »Die Klavierspielerin«', in Heinz Ludwig Arnold (ed.), *Text + Kritik*, 117, *Elfriede Jelinek* (Munich: edition text + kritik, Januar 1993), 51-59.

⁵ Elfriede Jelinek, *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, edited and with an introduction by Regine Friedrich (Köln: Prometh Verlag, 1987).

textual practice prefigures and echoes many of the themes of corporeal feminist theory which will be discussed in this chapter.

4.2 *Volatile Bodies*: Corporeal Feminism

The term 'corporeal feminism' is derived from Elizabeth Grosz's book *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, which was published in 1994.⁶ This work occupies a central position amongst a group of texts by feminist philosophers which engage with the role of the female body in the construction of female subjectivity.⁷ The work of these feminist academics is to be located within the field of feminist postmodernist theory, which was discussed in Chapter 1. Grosz asserts the crucial significance of the female body in the construction of female subjectivity. The text represents an attempt to engage with, and to subvert, the mind/body dualism central to the Cartesian view of the subject. Descartes terms the mind *res cogitans*, contrasting this with the body, which is made of the same material as the natural environment, *res extensa*.⁸ The mind is viewed as separate from, and superior to, the body, which is not essential to its functioning. Within Western culture, the female subject is both marginalised, and associated with nature. An engagement with the body, then, according to Grosz, is an engagement with the position of women: the marginalisation of the body is analogous to the cultural marginalisation of women.⁹

Grosz argues that the body occupies an ambivalent position within feminist theory. She discerns three different approaches among feminist theorists to the question of the female body, which also represent a chronological development in feminist thinking on this subject. The first and earliest of these approaches is termed 'Egalitarian Feminism', and it is equated with figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Shulamith Firestone and Simone de Beauvoir.¹⁰ These feminists, according to Grosz, tend either to view the biological processes of the female body as a barrier to self-realisation, or to see in these processes themselves a source of special insight

⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁷ See also Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics Power and Corporeality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

⁸ Grosz, 1994, p. 6.

⁹ Grosz, 1994, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Grosz, 1994, pp. 15-16.

and a particular relationship to existence. One approach, associated particularly with Beauvoir and Firestone, views female biology as the hurdle which must be overcome if women are to achieve full subjecthood; the technological control of childbirth is thus welcomed. Radical feminist theories, on the other hand, which Grosz also subsumes under this heading, attempt to rehabilitate the female body, viewing it as a unique locus of female 'truth' and meanings. Both of these approaches, according to Grosz, have tended to reinforce, rather than deconstruct, conventional thought paradigms by viewing nature and culture as diametrically opposed.

The second tendency, and by far the largest category, is termed 'Social Constructionism'.¹¹ This group includes such feminist psychoanalytic writers as Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva and Nancy Chodorow. Psychoanalytic approaches, particularly, are included in this grouping, addressing as they do the effects of social influences on the presumed raw material provided by the infant female body. This group, in Grosz's view, has made significant advances over the first group in the sense that the female body is not viewed as an obstacle to be overcome, but as a neutral biological entity which is subject to political and cultural encoding. However, social constructionist approaches, according to Grosz, fail to break out of the dualistic framework which underpins the thinking of the first group. Whereas the theories of the first group are structured by the nature/culture opposition, those of this second group are organised around the dichotomy between biology and psychology. The focus for these theorists is not the sexed body, but the psychological concepts of masculinity and femininity which attach themselves to these bodies. Whereas the mind is viewed as an ideological construction, the body is still viewed as a biological given. It is not the processes of the female body themselves which are the issue, rather the use that culture makes of them. The possibility that the processes themselves may be cultural constructions is not addressed by this group.

The third group, to which Grosz would allocate her own work, is termed 'Sexual Difference', and includes theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Moira Gatens, and Judith Butler.¹² These are also theorists for whom the body is indeed deemed essential to an understanding of female subjectivity. However, it is viewed not as raw, natural material, but as a cultural product in its own right. This group does not deny the materiality of the body, but asserts the impossibility of having

¹¹Grosz, 1994, pp. 16-17.

¹²Grosz, 1994, pp. 17-19.

access to that materiality. From the moment the body begins to exist, it has already begun to be defined by culture. It is therefore impossible to disentangle the natural and the cultural, as they are inextricably interwoven. The way that the body is thought about, or even, perhaps, the fact that it is thought about at all, is cultural. This same interweaving is to be discerned in this group's approach to the mind/body dichotomy, which is subverted in a number of different ways. Whereas social constructionists tend to view the body as the blank screen onto which society's meanings are projected, this group of theorists engage with the composition of the 'screen' itself, which is also deemed to be cultural.

Grosz acknowledges that feminists have correctly identified the close association of the female with the body, which has contributed to women's cultural, and therefore also, socio-political marginalisation. As a result of this association, women are not capable of being epistemological subjects within a Cartesian framework: the female subject cannot 'know' in her own right, she functions as the recipient of pre-determined knowledges.¹³ This has produced a justifiable suspicion among feminist theorists regarding the body, and there has been a marked preference to investigate female subjectivity in terms of the conscious and unconscious minds. This manoeuvre, admittedly, subverts the close association between the female subject and the body; however, as Grosz, argues, by eschewing corporeality in favour of mind, feminist theorists collude with the central Cartesian dualism which privileges mind (the male) over body (the female), thereby reinscribing the asymmetry of the male/female dichotomy. Corporeal feminist approaches, then, have the task of negotiating the dangerous terrain between these two self-defeating alternatives. As Grosz formulates this problem:

I have risked alarming some feminists, with whom I feel political and conceptual alignments, who worry about the perilous closeness of the material covered in this book - theories of bodies - to those facets of patriarchal thought that have in the past served to oppress women, most notably the patriarchal rationalization of male domination in terms of the fragility, unreliability or biological closeness to nature attributed to the female body and the subordinate character attributed to women on account of the close connections between female psychology and biology. Women have been objectified and alienated as social subjects partly through the denigration and containment of the female body. This project hovers close to many patriarchal conceptions of the body that have served to establish an identity for women in essentialist,

¹³Grosz, 1994, p. 4.

ahistorical, or universalist terms. But I believe that it does so in order to contest these terms, to wrest a concept of the body away from these perils'¹⁴

Grosz's 'wager', as she terms it, in *Volatile Bodies* is that female subjectivity can be rethought in terms of a corporeal, rather than a psychical model. This model does not dispense with the psyche, rather it views the psyche as a product of the corporeal surface of the body, and the manner in which this surface is inscribed. This is a radical departure from the conventional view of the subject, which conceives it as occupying a three-dimensional space in which the body provides the shell, and the psyche is located within the subject's interior. Grosz stresses that her aim in this reconceptualisation is not part of a 'reductionist endeavour'. The subject is allowed its full complexity and multi-dimensionality, but these are theorised as located on or around the corporeal surface; it is, therefore, a model of surface, rather than depth.¹⁵

4.3 Beyond dualism: The Möbius Strip¹⁶

4.3.1 Dualisms

Grosz argues that Western philosophy is organised around what she describes as a 'profound somatophobia'.¹⁷ Although she takes Cartesianism as her focus, the origins of this school of thought, she argues, can be traced back to Plato and his conception of the inferiority of matter.¹⁸ The mind/body dichotomy is viewed by Grosz as central to the Cartesian world-view, functioning as it does as a template onto which other dichotomies are attached.¹⁹ Examples of these dualisms are: reason/emotion; day/night; strong/weak; culture/nature; conscious/unconscious; exterior/interior; self/other, to name but a few.²⁰ These dualisms are structured by a number of common factors:

¹⁴Grosz, 1994, p. xiv, Introduction and Acknowledgements, pp. vii-xvi.

¹⁵Grosz, 1994, Introduction and Acknowledgements, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁶Grosz, 1994, Introduction and Acknowledgements, p. xii.

¹⁷Grosz, 1994, p. 5.

¹⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 5.

¹⁹Grosz, 1994, pp. 3-4.

²⁰See also Susan Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 5.

(a) They all consist of a superior and an inferior term, and in most cases the superior term precedes the inferior term.

(b) Just as the mind/body dualism is structured by an association with male and female respectively, all other dualisms demonstrate this same gendered quality. Thus, reason is associated with men, whereas women are believed to lack rational understanding; culture is viewed as the male province, whereas women are deemed to be closer to nature, particularly in the light of their childbearing role; consciousness is defined as the male domain, whereas, according to psychoanalytic theory, the *unconscious* is wrought out of the child's traumatic awareness of separation from its mother's body.

(c) The second term has no existence in its own right, but is defined as everything which the first term expels from within its boundaries. Thus, it is predicated on lack and absence, rather than fullness and presence. This is no more clearly demonstrated than in Freudian developmental theory, in which the primary, founding gender is deemed to be male, the bifurcation of gender only occurring as a result of the mechanisms of the Oedipus complex.²¹ Femaleness, for Freud, is defined as a state of lacking maleness, in anatomical terms, of lacking a penis. If, therefore, the body is the 'Other' of the mind, and woman is the 'Other' of man, then woman is associated with all cultural Others: female subjectivity is produced around the locus of the Other.

4.3.2 The body as 'supplement'²²

Grosz's approach is non-dualistic in the sense that it refuses the mind/body dichotomy, whilst at the same time acknowledging the validity and centrality of both terms to a conception of female subjectivity. The emphasis on the interdependence of the two terms renders it impossible to assert the primacy of one term over the other. The deconstruction which Grosz undertakes in *Volatile Bodies* is enabled by the alchemical properties of the body as the second term of the mind/body dualism.

²¹Sigmund Freud [1932], 'Die Weiblichkeit', in *Neue Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 116.

²²See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Derrida's notion of the 'supplement'.

In spite of its relegation to the level of second term, the body has a 'peculiar status', according to Grosz. While, in cultural terms, the body functions as the inferior second term in this equation, it cannot be restricted to this status: 'It is this ability of bodies to always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control, which fascinates me and occupies much of this book.'²³ This 'peculiar' status of the body, according to Grosz, inheres in its irreducibility to any one state of being. In Cartesian terms the body is the object of the superior mind, which occupies a separate domain. On the other hand, the mind is located within the body, together with the complex of sensations and responses which constitute consciousness. Similarly, although in cultural terms women are associated with the body and men with the mind, in reality this is clearly nonsense: all men have bodies, and all women have minds. If, arguably, the body is repressed in the male subject in favour of the mind, neither can it be eradicated; it remains as the mind's cultural 'shadow'.²⁴

Twentieth-century research has demonstrated further links between mind and body, bearing out Grosz's arguments. For example, the influence of the mind over the body has been discussed since Freud's hysteria cases, and mind-based techniques such as creative visualisation are widely used in the treatment of a number of illnesses. Similarly, bodily techniques such as relaxation and yoga are used as ways of quieting the mind, and of combating stress. It is therefore not so easy, with twentieth-century hindsight, to relegate the body to an inferior and subordinate position *vis-à-vis* the mind. On the other hand, there is no doubt that the body is marginalised within Western culture. This is a paradoxical statement in the light of the apparent ubiquity of bodies in art, and in the media in general. However, it is a particular version of the body which is permitted to exist within conventional cultural frameworks: a stylised, and frequently idealised version which bears little resemblance to the realities of bodily existence.

²³Grosz, 1994, p. xi, Introduction and Acknowledgements.

²⁴The concept of the 'shadow' is derived from the work of Carl Gustav Jung. It refers to those aspects of personality which are not viewed as acceptable within a child's environment, and which are therefore consigned to the unconscious. The process of repression is a 'dynamic' one, with the result that the re-entry of shadow material into the conscious mind tends to produce anxiety in the subject and, therefore, a defensive response. For further explanation of this concept, see James A. Hall, *Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*, Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts, 13 (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1983), p. 15.

The body, therefore, threatens the established, consciousness-based, order. It functions both as the Other of that order, and as a radical and deconstructive 'supplement' to it. The notion of the supplement is derived from Derrida, and describes a property of language which traverses both sides of a dualism, whilst not forming a third term in opposition to it. It is both implicated in, and separate to the established order: 'the *supplement* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence.'²⁵ Whilst Grosz does not use the term 'supplement' to describe the body, this is clearly suggested by her interpretation of the body's status within culture. She does not attempt to establish a new 'corporeal ontology', rather, she seeks to use the body as a means of loosening the dualistic framework into which it is bound.²⁶ The concept of the 'social body' is crucial to this project: as Grosz argues, culture produces not subjects, but bodies.²⁷ The type of body women are allowed to inhabit, its range of movement, its size, its appearance, its attractiveness, all of these factors are determined by their particular cultural context. There are enormous differences between the freedoms available to male and female bodies within Western culture, for example, and there are similarly huge differences from one class to another, one ethnic group to another, one generation to another, and so on. In fact, according to Grosz, it is not possible to speak of 'the body' at all, rather it is necessary to speak of the types of 'bodies' generated by culture.²⁸

Finally, the distinction between the natural and the cultural body, as has already been mentioned, is blurred in corporeal feminist theory. It is no longer possible to distinguish between the body as raw material, and its cultural counterpart. The existence of the body as raw, pre-cultural material is not denied, but there is no access to it. The cultural construction of the body begins almost from conception, and there is no moment at which it is possible to differentiate the 'real' body from its cultural representation. All functions of the natural body, including birth and death, have been culturally interpreted, and there is no access for the language-dependent human subject to the presumed reality which underscores cultural overlays. As Grosz

²⁵Jacques Derrida [1972], *Positions*, translated and annotated by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 43.

²⁶See also Susan Hekman's discussion of Derrida's concept of the 'supplement', and its uses in deconstructing the masculine/feminine opposition (Hekman, 1990, pp. 170-172).

²⁷Grosz, 1994, p. 18.

²⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 19.

argues: 'the body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, *the* cultural, product.'²⁹

4.3.3 The Möbius Strip³⁰

Grosz's central proposition is that (female) subjectivity can be reconceived in terms of a corporeal framework, rather than a psychical model. However, rather than producing new theories, she interrogates and critically evaluates existing theories of the body and subjectivity, producing a new reading of them in accordance with the requirements of a corporeal feminism. These theories are predominantly the work of male theorists and represent perspectives which have frequently been rejected by feminist theorists. The underlying presumption in Grosz's selection of theories is that they undermine conventional dualistic ways of thinking about the mind and body. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt to summarise all of Grosz's complex arguments. This overview will therefore limit itself to a consideration of the three theoretical approaches upon which she builds her arguments: Freud's concept of the 'corporeal ego'; Foucault's notion of the inscribed body; and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the 'Body without Organs'.

Grosz's model for her conception of corporeal subjectivity is the Möbius Strip.³¹ This is a figure consisting of a single strip looped into a figure of eight. As the figure is three-dimensional, and yet there is no discernible beginning or end to its convolutions, it is impossible to determine where the outside ends and the inside begins. The sinuosity of the Möbius Strip combines the notion of two separate surfaces with an image of their interconnectedness and inseparability. This is a striking metaphor for Grosz's attempt to provide both a model of '*embodied subjectivity*', and '*psychical corporeality*'.³² The motif of the Möbius Strip is also an appropriate description of the trajectory of Grosz's theoretical investigations from

²⁹Grosz, 1994, p. 23.

³⁰Grosz, 1994, Introduction and Acknowledgements, p. xii.

³¹The Möbius Strip has been most famously depicted in the work of the Dutch graphic artist, M.C. Escher. It is named after the mathematician, Augustus Ferdinand Möbius (1790-1868), and describes a three-dimensional figure which has only one surface and one edge, such as that which can be formed by taking a strip of paper and twisting it to form a figure of eight. See Bruno Ernst, *The Magic Mirror of M.C. Escher* (Norfolk: Tarquin, 1985), translated from the Dutch by John E. Brigham, pp. 99-101.

³²Grosz, 1994, p. 22. (The italics are original to the text).

theories which retain conventional distinctions between inside and outside and masculine and feminine to those which adopt a fluid and deconstructive approach to dualisms, reaching 'that point of twisting or self-transformation in which the inside flips over to become the outside, or the outside turns over on itself to become the inside.'³³

4.4 Corporeal theories: The corporeal ego

4.4.1 Freud

Freud is well-known as the *bête noire* of feminist theory. However, his theoretical writings also offer one of the central theories underpinning Grosz's conception of a corporeal feminism. She focusses particularly on a little-discussed aspect of Freudian theory, namely the question of 'the corporeal ego'. This theory of the ego is articulated in Freud's later work, '*Das Ich und das Es*', published in 1923, and it is to be differentiated from that expounded in the earlier work, '*Zur Einführung des Narzißmus*', published in 1914, which views the ego as founded on the subject's ability to take its own body as a love object. Both theories, however, have a corporeal basis. In the earlier theory, the ego is conceived as an antechamber in which the body's libidinal energies are stored prior to their investment in external objects. The ego is continually torn between its need to invest in external objects, thereby depleting itself, and its need to retain libido by investing its own body with libidinal energies.³⁴ In this model of the ego, it cannot be viewed as an entity in its own right, rather, it functions merely as a membrane surrounding the sum total of libidinal energies which emanate from the body itself. It has no fixed structure and is able to form and reform to accommodate alterations in patterns of libidinal intensities and flows within the body.³⁵ In the later work, Freud theorises the ego rather differently as a structure whose function is to mediate between the demands of reality and the id, the site of the subject's primordial drives:

³³Grosz, 1994, p. 160.

³⁴Sigmund Freud [1917], '*Zur Einführung des Narzißmus*', in *Das Ich und das Es: Metapsychologische Schriften*, Einleitung von Alex Holder (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1992), pp. 53-4.

³⁵See Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 28-31.

Es ist leicht einzusehen, das Ich ist der durch den direkten Einfluß der Außenwelt unter Vermittlung von *W-Bw* veränderte Teil des Es, gewissermaßen eine Fortsetzung der Oberflächendifferenzierung. Es bemüht sich auch, den Einfluß der Außenwelt auf das Es und seine Absichten zur Geltung zu bringen, ist bestrebt, das Realitätsprinzip an die Stelle des Lustprinzips zu setzen, welches im Es uneingeschränkt regiert.³⁶

Although the ego's function is to mediate between the subject's inside and outside worlds, it does not 'belong' to the outside world. Rather, the ego is closely identified with the subject's body; it is a projection out of the body, not layered over its surface. As Freud describes this: 'Das Ich ist vor allem ein körperliches, es ist nicht nur ein Oberflächenwesen, sondern selbst die Projektion einer Oberfläche.'³⁷ The ego, then, according to Grosz, can be viewed as a form of 'psychical callous', deriving from the surface of the body, whose function is to filter sensory data received from both within and outside of the body.³⁸ It defines and delimits the body, marking the separation between the embodied subject and the rest of the world. Freud emphasises the corporeal nature of the ego, which is differentiated out of the id as a result of inner and outer impingements on the body's surface. The ego, then, can be viewed as a tracing of the body's surface, which, as Freud had already indicated in his earlier formulation of the theory of narcissism, is 'libidinally invested' by the subject.³⁹

To a greater or lesser extent, as Grosz argues, the subject loves her body, or, alternatively, she hates it, which is an inversion of the original love relationship.⁴⁰ Thus, the loss of a limb or a breast, for example, is not merely perceived as an inconvenience, but as a major loss of self. The phenomenon of the phantom limb is a further demonstration of the subject's libidinal investment in her body and her unwillingness to adapt her body schema to incorporate the reality of an altered body image.⁴¹ The manner of the body's libidinal investment by the subject, however, varies from one person to the next. Similarly, this investment is uneven - some parts of the body will be invested with libido to a far greater extent than others. For

³⁶ Sigmund Freud [1923], 'Das Ich und das Es', in *Das Ich und das Es: Metapsychologische Schriften* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1992), p. 264.

³⁷ Sigmund Freud [1923], 1992, p. 266.

³⁸ Grosz, 1994, p. 37.

³⁹ Grosz, 1994, p. 37.

⁴⁰ Grosz, 1994, p. 32.

⁴¹ See Grosz, 1994, pp. 41-42.

example, few people have a very powerful image of, or very strong feelings regarding, their backs, because of the difficulty for the human subject in viewing the back of the body. The front of the body, on the other hand, and particularly the face, are of fundamental significance to the subject.⁴² Thus, as Grosz argues, the ego: 'is not a point-for point projection of the body's surface, but an outline or representation of the degrees of erotogenicity of the bodily zones and organs.'⁴³ As an image of the body's surface the ego is a 'phantasmatic' representation, rather than a realistic template or map.⁴⁴

A central term in the Freudian conception of the corporeal ego is the perceptual system. The perceptual system represents a powerful example of the interdependence of mind and body. Although the function of the senses is to gather data which has to be processed by the brain, the senses themselves are located within the subject's body. The perceptual system, although associated with the mind, is crucially dependent on the body. If the ego is to fulfil its mediatory role, it has to be able to register both sensations from inside the subject's body and from the outside world. The body thus acts as a medium of exchange, receiving both endogenous and exogenous stimuli by means of the perceptual system. Freud, however, places particular emphasis on the importance of the surface of the body, as the organ responsible for both the body's perception of itself and its awareness of the outside world.

Auf die Entstehung des Ichs und seine Absonderung vom Es scheint noch ein anderes Moment als der Einfluß des Systems *W* [Wahrnehmung] hingewirkt zu haben. Der eigene Körper und vor allem die Oberfläche desselben ist ein Ort, von dem gleichzeitig äußere und innere Wahrnehmungen ausgehen können. Es wird ein anderes Objekt gesehen, ergibt aber dem Getast zweierlei Empfindungen, von denen die eine einer inneren Wahrnehmung gleichkommen kann. Es ist in der Psychophysiologie hinreichend erörtert worden, auf welche Weise sich der eigene Körper aus der Wahrnehmungswelt heraushebt. Auch der Schmerz scheint dabei eine Rolle zu spielen, und die Art, wie man bei schmerzhaften Erkrankungen eine neue Kenntnis seiner Organe erwirbt, ist vielleicht vorbildlich für die Art, wie man überhaupt zur Vorstellung seines eigenen Körpers kommt.⁴⁵

⁴²Grosz, 1994, p. 42.

⁴³Grosz, 1994, p. 37.

⁴⁴Grosz, 1994, p. 38.

⁴⁵Freud [1923], 1992, pp. 265-266.

This aspect of Freudian theory underlies Grosz's assertion that subjectivity should be viewed as a model of surfaces, rather than of depth. Just as Foucault argues that the 'soul' is produced in and around the body, as a result of the interactions between the body and its cultural context,⁴⁶ Freud theorises the ego, the sense of self, in a similar way. The skin, the largest organ in the human body, represents the perceptual surface of the individual: the ego, then, is a 'skin' ego.⁴⁷

4.4.2 Jacques Lacan

Grosz's reading of Freud constructs the ego as a phantasmatic map of the body's surface, based on the distribution of libidinal intensities over the skin. This aspect of Freudian theory was further developed by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Although Lacan takes Freud's first theory of the ego,⁴⁸ the narcissistic model, as the basis for his theoretical writings, the link between these two models is in the fundamental importance of the body for the development of subjectivity. Lacan's theory of body image builds on Freud's assertion of the primacy of corporeality in the development of the ego. This theory, which is expressed in the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, is an inter-disciplinary one, in the sense that it is derived not just from Freudian psychoanalytic theory, but also from neurological writings, particularly those which explore the phenomenon of the 'phantom limb'.⁴⁹

In Lacanian theory, there are two stages in the infant's development of an autonomous sense of self. The first of these is the mirror stage, which occurs at the age of approximately six months, and the second is the negotiation of the Oedipus complex which takes place at around the age of eighteen months. The mirror stage represents the child's first perception of herself in terms of a holistic body image. Before the baby enters this stage its experience of itself is theorised by Lacan as one of fragmentation. The mirror stage begins when the baby begins to recognise its reflection in the mirror. Captivated by the image of wholeness and integrity which it represents, this body image is libidinally invested by the infant, or, to put it in other terms, the baby falls in love with its own reflection. However, according to Lacan, this libidinal investment is founded on a misrecognition: the baby mistakes its mirror

⁴⁶Grosz, 1994, p. 149.

⁴⁷Grosz, 1994, p. 34.

⁴⁸Sigmund Freud, 'Zur Einführung des Narzißmus', in Freud [1914], 1992, pp. 51-77.

⁴⁹Grosz, 1994, p. 39.

image for its real self as it is not yet able to comprehend its existence in two places at once, as both gazer into the mirror, and as the object of the gazer: its reflection. The baby's experience of its body at this stage would still be chaotic and disorganised to some extent, but this disorder is dynamically repressed in favour of the unity which its mirror image represents.⁵⁰

The 'imaginary' body image is internalised and becomes the basis of the subject's ego. As it is predicated on a fantasy, though, it produces a fundamental schism within the subject which is completed by the mechanisms of the Oedipus complex. The 'imaginary anatomy', according to Grosz's reading of Lacan, is further supplemented by the baby's perceptions of the body images of others, particularly of its mother. As these bodies have inevitably been shaped and distorted by cultural expectations, the child's ego will, from the outset, possess a social and cultural dimension: there is no 'true' self outside of the cultural construction of the self, according to Lacanian theory. As Grosz argues:

The imaginary anatomy is an internalized image or map of the meaning that the body has for the subject, for others in the social world, and for the symbolic order conceived in its generality (that is, for a culture as a whole). It is an individual and collective fantasy of the body's forms and modes of action.⁵¹

Grosz uses the example of the phenomenon of the phantom limb as proof that the only access which the subject has to his or her body is by means of the imaginary anatomy. In cases where a limb has been amputated, the patient experiences sensations, such as pain and heaviness, which suggest that the missing limb is still attached to the body. These symptoms can persist for months, or even years in some cases, in spite of the subject's cognitive awareness that the limb has been removed. Clearly, the subject is only able to alter its body image with extreme difficulty, suggesting the crucial role of the 'imaginary anatomy', which always takes precedence over the real anatomy.⁵²

Similarly, body image is implicated in severe mental disorders and psychoses. Psychotic and borderline patients frequently perceive themselves as fragmented or

⁵⁰ Jacques Lacan [1966], 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in the psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated from the French by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-7. See also Chapter 2.

⁵¹ Grosz, 1994, p. 40.

⁵² Grosz, 1994, p. 41. See also pp. 64-65.

fragmenting, and, in very severe cases, the spatial and temporal relationships within which the body is located can be completely disrupted. These psychotic states suggest a reevocation of the pre-Oedipal stage of development, a return to the disordered awareness of an infant. Even in a healthy individual body image is fragile and constantly open to redefinition; however, psychosis can produce a sense of loss of control over the body, a feeling of being controlled from outside, or of being haunted by part-objects from earlier experiences.⁵³ Thus, for a reasonable degree of mental health to be maintained, a stable body image is essential, demonstrating its crucial importance to the construction of subjectivity. Any change in the body is bound to have a psychological impact, but, equally, any psychical change will impact on the way the subject perceives her body.⁵⁴

These readings of Freud and Lacan radically undermine the conventional view of human subjectivity as a purely psychological concept. Grosz's interpretation of Freud produces an ego which is inextricably interwoven with its corporeal context, but which is also a 'social' ego. In the original Freudian theory, the W-Bw system receives messages from the social world, which it then transmits to the ego (and vice versa). As the ego itself is theorised as a projection of the body's surface, there must inevitably be a point of intermingling of the natural and the social within the ego itself, blurring the boundary between the 'natural' body and the social world. As Grosz describes this:

The ego is not simply bounded by the "natural body". The "natural" body, insofar as there is one, is continually augmented by the products of history and culture, which it readily incorporates into its own intimate space.⁵⁵

In the Lacanian mirror stage, also, the infant can only move towards the development of a holistic body image by incorporating the image of the other, including its own mirror reflection, as a template. It is only through the 'misrecognition' of the body of the other as its own that the child can begin the path

⁵³ See Edna O'Shaughnessy, 'Psychosis: not thinking in a bizarre world', in *Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion*, edited by Robin Anderson, The New Library of Psychoanalysis, 14 (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 89-101.

⁵⁴ See Otto Kernberg, *Severe Personality Disorders: Psychotherapeutic Strategies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 7-8 and pp. 10-15. See also Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Postmodernism in the Contemporary West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 218-219.

⁵⁵ Grosz, 1994, p. 38.

out of its undifferentiated pre-Oedipal state. There is, therefore, no access for the individual to a subjectivity which is not at the same time social, and it is therefore impossible to disentangle the raw material of the body from its environment; it is always simultaneously both natural and cultural.⁵⁶

4.4.3 Masculinity and femininity

The disorders of the sense of self described in the previous section demonstrate the importance of the body in the construction of subjectivity. However, the construction of subjectivity is not predicated merely on the fact that the subject possesses a body, but also on the sexual specificity of that body. It is therefore crucial to examine the ways in which female (and male) bodies are constructed by culture. Grosz attempts this by means of an analysis of the concept of the Oedipus complex, Freud's controversial theory regarding the acquisition of gender and sexuality. This theory is of course one of the most disputed aspects of Freudian theory, and it has been much discussed and debated by feminist theorists. Grosz admits that the Oedipus complex represents a reasonably accurate description of the acquisition of gendered subjectivity in Western culture. However, whereas Freud and Lacan, whilst acknowledging the cultural nature of oedipalisation, see no other possibility for the development of female subjectivity, Grosz and other feminist theorists question the inevitability of the Oedipal model, suggesting as it does that women are compelled to accept their inferior status.⁵⁷

One of the dichotomies which the Oedipus complex effectively undermines, according to Grosz, is that of the sex/gender distinction.⁵⁸ In terms of the Freudian theory of the Oedipus complex, gender is crucially connected to biological sex; thus, femininity is constructed around the morphology of the female body. A male subject can adopt female styles of behaviour, but his 'femininity' will never have the same social meanings as that embodied by a female subject. A male subject whose personality style is deemed to be 'feminine' would still have access to the greater social power available to men (although he might well also be subject to discrimination), whereas a female subject who adopts a masculine style is still a

⁵⁶Grosz, 1994, p. 40.

⁵⁷Grosz, 1994, p. 57.

⁵⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 58.

woman in sociopolitical terms, with all of the limitations that that implies.⁵⁹ The Oedipus complex theorises women as castrated because they lack a penis. The penis, then, becomes a symbol for male social power, not merely a biological organ. However, no theory is merely descriptive, and the Oedipus complex, by using anatomical terms to describe social phenomena is clearly implicated in constructing female subjectivity as weak and frail (castrated), and male subjectivity as strong and thrusting (phallic). Gendered subjectivity is, therefore, not merely a set of prescriptions layered over a neutral body: it also determines the type of body which that subject is allowed to inhabit in the first place.

Grosz criticises particularly the dominance of the phallus in both Freudian and Lacanian theory. Freud views masculinity as the founding gender in his assumption that, prior to the Oedipus complex, 'das kleine Mädchen sei ein kleiner Mann'.⁶⁰ It is only with the development of her castration complex, that is, the awareness that she has no penis and is, like her mother, 'castrated', that she renounces her claim to masculine power and accepts her position as a representative of 'normale Weiblichkeit'.⁶¹ However, as Grosz argues, it is not at all clear in Freudian theory why a female infant should perceive her genitalia as lacking, rather than as merely different, or why they should be perceived in this way by a male infant. Even the omnipotence of the mother in the pre-Oedipal phases is encoded in masculine terms by Freud as 'phallic', although he also claims that, in this phase of life, the child has no awareness of gender. In fact, it appears that, in Freudian theory, all power is encoded as masculine, and all powerlessness as feminine, placing Freud, in this respect, firmly within a dualistic and gendered Cartesian framework.⁶² As Grosz argues, women's bodies cannot be deemed to be lacking in any 'ontological sense' of the word, they are merely adapted to their reproductive purpose.⁶³ Hence women's bodies are produced as lacking because it serves the interests of the hegemonic culture to do so.⁶⁴

The interpretation of psychoanalytic insights attempted by Grosz provides a number of powerful explanations of the acquisition of subjectivity. Freud's concept of the corporeal ego demonstrates the importance of the body in the construction of

⁵⁹Grosz, 1994, p. 58.

⁶⁰ Freud [1932], 1991, pp. 115-116.

⁶¹ Freud [1932], 1991, p. 124.

⁶²Grosz, 1994, pp. 59-60.

⁶³Grosz, 1994, p. 60.

⁶⁴Grosz, 1994, p. 60.

subjectivity, yielding useful insights for an examination of female subjectivity. Lacan's rewriting of Freudian theory stresses the cultural construction of the corporeal ego, undermining the biologism of conventional views of subjectivity. However, neither of these two theorists are able to overcome their gender blindness, and they both accept the status quo at the time of writing as an accurate predictor of the future state of gender politics. Corporeal feminist theory, then, builds on the Freudian concept of the corporeal ego, and the Lacanian theory of the 'imaginary anatomy', supplementing it with an awareness of the importance of the gender of bodies, and the belief that bodies themselves are culturally produced by the discursive context in which they are located.

4.5 Michel Foucault

Freud and Lacan, as Grosz argues, recognise the centrality of the body in the construction of subjectivity. However, they fail to deconstruct the differential power relations within which male and female bodies are located, assuming an inevitability to the social structures within which their work is located. Michel Foucault, on the other hand, places the body at the centre of the struggles for domination of different power interests. For Foucault, the body is both a cultural product and the focus *par excellence* of sociopolitical power. Foucault's conceptualisation of the body is, as Lois McNay argues, 'radically anti-essentialist'.⁶⁵ The body is not raw biological material to be shaped by society; rather, the form which its 'rawness' is permitted to take is already determined by its cultural context and the operations of power. The body is produced and shaped by the forces which act on it, and which have acted on it throughout history. The body is, therefore, also a historical document:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration.⁶⁶

This conception of the body opposes the conventional Cartesian view in a number of ways. Firstly, the 'natural' body is inextricably interwoven with the culture which

⁶⁵Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History' (1971), in Paul Rabinov (ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 83.

creates its form, as illustrated by Foucault's notion of corporeal inscription. As the inscriptions mark and penetrate the body's surface, they also become incorporated into its form, blurring the boundary between culture and nature. Secondly, the Self is viewed as located in the body and not, as in the conventional Cartesian conception, in the mind. Further, it is a 'dissociated' Self, therefore the subject is viewed as having no centre or nucleus. Finally, the body's unity is deconstructed by Foucault in his assertion that the body is a 'volume in perpetual disintegration', exposing the body's illusory holism. The body, as Grosz also argues, is constantly open to cultural shaping and redefinition. As the form which the body takes is determined by history, it is also possible to read that history from the body, a process which Foucault terms 'genealogy':

Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body.⁶⁷

The body is both the object and the agent of historical mechanisms and Foucault, as Grosz explains, follows Nietzsche in theorising history as a process of corporeal destruction.⁶⁸ Foucault, therefore, emphasises the importance of an examination of the way in which the body has been manipulated and shaped by history.

Whilst not denying the materiality of the body, Foucault does not believe that there is any access to the actual body. Rather, it can only be known through the discursive constructs which surround it, and by analysing the power relations embodied within them. This has clear implications for a feminist investigation of female subjectivity, and particularly one which is effected through an examination of women's writing. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault describes an historical process which he terms '*A hysterization of women's bodies*'.⁶⁹ This term is associated particularly with the nineteenth century, but it has its origins in the eighteenth century and earlier. Its purpose was to categorise women's bodies as 'thoroughly saturated with sexuality', a 'fact' which also rendered the female body dangerous and in need of social and medical regulation. Women's role was equated with their fertility, and their role as birthgivers and carers of the next generation was reinforced, combined with an

⁶⁷Foucault, [1971], in Rabinov (ed), 1991, p. 83.

⁶⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 145.

⁶⁹Michel Foucault, [1976], *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Volume I, translated by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 104. (The italics are original to the text).

Chapter 4 Corporeality and Female Subjectivity

association of women with hysteria and nerves which ostensibly rendered them unfit for any other activity. This brief description provides the historical context to the Freudian theorisation of women, suggesting that the 'hysterical body' associated with women by Freud was located within a particular 'power-knowledge nexus'.⁷⁰

The Foucauldian approach to the body's role in the construction of subjectivity, therefore, rectifies some of the omissions of psychoanalytic theory. Rather than accepting the structures of the psyche as inevitable, Foucault demonstrates that subjectivity is an effect of the discourses of power in circulation within the cultural context in which an individual is located. There are, however, a number of difficulties inherent in a Foucauldian approach to understanding sexual difference. The first of these is that Foucault, in his writings about sexuality, with the exception of the above example, makes very little reference to the specificity of male and female bodies. If the body is to be understood as a surface which is inscribed by culture, then the implications of the gender of that surface must be significant. As Grosz formulates this lacuna in Foucauldian theory:

The issue of the ontological and political status of the body (and pleasures) in Foucault's genealogical writings raises a more general feminist concern about the model of social inscription: do sexually different bodies require different inscriptive tools to etch their different surfaces? Or rather, is it the inscription of power on bodies that produces bodies as sexually different?⁷¹

The second difficulty relates to Foucault's construction of the body, whether of male or female gender, as a passive *tabula rasa* onto which society inscribes its prescriptions. If the body is conceived of as a blank screen or page, the possibilities for resistance from that body are limited and, as McNay argues, the individual is deprived of any prospect of change or progression.⁷² McNay cites as a counter argument to this view the work of feminist social historians, who document the female subject's attempts to fight back against the inscription of the female body.⁷³ Foucault's conception of subjectivity as a body without psychology deprives the female subject of her ability to protest against the roles applied to her, lacking as it does the richness of psychoanalysis's accounts of gender acquisition and subjective

⁷⁰ McNay, 1992, p. 27.

⁷¹ Grosz, 1994, p. 156.

⁷² McNay, 1992, p. 42.

⁷³ McNay, 1992, p. 42.

states. Similarly, Grosz, with reference to Foucault's description of the hysterization of female bodies, emphasises the different meanings which can be applied to hysteria.⁷⁴ It can, as in the work of Luce Irigaray, be viewed as a discourse of resistance to patriarchal prescriptions, as well as a manifestation of compliance.⁷⁵

4.6 Deleuzian Feminism?

As this chapter has argued, the theories of Freud, Lacan and Foucault have much to contribute to the development of a corporeal feminist understanding of female subjectivity. However, it is to overcome the limitations of those theories that Grosz looks to the work of the controversial philosopher Gilles Deleuze, and particularly, the text *A Thousand Plateaus*, co-authored with Felix Guattari.⁷⁶

This text conceives of the body neither as raw material to be shaped by culture, nor as a blank page on which society inscribes complex and contradictory messages. Rather, the body is theorised as a 'discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations'.⁷⁷ This description explodes the mind/body dichotomy by denying the body's boundary: it is simultaneously a self-contained unit, and irrevocably intertwined with its environment. Further, its state is conceived as a process subject to continual flows and retractions; therefore, as it is perpetually in flux, its degree of self-containment and interconnectedness cannot be ascertained. The body is viewed not as an entity in its own right, but in terms of the operations it can perform. A central metaphor for the Deleuzian view of the body is that of 'desiring machine'.⁷⁸ Both organic and non-organic entities can be described as machines, a non-mechanistic concept which implies a sophisticated, but temporary linkage, or series of linkages. The body is viewed as composed of a number of 'desiring machines', which are in turn linked with those in its environment. Therefore, fragments of the body are inextricably intermingled with aspects of its environment,

⁷⁴Grosz, 1994, pp. 157-158.

⁷⁵Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1989), pp. 132-139.

⁷⁶Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari [1980], *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated and with a foreword by Brian Massumi (London: The Athlone Press, 1988).

⁷⁷Grosz, 1994, p. 164.

⁷⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 168.

while others create different connections and flows.⁷⁹ This description of the body subverts the subject/object dichotomy, combining as it does two apparently opposed concepts: those of 'desire' and 'machine'. The presence of the word 'desire' in the term constantly disrupts the mechanistic in the notion 'machine': a desiring machine is fluid, unfinished and discontinuous.

The concept of desire is viewed *contra* Freud and Lacan, and psychoanalytic theory in general, not as a lack, but in terms of its potential, of what it can achieve. Desire is accorded a gaseous quality: it seeks expansion and proliferation, but without any particular aim or target in mind. In so doing, though, it is capable of forming, re-forming and breaking linkages in an active and creative manner. As Grosz argues, this conception of desire represents a radical rethinking of post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, in which the mother's body occupies a central position. In Lacan's writings, for example, desire is theorised as the lack which arises when the infant is sundered from the experience of blissful union with its mother's body through the mechanisms of the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex. This conception also differs from that evinced by French psychoanalytic theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray, who theorise desire as a plenitude. According to Grosz, Deleuze and Guattari conceive of desire neither as plenitude, nor as lack: it exceeds both sides of the dualism, viewed as it is as a process, a 'becoming'.⁸⁰

The aim of the body is to become aware of the presence of desiring machines within it, and to permit their circulation. If this is achieved, the result is what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the 'Body without Organs', a term derived from the work of Antonin Artaud.⁸¹ The term 'Body without Organs' (BwO) can be applied to any body: human, animal or textual. With regard to subjectivity, this concept evokes a subject composed primarily of a richly-textured, constantly-evolving, corporeal surface. The subject's interior is viewed not as a space, but a 'field for the production,

⁷⁹Grosz, 1994, p. 168.

⁸⁰Grosz, 1994, p. 165.

⁸¹Grosz, 1994, p. 168. See also Stephen Barber, *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (London: Faber, 1993), p. 3: 'In Artaud's perception, the human body is a wild, flexible but flawed instrument that is still in the process of being forged. The body suffers malicious robberies (by society, family and religion) which leave it fixed and futile, smothered to the point of a terminal incoherence and inexpressivity. Throughout his life, Artaud worked through ideas and images which explore the explosion of that useless body into a deliriously dancing, new body, with an infinite capacity for self-transformation. The body would become a kind of walking tree of will'; and Antonin Artaud, *Selected Writings*, edited and with an introduction by Susan Sontag (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Introduction, p. 1.

circulation, and intensification of desire, the locus of the immanence of desire.⁸² A distinction is made between the empty and the full BwO.⁸³ In the case of the latter, and Deleuze and Guattari cite as examples the bodies of drug addicts, masochists and hypochondriacs, the circulation of intensities ceases, rendering the body fixed and brittle, subject only to the flows of pain waves.⁸⁴

The BwO is resistant to the notion of organism, viewed as a limiting concept, but it is not without organising principles.⁸⁵ The process of 'destratification', though, has to be carried out with caution, otherwise the result can be the deadened, empty BwO.⁸⁶ Thus, Deleuze and Guattari are not opposed to notions of identity, such as subjectivity, or political causes. However, the challenge is to maintain a balance between destratification and the urge to render life comprehensible by creating large identity blocks, termed 'molar unities': the division of human beings into male and female would be an example of such a unity.⁸⁷ The danger is that, in the case of a molar unity whose boundary is too fixed and impermeable, and which therefore functions homoeostatically, the flow of intensities which can bring about change is impeded or brought to a halt. Thus, 'micro-destratifications', or loosening, are necessary to ensure that change and evolution can proceed.⁸⁸ This is achieved by means of 'becomings', flows which traverse molar unities, both disrupting their internal organisation, and creating new linkages.

The most privileged mode of becoming is the somewhat notorious concept of 'becoming woman', which, it is argued, contains all other becomings: 'The BwO and all becomings necessarily pass through and are part of the processes of becoming-woman.'⁸⁹ The movement known as 'becoming-woman' is personified not by an adult woman, but by the figure of the girl, viewed as 'the site of culture's most intensified disinvestments and recastings of the body'. The girl is viewed not in relationship to real girls, but as a fantasy figure, linked with Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*, whose form and purpose is constantly evolving.⁹⁰ This concept is intended to be without gender: 'the girl is the becoming-woman of each sex, just as

⁸²Grosz, 1994, p. 171.

⁸³Grosz, 1994, pp. 170-171.

⁸⁴Grosz, 1994, p. 171.

⁸⁵Grosz, 1994, p. 170.

⁸⁶Grosz, 1994, pp. 171-172.

⁸⁷Grosz, 1994, pp. 172-173.

⁸⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 172.

⁸⁹Grosz, 1994, p. 174.

⁹⁰Grosz, 1994, p. 175.

the child is the becoming young of every age.⁹¹ Thus, both men and women are required to 'become-woman', a process which implies a loosening, questioning and redefinition of their gender identity. This is not, as Grosz explains, to be confused with the concept of bisexuality, which merely combines within the individual the binary division of gender.⁹² Becoming-woman implies the deconstruction of existing gender concepts, and the production and re-production of new becomings, which may include fragments of these concepts, and fragments of other 'bodies'.⁹³

As Grosz argues, Deleuze and Guattari's work has been received with understandable suspicion by feminists, as a result of their appropriation of terms such as 'becoming-woman', and 'the girl'.⁹⁴ While these concepts are not intended to be gendered, and they refer to movement and changes in both sexes, or indeed, in any other 'body', they cannot be totally detached from their discursive origins: 'woman' must inevitably bring with her into the concept of 'becoming-woman' not only her subversive potential, but also her marginalised cultural status.⁹⁵ Similarly, the uterine notion of 'becoming-woman' as a container for all other becomings is strikingly reminiscent of psychoanalytic notions of woman as the infant's first container, both physical and emotional.⁹⁶ The concept, therefore, resonates with stereotypical definitions of woman as the empty vessel in which new life is generated, rather than as 'alive' in her own right, a theme addressed by the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*.⁹⁷ There is, therefore, a sense of exploitation and gender-blindness in the use of these terms, as Grosz argues:

First, the metaphor of "becoming woman" is a male appropriation of women's politics, struggles, theories, knowledges, insofar as it "borrows" from them while depoliticizing their radicality. At the least, Deleuze and Guattari can be accused of aestheticizing and romanticizing women's struggles, while in stronger terms, they may be accused of depoliticizing women's various political struggles and using them precisely to neutralize, to render human (and thus to rephallicize),

⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, quoted in Grosz, 1994, p. 176.

⁹² Grosz, 1994, p. 176.

⁹³ Grosz, 1994, p. 177.

⁹⁴ Grosz, 1994, pp. 161-162.

⁹⁵ Grosz, 1994, pp. 163-164.

⁹⁶ See Ronald Britton, 'Keeping things in mind', in Robin Anderson (ed.), *Clinical Lectures on Klein and Bion*. Foreword by Hanna Segal. The New Library of Psychoanalysis: 14 (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 102-104.

⁹⁷ 'An dir ist nichts. Aber in dir entsteht vieles', in Jelinek, 1987, p. 13.

women's specificity, which they have struggled so hard to reproduce and represent.⁹⁸

A further difficulty raised by the quotation is the question of identity, both in terms of individual subjectivity, and the identity(ies) of women's collective struggles. Chapter 1 examined both postmodernism's urge to deconstruct all unities, as exemplified in the work of Lyotard, and Nicholson and Fraser's feminist response to this tendency. In particular, they argue for the retention of collective terms such as 'woman', 'feminist', 'Women's Movement', and so on, as an essential basis for political struggle. In Deleuze and Guattari's text, there is a worrying tendency towards the deconstruction of all unities, which are viewed as a transitional stage in the movement towards the utopian project of the 'reconstruction of the body as a Body without Organs'.⁹⁹ As Grosz argues, this is very reminiscent of the Enlightenment view of the subject which, because it is not gendered, effaces the very real differences between men's and women's lives:

These are very common claims, claims which have been used to tie women to struggles that in fact have little to do with them, or rather, to which women have been tied through a generalized "humanity" which in no way represents their interests, which is a projection or representation of men's specific fantasies about what it is to be human.¹⁰⁰

In terms of individual female subjectivity, the focus of this thesis, the implications are, as Waugh also suggests,¹⁰¹ that the struggle towards autonomous definitions of femininity(ies) is threatened by deconstruction, or 'destratification' in Deleuzian terms, before it has even reached the status of 'molar unity'. Thus, women's 'Otherness' risks being appropriated as means of augmenting the status of the male subject, rather than effecting any realignment of power structures.¹⁰²

Nonetheless, Grosz argues that the text *A Thousand Plateaus* has the potential to form the basis of what she terms a 'Deleuzian Feminism'. In order to think differently about the body, and particularly the female body, a shift is necessary from a 'psychoanalytic and semiotic perspective to a Deleuzian problematics of surfaces'.¹⁰³

⁹⁸Grosz, 1994, p. 163.

⁹⁹Deleuze and Guattari [1980], 1988, p. 276.

¹⁰⁰Grosz, 1994, p. 179.

¹⁰¹Patricia Waugh, *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 6.

¹⁰²See Grosz, 1994, pp. 179-80.

¹⁰³Grosz, 1994, p. 180.

This 'problematics' is fundamentally opposed to binarism in all forms, thereby radically undermining the central dichotomy structuring Western culture, that between mind and body. One example of this is the text's refusal to acknowledge the social and psychical as separate orders: they are viewed as fundamentally interconnected, and of equal valency. The body, then, does not exist in contradistinction to the social world, rather, it both flows into that world and incorporates aspects of that world within its own (constantly fluctuating) boundaries.¹⁰⁴ This is a far more radical concept than the poststructuralist notion of discourses, as expounded in the work of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, which suggests that the subject's contact with the world, and with him-/herself is effected almost entirely through the medium of language. In the Deleuzian world-view, the social is not accessed through discourse, rather the subject is already intertwined with and structured by it through the presence of desiring machines.

A further aspect of Deleuzian theory incorporated by Grosz into her own theory of corporeal feminism is the repudiation of the notion of psychical depth. This is a complex and problematical notion, as the discussion of the work of Flax in Chapter 1 indicates.¹⁰⁵ The conventional view of the subject posits a three-dimensional being, who contains a psychical interior. However, the Freudian concept of the corporeal ego already challenges that view in constructing the ego as a 'psychical callous' layered over the (libidinal) surface of the body. If the ego is the location of the subject's sense of self, then subjectivity is fundamentally an embodied concept, and all feelings, emotions and thoughts grow out of corporeal experience. Nonetheless, the Freudian corporeal ego still retains a relatively conventional relationship between inside and outside. Grosz's rereading of Freud 're-corporealises' the ego, a concept which has become increasingly disembodied in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory. However, it is only that aspect of the psychical apparatus which is able to communicate with the world outside of the subject; the id and the superego are still firmly associated with the subject's interior. Thus, the Freudian subject engages only reluctantly with the social world by means of its ego, whilst retaining a distinct preference for its natural and corporeal existence. In Deleuze's text, there is no natural or corporeal existence which is separate from the social world: the social penetrates and structures every aspect of the subject, and, by

¹⁰⁴Grosz, 1994, p. 180.

¹⁰⁵Chapter 1, Section 1.8.

extension, all parts of the subject are able to connect with the social world. It is in this sense that the model of subjectivity as one of surfaces (or 'plateaus', to use Deleuzian terminology)¹⁰⁶ is to be understood. It does not imply that the subject loses its interiority and depth, as Deleuze and Guattari emphasise. Rather, it suggests a stage beyond the conventional organisation of the subject, in which it becomes open to redefinition or 'destratification'. This process must necessarily pass through the binarisms which constitute the conventional view of the subject, but it both exceeds and disrupts them:

You will be organized, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body - otherwise you're just deprived. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted - otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement - otherwise you're just a tramp. To the strata as a whole, the BwO opposes disarticulations (or *n* articulations) as the property of the plane of consistency, experimentation as the operation on that plane (no signifier, never interpret!), and nomadism as the movement (keep moving, even in place, never stop moving, motionless voyage, desubjectification) [...] Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor.¹⁰⁷

Thus, the BwO exists in a constant state of tension between submission to the Law (or Judgement of God, as Deleuze and Guattari term it), and a loosening of its organismic state which enables it to open to new possibilities and connections.

While the theories expounded by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* are clearly riven with contradictions and complexities, their fluid and kaleidoscopic approach to questions of subjectivity nonetheless offers possibilities for their redefinition in corporeal terms. Grosz emphasises in particular the failure on the part of psychoanalysis to offer adequate explanations of female subjectivity, a difficulty which has only intensified in post-Freudian theories.¹⁰⁸ In particular, a Deleuzian perspective constructs the body neither as natural, raw material to be forced into a series of social straitjackets (as in psychoanalysis), nor as the passive foundation for

¹⁰⁶Deleuze and Guattari [1980], 1988, p. 158.

¹⁰⁷Deleuze and Guattari [1980], 1988, p. 161.

¹⁰⁸For a detailed critique of psychoanalytic theories of femininity and female sexuality, see Noreen O'Connor and Joanna Ryan, *Wild Desires and Mistaken Identities: Lesbianism and Psychoanalysis* (London: Virago, 1993).

social inscription (as in Foucault's writings). The embodied subject, subjective body has a dynamism which it is not accorded in the other theories considered by Grosz, opening up the possibility of change and development.

4.7 Conclusion

The theories considered by Grosz support her supposition that subjectivity can and should be rethought in corporeal terms. Placing the body at the centre of accounts of subjectivity is in itself subversive, undermining as it does the cultural privileging of the mind. Similarly, if the body is associated with women, then this approach must also throw into question conventional notions of female subjectivity. However, all of the accounts considered are organised around a single template for the body, which appears to be ungendered and available for appropriation by either men or women. Feminist experience, though, has demonstrated that, wherever female subjectivity is not explicitly considered, claims to universal human significance almost always conceal a masculine bias. In her final chapter 'Sexed Bodies', Grosz addresses the question of the particular construction of the female body in Western culture.¹⁰⁹ Referring to Kristeva's text 'Powers of Horror',¹¹⁰ Grosz examines her concept of 'abjection', which describes those aspects of subjectivity which are unacceptable to socialisation. A properly socialised subject is expected to be in possession of a 'clean and proper' body, that is a body which is separated from its own fluids, secretions and waste products, a 'non-corporeal' body.¹¹¹ These substances, which are unacceptable to the socialised subject, are symbolic of the ultimate manifestation of abjection - death:

The corpse, seen with God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Grosz, 1994, pp. 187-210.

¹¹⁰Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

¹¹¹Grosz, 1994, p. 192.

¹¹²Kristeva, 1982, p. 4.

Kristeva claims that the subject cannot accept the fact of its own mortality, which also signifies the end of subjecthood (the end of signification), and so it expels this knowledge from its boundaries into the zone of the abject. Once expelled though, the abject is never fully eliminated, rather it hovers on the subject's periphery as a constant reminder of its own materiality, and its inevitable obliteration.

Kristeva's concept centres particularly on the role of bodily fluids and waste products in constituting abjection. If the subject develops 'normally', s/he will react to such products and fluids with expressions of disgust and, if exposure is prolonged, retching and vomiting.¹¹³ A bodily fluid which has particular relevance to female subjectivity is menstrual blood; it is also a substance which is surrounded by a particularly dense thicket of taboos, a further thematic focus in the play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*.¹¹⁴ The female body, then, is the container for this dangerous and taboo substance, which it expels cyclically for a large proportion of the subject's life. By extension, Grosz argues that there is a cultural association between the female body and bodily fluids of all kinds: the morphology of the female body is perceived as imitating the dynamic of these fluids, viewed as it is as 'a mode of seepage'.¹¹⁵ Thus, just as the abject represents those aspects of corporeality which both genders are required to expel from themselves, the female represents, as it were, the abject of the abject; she contains both her own fluids and 'the liquidities which men seem to want to cast out of their own self-representations'.¹¹⁶ The female subject, then, is not merely marginalised, but also a form of spittoon for those elements which culture deems unacceptable to its self-image.

The metaphors generated by Grosz's text will be particularly relevant to the consideration of the work of Anne Duden which follows in the next two chapters. In Deleuzian terms, fluidity is accorded positive status as a dynamic process in which new connections and linkages are continually formed, broken and reformed. However, Deleuze and Guattari do not analyse, as Grosz, following Kristeva, does, the negative connotations of fluidity in the context of female subjectivity. Nonetheless, an approach to subjectivity which is not only corporeal, but also fluid and dynamic offers genuine possibilities for the rethinking of conventional definitions of gender. If this is corrected and balanced by an awareness of the

¹¹³Kristeva, 1982, p. 3.

¹¹⁴See Chapter 3.

¹¹⁵Grosz, 1994, p. 203.

¹¹⁶Grosz, 1994, p. 203.

Chapter 4

Corporeality and Female Subjectivity

specific implications and pitfalls of this approach, this thesis argues that Grosz's project in this text is one which opens up new terrain to female subjectivity, without reinscribing concepts from which women have sought to free themselves.

5.1 Introduction

Anne Duden was born in Oldenburg in 1942, and spent her early childhood in Berlin and Ilsenburg. In 1953 she fled with her family to West Berlin, where she completed her education, studying 'Germanistik', Sociology and Philosophy at the Freie Universität. She was involved in the founding of the Rotbuch Verlag, and worked there until 1978. Duden has carried out guest lecturer/professorial functions at the Universities of Hamburg (1987), Paderborn (1995/6) and Zürich (1996/7). She has been awarded an array of literary prizes, including the Dedalus Preis (1996), the Berliner Literaturpreis (1998), and the Kunstpreis für Literatur des Landes Niedersachsen (1999). She speaks English fluently, and lives in both Berlin and London.

Duden's first work, *Übergang*,¹ a collection of prose texts, appeared in Germany in 1982. At the time of writing she has produced six further works: the novel, *Das Judasschaf*,² also Duden's best-known work, which appeared in 1985; a long prose-poem, *Steinschlag*,³ published in 1993; a further collection of prose texts, *Wimpertier*,⁴ and a collection of essays, *Der Wunde Punkt im Alphabet*,⁵ both of which appeared in 1995. *Hingehend*,⁶ a collection of poems, and *Zungengewahrsam: Kleine Schriften zur Poetik und zur Kunst*⁷ were both published in 1999. Duden's work is still not widely known in Germany, and she is read and studied mainly by female academics in the German-speaking and Anglo-American worlds.⁸ In Germany, the feminist academic Sigrid Weigel has been responsible for increasing

¹ Anne Duden [1982], *Übergang*, with an afterword by Uwe Schweikert (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1996).

² Anne Duden [1985], *Das Judasschaf* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1994).

³ Anne Duden, *Steinschlag* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993).

⁴ Anne Duden, *Wimpertier* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1995).

⁵ Anne Duden, *Der Wunde Punkt im Alphabet* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1995).

⁶ Anne Duden, *Hingehend* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1999).

⁷ Anne Duden, *Zungengewahrsam: Kleine Schriften zur Poetik und zur Kunst* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999).

⁸ Duden's reputation has grown significantly in the years that this thesis has been in preparation and, whereas secondary literature and Internet searches yielded very few results in 1996, this is no longer the case. In addition, Duden's texts also now feature on the syllabuses of a number of universities in Western Europe and America.

Duden's readership, and bringing her work to a wider audience.⁹ One of the difficulties with Duden's work is its categorisation, as Weigel explains:

Die Literaturwissenschaft und -kritik hat sich bislang schwer getan mit Dudens Prosa. Diese wurde z.B. unter dem Titel »Wahnsinn und Weiblichkeit« diskutiert (Anz 1989, 170ff) oder wegen heilsgeschichtlicher und kunstreligiöser Momente kritisiert (Winkels 1988, 54 u. 58).¹⁰

Although there are similarities in the critical reception of the texts of both Duden and Jelinek, Duden's associative and intensely subjective style could not differ more sharply from that of her younger counterpart. Nonetheless, her central focus on both physical and emotional pain, together with an inner landscape which is almost devoid of links to the world of external reality; the frequent references to death and destruction, particularly that which constituted the Holocaust, make for equally uncomfortable and disturbing reading. However, whereas the works of Jelinek embody an implicit political perspective, Duden's work makes no reference at all to politics; rather, her message takes as its starting point the pain of existence, and the inhumanity of humankind in its historical dimension. Similarly, while Duden's work is not explicitly feminist, critical references are made in all her works to the cultural construction of female subjectivity, and to the limitations of a female existence in Western society. In a discussion of the novel *Das Judasschaf* with Sigrid Weigel, Duden also emphasises that she views her task as a writer as enabling the culturally-marginalised female subject to speak, a view which is shared by the majority of women writers: 'Gegen das Verstummen des weiblichen Subjekts gerade richtet sich mein Schreiben. Oder zumindest ein großer Teil meines Schreibens.'¹¹

As Grosz's corporeal feminism argues, the marginalisation of the female subject within Western culture is crucially connected with the cultural construction of the

⁹ In the Summer Semester of 1987, Anne Duden took up a Guest Professorship at the University of Hamburg, the institution at which Weigel was employed at that time. This period gave rise to a discussion between Weigel and Duden, which was later published, about Duden's novel *Das Judasschaf*: Anne Duden and Sigrid Weigel, 'Schrei und Körper - Zum Verhältnis von Bildern und Schrift. Ein Gespräch über *Das Judasschaf*', in Thomas Koebner (ed.), *Laokoon und kein Ende: Der Wettstreit der Künste* (München: edition text + kritik, 1989), 120-148. Duden's work is also discussed extensively in Sigrid Weigel's survey of contemporary German women's writing: *Die Stimme der Medusa: Schreibweisen in der Gegenwartsliteratur von Frauen* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1987), pp. 123-129, 259-264 and 281-293.

¹⁰ Sigrid Weigel, *Bilder des kulturellen Gedächtnisses: Beiträge zur Gegenwartsliteratur*, (Dülmen-Hiddingsel: tende, 1994), p. 22.

¹¹ Duden and Weigel in Koebner (ed.), 1989, p. 139.

female body. Using Grosz's model, as this thesis has argued, corporeality provides the framework for female identity, rather than the more conventional view that the body is the physical carrier for the subject's identity, which is psychological in nature. Duden's work represents a particularly suitable literary 'testing-ground' for Grosz's theory, as the body forms a central focus of her textual practice. Duden's texts frequently describe attempts by the central female figure to escape the constraints of a subjectivity which she perceives as unendurable. Typically, these attempts involve intense physical discomfort, or a dreamt or imagined assault on the body. In Duden's work, therefore, the two concepts of the body and subjectivity can be seen to converge. Her texts resonate powerfully with Grosz's theoretical writing in the sense that they construct the body as repressed and marginalised within a culture in which the hegemonic value system is explicitly rational, cognitive and non-corporeal.¹² In a deliberate subversion of this view of reality, the body constitutes the filter through which Duden's figures view reality, and its sensations and processes are described in minute detail.

The novel *Das Judasschaf*,¹³ published in 1985 as Duden's second work, is her only longer prose text to date. The work has no plot in the conventional sense of the word; rather, it depicts the intense psychological suffering of a female character, which culminates in her decision to terminate her existence as a subject. As the novel is not written in a realistic style, however, there is no suggestion that an actual suicide takes place; the termination is enacted at the textual level by means of the central character's decision to reject an identity which she finds unbearable. The narrative voice in the text oscillates between the first and third persons, and the central figure is referred to throughout the text in impersonal terms as either 'die Frau', 'sie' or 'die Person'. The identity crisis which 'die Person' undergoes is frequently expressed in corporeal terms, in the form of physical symptoms and sensations, the body functioning as a locus of conflict between the central figure's increasing rejection of her culture, and the expectations of that culture.

The novel is divided into four chapters: 'E guerra e morte', which is located in both Venice and Berlin; 'Panorama Berlin', which is located entirely in Berlin; 'New York, mit einem Schrei', a chapter which describes the narrator's visit to the

¹²Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 5-6.

¹³Duden [1985], *Das Judasschaf* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1994).

city; and 'Der anhaltend letzte Blick', which returns the focus to Berlin. The choice of locations is associated less with a desire to provide a variety of cultural settings, than by their links with the paintings around which the novel is structured. In fact, the dominant experience of the central figure when she changes location is that the same conflicts shape her experience, regardless of her geographical situation. Thus, at the beginning of the New York chapter she comments: 'Ich bin in New York gewesen, auf Long Island und anderswo, ich habe die größte Reise meines Lebens gemacht, bin aber weder abgereist noch angekommen noch zurückgekehrt.'¹⁴ Her enduring location is constituted out of her German nationality and the historical context into which she was born, and this accompanies her to all destinations, determining and restricting her view of the world.

The first chapter focusses on the central character's troubled identity, describing an episode from her youth when she was admitted to hospital following a bout of uncontrollable vomiting. In a dreamlike sequence 'die Person' relates her experience of a trip to Venice, in which she imagines that she is caught up in a scene which resembles Tintoretto's painting, 'The Removal of the Body of St. Mark'. This painting portrays the recovery of the body of St Mark, who has been brutally murdered in Venice by a group of his followers. In the text, the painting represents the fear of death which, according to 'die Person', is endemic in Western culture.

The troubled relationship of 'die Person' to her country of origin, Germany, is explored in the second chapter. The knowledge that she was born into a historical context which also produced the Holocaust is her central dilemma. Her identity, she feels, has been constructed out of this context, and this awareness creates an increasingly unbearable inner pressure for 'die Person', producing thoughts of suicide and death.

In the third chapter she visits New York, during which period her desire to escape from the constraints of her subjectivity intensifies. An outlet is provided by her contemplation of Renaissance paintings, and in this chapter Carpaccio's 'Meditation on the Passion of Christ' becomes a particular focus. 'Die Person' formulates in her mind the desire to live her life again in one of her favourite Renaissance paintings.

This desire is fulfilled in the final chapter, in which she imagines that her existence as an individual subject has terminated, and that she has merged with a further painting by Carpaccio, 'Preparations for the Entombment of Christ'. The

¹⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 57.

picture provides a location in which 'die Person' can reunite the fragmented elements of her subjectivity: she can be at one with her 'knowledge', a term used to describe the painful awareness of the suffering caused by the Holocaust.

5.2 'Mir ist ja schon ganz kalt'¹⁵

The metaphor of coldness is used in the text to link the personal suffering of 'die Person' with the recent German past. At the opening of the novel, she is travelling to Venice by plane.¹⁶ The stream of cold air from the overhead ventilation nozzle is the catalyst for an extended metaphor which describes the state of mind of 'die Person'. In the description, the air stream fragments when it meets the top of her head, forming a network of tiny streams which encapsulate her body from head to toe. The resulting cage is so tightly woven, that she has no possibility of escape: 'Sie war in etwas tief Eingesunkenes verkeilt und darin bei aller Kälte so gut und fest aufgehoben, daß Versuche der Entwirrung und Befreiung nicht gelohnt hätten.'¹⁷ The image can be interpreted as referring to the subjectivity of 'die Person', which encompasses both sinister elements, and a sense of reassuring familiarity. The text then moves into a violent fantasy in which the central figure is observing the dismemberment of a corpse by three men. Following threats from the men, 'die Person' has no alternative but to continue to observe, thereby demonstrating her complicity with the brutal act. This produces in her overwhelming feelings of persecution: 'und ich jage durch die verdunkelten Straßen einer Stadt und werde gejagt und weiß nicht von wem.'¹⁸ These two fantasies convey succinctly the themes of the text. The fantasised dismemberment of a corpse introduces the themes of violent death and murder, whose ultimate expression was the Holocaust. The central figure's reluctant complicity with the violent act evokes the theme of collective guilt. The body cage is a metaphor for the constraints represented by the central figure's subjectivity, shaped as it is by her historical context.

¹⁵Duden [1985], 1994, p. 7.

¹⁶Margret Brüggemann provides an analysis of this scene as an example of the narrator's psychological fragility, and her relationship to the theme of collective guilt in, 'Das gläserne Ich: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Frauenliteratur und Postmoderne am Beispiel von Anne Duden's *Das Judasschaf*', in Mona Knapp and Gerd Labrousse (eds), *Frauen-Fragen in der Deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1945*, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik*, Vol. 29, 1989 (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1989), 259-260.

¹⁷Duden [1985], 1994, p. 7.

¹⁸Duden [1985], 1994, p. 8.

The link between coldness and the 'endgültige Lösung' is provided by extracts from a report describing brutal experiments carried out on prisoners in Dachau. The 'experiments' were designed to ascertain the human physical response to cold in order to provide data which would promote the well-being of German troops in action. The experimental method involved exposing some thirty naked people to the open air for a period of twelve hours. Following this the prisoners are subjected to 'rewarming' by means of a hot bath, and their physiological responses are recorded. The process is described in terms which accord no vestige of humanity to the individuals used for the experiment:

Auschwitz ist für einen derartigen Reihenversuch in jeder Beziehung besser geeignet als Dachau, da es dort kälter ist und durch die Größe im Lager selbst weniger Aufsehen erregt wird (die Versuchspersonen brüllen (!), wenn sie sehr frieren).¹⁹

The experiments are continued until the desired result is achieved: a fatal outcome. The tone of the reports, addressed to Hitler himself, is shockingly obsequious. The writer clearly hopes to further his career by relating the results of the experiments, and he is at pains to demonstrate his commitment by emphasising that he has remained at work in Dachau in spite of a recent outbreak of typhoid. The interpolated passages are not commented on in the text, and indeed, they require no explanation. They convey succinctly the dissociation from the suffering of other human beings which enabled the Holocaust to take place. The last extract from the reports is located significantly in the New York chapter, in which city 'die Person' experiences freezing cold temperatures. In this chapter her identification with the victims of historical violence also intensifies, and she seeks refuge in the world represented by Carpaccio's painting 'Meditation on the Passion of Christ'.

The central figure is acutely aware that, through her birth and nationality, she is implicated in the events described in the previous paragraph: 'Neunzehn Tage nach ihrer Geburt war im selben Wohnort während einer Konferenz der Beschluß gefaßt worden, elf Millionen Menschen zu beseitigen. Damit konnte man leben.'²⁰ As the final sentence in the quotation must be read as implying its complete opposite, this reference to the Wannsee-Konferenz highlights the central moral dilemma of 'die Person', namely, how to reconcile the fact of her own existence and survival with

¹⁹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 51.

²⁰Duden [1985], 1994, p. 43.

the knowledge of the Holocaust. Her, as she sees it, shameful existence as a survivor produces a sense that she is a 'zurechtgefolterte Restperson.'²¹ The second chapter of the text explores the attempts of 'die Person' to locate herself within her culture of origin. It is only by employing a distancing mechanism, which she terms 'Weitsicht', that she is able to affirm: 'Ich wußte auf einmal, wohin ich gehörte [...] Ich gehörte hierher, nach Berlin. Und zwar ganz präzise in die Luft über und unter Berlin.'²² However, her description of her manner of belonging - hovering above and below the city - is also evidence of her alienation from the culture which has produced her. The resulting peace of mind must necessarily represent only a temporary compromise: 'Es ergibt sich daraus natürlich eine etwas unbequeme Lebenslage, aber um wieviel ist diese erträglicher als alles andere zuvor.'²³ At a later point in the same chapter, 'die Person' expresses her complex relationship to her cultural and historical location in the following, graphic terms:

Es war ihr rohes Gehirn, das nun schon seit über zwanzig Jahren in einem Schlachthaus lebte. Genauer, es klebte dort an der Decke. Kaltluft und Zug waren am schlimmsten, aber auch der Lärm trug zur allmählichen Zerrüttung bei.²⁴

In this image, Germany has become a slaughterhouse. 'Die Person' is both an integral part of that setting, and distanced from it by her location on its roof, observing events below. The reference to the impact of cold air on her existence as a naked, and therefore, acutely sensitive, brain, nailed to the roof of a slaughterhouse is a link with the imagery of this strand of the text, interweaving the personal situation of 'die Person' with the historical facts of the Holocaust. The metaphor of the 'Schlachthaus', a recurrent image in Duden's work, is linked with the eponymous story of 'das Judasschaf'. This parable is interpolated into the second chapter of the novel, 'Panorama Berlin', and relates the story of a sheep, or sometimes a goat, which is kept at slaughterhouses, and is trained to lure the arriving load of sheep inside to their deaths, after which it returns to collect the next group. This powerful evocation of the theme of collective guilt conveys the central figure's despair at the awareness that the culture which has shaped her also presided over the murder of millions of people; it is also an expression of her awareness of her own complicity.

²¹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 54.

²²Duden [1985], 1994, p. 41.

²³Duden [1985], 1994, p. 41.

²⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 44.

5.3 'Ich bin eine Frau, ein Mädchen, ein weibliches Kind. Ich bin aus Deutschland'.²⁵

The quotation which forms the title of this section conveys in two clipped sentences almost everything the reader learns regarding the identity of the central character in the novel *Das Judasschaf*. The reader learns that she is female, and that she views herself in terms of three developmental stages from female infancy to womanhood. In addition, 'die Person' does not view her subjectivity only in terms of her gender: the fact of her German nationality is also accorded central significance and is conveyed in a separate sentence. During the course of the novel, only a small cluster of autobiographical details are added to this stark outline, seeded through the text in the form of bald and unsubstantiated statements. The text reveals that the main character is middle-aged, white, slim, that she has no children, that she has worked in an office, and that her home city is Berlin. She has a partner whom she describes as 'mein Geliebter', although no further information is provided as to his identity. Further evidence of the difficulty of identity is provided by the narrative technique employed in the novel, which oscillates between first- and third-person narrative. The intimate and confessional 'ich' cannot be sustained, and it frequently lapses into 'sie', 'die Frau', or the deeply impersonal 'die Person'. In employing this device, Duden incorporates into the novel at the structural level the difficulty experienced by women in speaking as subjects in their own right.

On the other hand, although the external identity of the main character in *Das Judasschaf* remains shadowy, this charge cannot be applied to her inner world, which is the central focus of the novel, and which is portrayed in its full complexity. The focus of the narrator's dissatisfaction is her subjectivity, which is experienced as a locus of torment. Her sense of entrapment produces in her the desire to reverse the process by which identity is acquired, namely through time and experience, thereby unravelling its distorting effects:

Ich möchte meinen Kopf verschütten und nicht mehr sein. Ich möchte bis ins kleinste Detail und in die winzigste Nebensächlichkei alles ungeschehen machen. Zurückentwickeln und abtreiben.²⁶

²⁵ Duden [1985], 1994, p. 59.

²⁶ Duden [1985], 1994, pp. 47-48.

The narrator's dissatisfaction, although expressed in terms of violent self-hatred, is directed less at herself than at what she perceives to be the brutal and brutalising environment which has shaped her subjectivity. The body is the central means of expression of the narrator's subjectivity, and the metaphor of illness is used to represent its troubled aspects. In a flashback to her youth in the first chapter of the novel, this is described in terms of bouts of uncontrollable vomiting, which are serious enough to warrant her admission to hospital. The vomiting can be interpreted as an attempt by the narrator to void those aspects of her subjectivity which are unacceptable to her. The repeated attacks produce a sharp pain in the narrator's chest which recasts her subjectivity within its parameters:

Sie fühlte, daß er nur ein kleiner Ort war im Vergleich zu ihrer Körpergröße und -ausdehnung; aber er zwang jede Einzelheit durch sich hindurch, jedes Ein- und Ausatmen, jedes Körpersegment, jedes Haar, jeden gelebten und endlos zersplitternden Augenblick. Alles was ich war, mußte durch diesen Engpaß, und hatte es ihn passiert, mußte es schon wieder hindurch.²⁷

The illness, a metaphor for her maladaptation to an alien environment, becomes her new location, or dis-location. The distortion of self to which 'die Person' is subject intensifies during the course of the novel to produce in her an even more profound sense of dis-ease and alienation from her environment. In the later chapters of the text it becomes clear that the illness from which 'die Person' is suffering relates to the recent German past. Her subjectivity is organised around the historical facts of her birth: she describes herself as a 'Trümmerüberbleibsel der Lebenden',²⁸ evoking an image of the 'Trümmerfrauen' who cleared away the wreckage of ruined buildings during and after the Second World War. 'Die Person' embodies the 'Trümmer' of the War; she has assumed the responsibility, at huge personal cost, of functioning as 'ein Vehikel des Überdauerns'²⁹ for her culture. The implications for 'die Person' are serious: 'Sie war dabei, auf natürlichem Wege verrückt zu werden, diese Person'.³⁰ Her 'Verrückung' has led to a disintegration of her already fragile sense of self, which further reinforces her separation from her environment:

²⁷Duden [1985], 1994, p. 10.

²⁸Duden [1985], 1994, p. 54.

²⁹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 12.

³⁰Duden [1985], 1994, p. 43.

Sie sah den diffus dunklen Ring, der sie lückenlos umschloß und der in etwa zwei Metern Abstand alles fernhielt, was noch hätte zu ihr kommen wollen oder können. Sie war Zentrum einer undurchdringlichen Zone geworden, die aus unendlich vielen Teilchen ihrer abgestorbenen und an den Rändern unaufhörlich weiter absterbenden Lebensfläche bestand. Ganze Kontinente ihrer selbst waren untergegangen.³¹

Her 'self' has become a depleted nucleus, located, or dis-located, amongst the dead fragments of her former identity, which form an impenetrable barrier against the reality which has produced this alienation.

The devastation of her 'self' leads her to conclude that any further existence is an impossibility: 'Lebend war sie einfach nicht aufrechtzuerhalten.'³² Her despair is expressed by her desire to scream, a central motif in the text.³³ This form of expression is not available to her in the first chapter of the text (Sie konnte nicht schreien),³⁴ but becomes increasingly central as the novel progresses. In the second chapter, the scream is still muffled: 'Sie schrie in den Verkehrslärm hinein, damit sie nicht doch noch gehört werde',³⁵ but by the third chapter her scream has become central to her self-expression: 'Der letzte Schrei dieser Nacht stürzt sie aus der Gefängniszelle und rettet sie aus solchem Schlaf; es ist der erste Schrei des Tages.'³⁶ Ultimately, 'die Person' finds a location in which her scream can be expressed in the Renaissance paintings which she views in Berlin and New York, and particularly in Carpaccio's 'Meditation on the Passion of Christ'. The significance of this painting, which accords a central position to the figure of Job, is made clear in a quotation from the Book of Job which integrates his plight with that of 'die Person': 'Ich schreie Gewalt und werde doch nicht gehört; ich rufe aber kein Recht ist da.'³⁷

The central character's paradoxical experience of her subjectivity as a prison of her self generates the need for experiences outside of the constraints of this location. Reflecting the psychoanalytic view that the development of the self is predicated on a realisation of the boundary between self and Other, the novel is a sustained attempt to reintegrate the Other into the location of the self, thereby making the self whole

³¹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 52.

³²Duden [1985], 1994, p. 43.

³³For a detailed discussion of the scream motif, see Duden and Weigel, 1989, pp. 130-135.

³⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 14.

³⁵Duden [1985], 1994, p. 46.

³⁶Duden [1985], 1994, p. 68. (The 'Gefängniszelle' refers to a dream in which 'die Person' is involved when she wakes up.)

³⁷Duden [1985], 1994, p. 101.

again. The Other in the novel is represented by the unconscious, the repressed aspects of the self which are not acceptable to the subject's identity. Time is viewed as the crucial axis along which identity is developed in reaction to experience. Thus, escape from the strictures of identity is only possible in moments of timelessness, such as those sometimes provided by sleep and dreams. Experiences of the location of the Other, though, whilst representing the possibility of a return to wholeness, are also fraught with danger. An escape from the constraints of identity carries with it the threat of annihilation and death. In the following quotation, taken from the New York chapter of the book, the narrator describes her experience on first waking up in the morning:

Ich muß nämlich eigenhändig meinen Körper aufsammeln, alle die Einzelteile, die oft verstreut herumliegen. Ich hebe sie auf, obwohl ich selber noch ganz gelähmt bin; ich wickle sie aus mehreren Lagen Bandagen, widerwillig und mit klammen Fingern; oft entgleiten sie mir dabei noch einige Male. Dann muß ich das Leichengift aus ihnen saugen, und dann erst beginnen sie sich endlich zu regen und ich spüre allmählich ihr Lebendgewicht. Zum Schluß bin ich es, eine Person im Erregungszustand, durchaus zusammengehörig.³⁸

In this metaphor, subjectivity is once again described in corporeal terms. The dissolution of identity which occurs at night, a time of transition to the Other in the novel, is evoked in terms of the dismemberment of the body. The task of the subject is to negotiate the 'allmorgendliche Neubeleibung'³⁹ which identity demands. Death as the ultimate refuge from the rigours of identity is implied by the bandages in which the different parts of the body are wrapped, suggesting pieces torn from a shroud. This is the risk faced by the subject every time she encounters the location of the Other.

Similarly, in the Venice chapter, 'die Person', is driven to the water's edge by the crowd of people in which she is trapped. When approaching the water, she sees fragments of her self beneath its surface. The water functions as an image of wholeness in the form of death, a refuge outside of the constraints of identity; and the presence of missing parts of her self below its surface lure 'die Person' to join them. However, the act of merging with these fragments also implies the complete loss of self which accompanies death. Having resisted this temptation, in a further

³⁸Duden [1985], 1994, pp. 68-69.

³⁹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 68.

image of splitting and merging, as she runs back through the streets of Venice to safety, 'die Person' splinters into a multitude of self-fragments which converge from different directions on her central self. No actual reunion between these different aspects of the self is described though, and the reader is left with a frozen image of fragmentation and attempted convergence, which can never achieve resolution. Thus, in this episode, fragmentation is presented as a form of survival, the threat to existence is represented by the urge towards merging and wholeness, synonymous with death. Maintaining an identity, then, in these terms, involves the acceptance of a fragmented self. During the course of the novel, though, the ability of 'die Person' to sustain a fragmented identity becomes increasingly fragile.

5.4 'Ahi vista! Ahi conoscenza!'⁴⁰

The importance of seeing and observing is expressed in *Das Judasschaf* through the narrator's contemplation of a series of Renaissance paintings by Tintoretto and Carpaccio. In a conversation with Sigrid Weigel about *Das Judasschaf*, Duden discusses her purpose in including in the text lengthy verbal responses to the visual act of appreciating paintings. She describes this in terms of a collision of language and image: 'Ich denke für mein Schreiben sind Bilder wichtig geworden, weil beim Zusammentreffen, Zusammenprall auch, von Sprache und Bild etwas Drittes freigesetzt, freigesprengt wird.'⁴¹ Duden's approach resonates with Freud's discussion of the relationship between perception and consciousness in 'Das Ich und das Es'.⁴² In this discussion, Freud seeks to demonstrate the process by which a subject's thought processes (as opposed to feelings and sensations) can be registered at a conscious level by the perceptual system. Thoughts have an unusual status within the psyche, according to Freud, as they arise within the organism, and yet need to be externalised to be apprehended by the perceptual system. In attempting to explain this phenomenon, Freud also employs the notion of 'etwas drittes' (*sic*),⁴³ postulating that this occurs by means of what he terms 'Wortvorstellungen'. According to Freud, the mechanism by which an unconscious thought becomes conscious is by attaching

⁴⁰Duden [1985], 1994, p. 30.

⁴¹Duden and Weigel, in Koebner (ed.), 1989, p. 121.

⁴²Sigmund Freud [1923], 'Das Ich und das Es', in *Das Ich und das Es: Metapsychologische Schriften*. (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuchverlag, 1992), pp. 259-267.

⁴³Freud [1923], 1992, p. 260.

itself to an appropriate 'word-formation'; the thought can then be registered as if it were an external stimulus.⁴⁴ Therefore, by analogy, in incorporating verbal descriptions of paintings into the text of the novel, Duden is attempting to unlock and reveal the thought processes by which they are structured.

This is particularly interesting in the light of a further argument on the part of Freud from 'Das Ich und das Es'. He argues that, where unconscious *images* are able to enter consciousness, they remain much more closely associated with the unconscious than do thought processes:

Das Denken in Bildern ist also ein nur sehr unvollkommenes Bewußtwerden. Es steht auch irgendwie den unbewußten Vorgängen näher als das Denken in Worten und ist unzweifelhaft onto- wie phylogenetisch älter als dieses.⁴⁵

Paintings, then, it could be argued, occupy a borderline zone between consciousness and unconsciousness, a position which words alone cannot occupy. Duden's aim, as Weigel argues, is to reunite her culture with disavowed historical experiences: 'Und das Problem der Person sehe ich darin, daß sie verzweifelt darum ringt, das Getrennte wieder zusammenzubringen, das heißt andere, in unserer Kultur verdrängte Gedächtnisformen, Wissensformen zu finden oder zu reaktivieren.'⁴⁶ As these experiences, arguably, are located in the cultural 'unconscious', by focussing on paintings and translating visual into verbal text, Duden is better able to access the unconscious, and to reintroduce it into the cultural 'consciousness'. Duden's purpose is further facilitated by the association, not only between images and the unconscious, but also between images and dreams, 'die Via regia zum Unbewußten',⁴⁷ as they were termed by Freud. Dreams also consist primarily of images, although they may also have acoustic components, a further point of contact with Duden's textual technique which also contains detailed descriptions of auditory experience.⁴⁸ According to Freud's 'Traumlehre', dreams always refer to experiences which the subject has already had, even if the form in which they reappear is unfamiliar.⁴⁹ This is a further area of resonance with the text, which engages with

⁴⁴Freud [1923], 1992, p. 260.

⁴⁵Freud [1923], 1992, p. 261.

⁴⁶Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 128.

⁴⁷Sigmund Freud [1900], *Die Traumdeutung*, mit einem Nachwort von Hermann Beland (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1991), p. 2.

⁴⁸Duden [1985], 1994, pp. 116-118.

⁴⁹Freud [1900], 1991, p. 27.

painful memories of Germany's recent past. In addition, within Jungian theory, dreams have a compensatory function: their purpose is to bring material which has been repressed into the unconscious to the attention of the subject's conscious self, thereby correcting 'distortions'.⁵⁰ There are many similarities in the text between the central figure's experiences and the world of dreams, in addition to reports of actual dreams. The narrator's experience of contemplating the paintings and of becoming absorbed into their world also has a particularly dreamlike quality.

The immediacy of the relationship between seeing and awareness in the text is powerfully conveyed by the quotation which forms the title of this section. The quotation is a phrase from the madrigal, '*Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*', by Monteverdi. It occurs at the point where the crusader, Tancredo, realises that the 'soldier' on whom he has just inflicted fatal wounds is in fact the woman he loves, disguised as a warrior. On lifting the soldier's visor to baptise 'him' at 'his' own request, Tancredo utters a profound cry of pain in which the act of seeing and the process of realisation appear to occur almost simultaneously. Tancredo's cry can be compared to the conflict experienced by 'die Person' in attempting to continue to live with the knowledge of Germany's past, and with her observations of her culture. In the madrigal, Tancredo does not attempt to suppress the pain produced by recognition and awareness, producing a particularly dramatic and moving musical effect. On the other hand, for 'die Person' the difficulty of survival is intensified by what she perceives as an amnesia in those around her regarding the events of the Holocaust, the awareness, '.....daß tödliches Schweigen herrscht in den Eingeweiden ALLER'.⁵¹ This silence is characterised by a further visual metaphor, that of 'Weitsicht',⁵² which the narrator uses to characterise the ability of her culture to develop a selective blindness to aspects of suffering, and to the events of the past. 'Weitsicht', according to 'die Person', employs 'Trennung Teilung Spaltung' to avoid confronting facts which are unacceptable to the subject.⁵³

'Splitting' is a term which is also used in psychoanalysis, describing the tendency for human subjects to shield themselves from anxiety by screening out painful perceptions. According to Melanie Klein's account of infantile development,

⁵⁰James A. Hall, *Jungian Dream Interpretation: A Handbook of Theory and Practice*, Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian analysts, 13 (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1983), pp. 23-24.

⁵¹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 38.

⁵²Duden [1985], 1994, p. 41.

⁵³Duden [1985], 1994, p. 35.

splitting is used by a young baby to comprehend a world which would otherwise be overwhelming.⁵⁴ For example, an infant cannot understand that its mother is not present whenever it needs her, so it deals with the overwhelmingly painful fact of separation from her by splitting her mental image into a good and a bad mother, as represented symbolically by the part-objects described as the 'good' and the 'bad' breast.⁵⁵ It is only through maturation, and through a good experience of mothering, that the baby can come to realise that the good and the bad mother are the same person, thus allowing its perception of her as both good and bad to enter consciousness at the same time.⁵⁶ Arguably, Duden describes a culture in which there has been a failure of 'mothering', with the result that the majority of subjects are unable to reach what Klein terms 'the depressive position', an acceptance of both the positive and negative aspects of experience.

This aspect of psychoanalytic theory resonates with the narrator's perception in the novel that, in Germany, the atrocities of the Holocaust tend to be filtered out of the cultural consciousness. This is represented in the text by the example of Carpaccio's painting '*St Peter Martyr*'. In this painting Duden criticises the glorification of pain and suffering which it represents. For her the two daggers, the scimitar through the head, and the smaller dagger through the heart, are a graphic representation of splitting. St Peter is only able to tolerate his suffering because he employs this strategy; that is, he doesn't allow himself to experience the totality of his suffering and, by extension, that of his fellow human beings, at any one time. Whereas splitting can enable the human subject, or a whole nation, to maintain an illusory sense of wholeness, 'die Person' is threatened with annihilation, because she is not morally able to resort to this strategy, 'Es war ihr nicht zu teilendes Wissen, auf das sie ununterbrochen zustürzte. Sie wußte, daß es keine andere Richtung gab und daß die Strecke zu Ende wäre, wenn sie auf es aufprallte und deckungsgleich mit ihm würde.'⁵⁷

St Peter's use of splitting is represented in the painting by the division of his skull through the presence of the scimitar. In the case of 'die Person' the skull imagery

⁵⁴Melanie Klein, 'Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant' (1952), in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (London: Virago, 1998), pp. 61-93.

⁵⁵Klein [1952], 1998, p. 63.

⁵⁶Klein [1952], 1998, pp. 75-76.

⁵⁷Duden [1985], 1994, p. 45.

used in this metaphor is developed in a different way. As she is unable to resort to splitting, her skull manifests symptoms of overextension and distension:

Mein Herz ist nicht durchbohrt, aber zerschlagen. Mein Schädel nicht gespalten, aber überdehnt. Und zum Zerreißen gespannt, so daß er bisweilen schon zu ächzen und bersten beginnt, weil die Schädelnähte dem Innendruck nicht mehr standhalten können.⁵⁸

Die Person', then, coexists with the full weight of her knowledge at all times, and the possibility of repression, of forgetting, is not available to her. Some respite from the continual onslaught of associations is provided by her senses. A means to escape from an increasingly unendurable reality is found to a certain extent in music, but particularly in painting. The Renaissance paintings featured in the novel represent for 'die Person' a location of stillness: '[ich möchte] ...ganz ohne stärkere Gemütsbewegung [...] - mein Leben noch einmal leben in einem der Bilder, die unverdrossen die Ruhe bewahren.'⁵⁹ The paintings are not obviously images of tranquility at first sight, representing as they do, for the most part, images of suffering and death. However, for 'die Person' they represent relief precisely because they express suffering overtly. The moment of suffering in a painting is frozen into perpetuity and can never be repressed or excluded:

Denn diese Art von Wissen verliert sich stets aufs neue. Nur in den Farben scheint es immerwährend auf, in warmem Braun und Elfenbein, in Blau und hellem Purpur, in Grün und Ocker, als nachglühende, weit entfernte Erinnerung, wie in einem Traum.⁶⁰

This dichotomy between remembering and forgetting acquires crucial significance in the description of two paintings, both by Carpaccio, which are central to the final two chapters of the book. The background to these paintings is elucidated in detail in the discussion between Weigel and Duden which has already been mentioned. The first of the paintings is 'The Meditation on the Passion of Christ', which occurs in the New York chapter of the book.⁶¹ The contemplation of the painting by 'die Person', once again, is a powerful experience of the 'Other', in which any sense of separation between herself and the canvas is removed. Even her entry into the gallery where the painting hangs is represented as a transition to another location,

⁵⁸Duden [1985], 1994, pp. 36-37.

⁵⁹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 49.

⁶⁰Duden [1985], 1994, p. 104.

⁶¹Duden [1985], 1994, pp. 92-104.

that of the 'Other', the personal and cultural unconscious, the inner world: 'Ich wurde deutlich von etwas getrennt, wußte aber nicht sofort, was es war. [...] Ich war jedenfalls wie durch eine Trennungsschleuse von außen nach innen gekommen.'⁶² Her experience of the painting focusses first of all on the three figures in the foreground. The central figure is the body of Christ, who has been cut down from the Cross. However, the attention of 'die Person' is arrested particularly by the two figures to either side of the stone throne. On the left is 'Hieronymus' and, on the right is 'Hiob'. These two figures are described by 'die Person' as 'Vielwisser' and 'Violdulder' respectively. St Jerome and Job unite a number of the themes of the novel: they represent both knowledge of and endurance of suffering; they are also survivors. Focussing particularly on the figure of Job, 'die Person' finds a visual representation of her own unvoiced scream, a recurrent motif in the novel, which represents the response of the main character to the burden of knowledge which she carries.⁶³ She discovers this in the painting by deciphering the hieroglyphs on the stone throne on which the body of Christ has been placed.⁶⁴ They read, somewhat epigrammatically, as 'KRONE....ISRAEL.....MIT EINEM SCHREI'. Alongside these words is the number nineteen. This refers to the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Job in which he expresses his anguish at God's apparent indifference to his suffering, 'Ich schreie Gewalt und werde doch nicht gehört; ich rufe aber kein Recht ist da'.⁶⁵

In Duden's discussion with Weigel she identifies a further link between the situation of 'die Person' and this painting. The male figures in the painting have a relationship to the concept of 'Wissen' which serves as a parallel to that of 'die Person'. According to Duden's interpretation of the painting, St. Jerome and Job are both in possession of a knowledge which cannot be expressed if they are to avoid the fate which has befallen Christ. Duden finds evidence for this in the portrayal of the stone on which Job is sitting, which bears the inscription, 'DASS MEIN ERLÖSER LEBT', a fragment of the quotation: 'Aber ich weiß, daß mein Erlöser lebt!', the expression of Job's continuing faith, in spite of his suffering.⁶⁶ This, according to Duden, is Job's knowledge, and once again, in the situation depicted in the painting,

⁶²Duden [1985], 1994, p. 85.

⁶³Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 131.

⁶⁴See Weigel, 1994, pp. 34-35.

⁶⁵Duden [1985], 1994, p. 101. See also Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 131.

⁶⁶Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 128.

it cannot be voiced aloud. It is therefore significant that the 'ich weiß' in the original quotation is suppressed. Both of these elements which reflect the predicament of 'die Person', the stifled scream and the burden of knowledge, are incorporated into the painting in fossilised form; they are inscribed in stone and, although they cannot be expressed, they can never be erased or repressed.

The final painting, '*Preparations for the Entombment of Christ*', represents a further development in the desire of 'die Person' to find a location in which her knowledge can be expressed. During the course of the novel, the narrator's visual sense becomes increasingly important. It represents not merely a form of solace in what is an intolerable reality, but also a means of transition to the location of the Other, to a visual world which is analogous to that of sleep and dreams. The conviction is expressed by 'die Person' during the course of the novel that she has to die, that her continued existence as a subject located in a culture which she deems unacceptable has to be brought to a conclusion. In the final chapter this is enacted in a form which is commensurate with the logic of the text, but does not represent a 'suicide' in any realistic sense of the word. The subjectivity of 'die Person' becomes completely subsumed into her gaze, she becomes a 'perspektivische Verkürzung im eigenen Auge'. This telescoping of her self into her gaze represents the decision of 'die Person' to leave the location of the self and to enter the location of the Other. This is followed by a final and irrevocable merging with the painting in question, which involves the abandonment of any notion of individual subjectivity:

Hier jetzt der stillstehende Ort, der alles aufgespeichert hat, für einen letzten anhaltenden Augenblick. Ich gehe auf meinen Treffpunkt zu, höre Kinder lachen und schreien, einen schon tagelangen unruhigen Sommerwind durchs frische Laub jagen und es immer wieder aufbrausend durchwühlen. Ich komme an und werde wegen der herrschenden Lebensgefahr jetzt nicht mehr ich sagen.⁶⁷

In this painting the focus for 'die Person' has shifted from the figure of Job, who is present in the painting, but is placed in the middle-, rather than the foreground, to the body of the dead Christ, with which she identifies; the activities of the many other people depicted in the painting are of little relevance to her: 'Auch wenn die Frau hier noch einmal herauskäme und das Ganze von außen betrachtet: sie kann sich immer wieder nur dem Ausgestreckten zugesellen. Alles andere führt zu nichts,

⁶⁷Duden [1985], 1994, p. 128.

ist mühselig und immer das gleiche.⁶⁸ Death, closely associated with the Other, represents a locus of calm to 'die Person', but, as Duden points out, this is not, as would normally be expected, in the sense of a final annulling or erasure of pain.⁶⁹ This, according to Duden, is a function of Carpaccio's manner of depiction of the dead Christ. As in the previous painting, he is not portrayed according to our cultural expectations of a corpse, rather, he appears to be asleep or dreaming.⁷⁰ As Weigel further develops Duden's point, this body tells its own story, it bears the marks of the suffering it has undergone, marks which, in the world of the painting, cannot be erased. The body, therefore, both represents and expresses knowledge, it is both symbol and text.⁷¹ The painting, then, allows 'die Person' to be reunited with her knowledge, that of pain and suffering: 'Die Welt ist vollständig hier und nicht mehr bloß ein Lebensabschnitt.'⁷² The price that she has to pay for wholeness, though, is the surrender of her corporeality to the canvas: 'Endlich kann sich das Wissen über den ganzen Körper verteilen, ausgestreckt und verteilt über das ganze Bild'.⁷³

5.5 'Ihre Erinnerungen sind unheilbar krank'⁷⁴

A central factor in the disintegration of the narrator's sense of self is represented by the concept of 'Gedächtnis', or memory. Existing through time inevitably involves the acquisition of knowledge, 'Wissen', as a result of experience. In the case of 'die Person', her life experience has been augmented to her cost by her acquired knowledge of Germany's past. The text *Das Judasschaf* describes the gradual fragmentation of the central figure's defence against her memories. She feels herself to be torn apart by the accumulated weight of, predominantly painful, experiences and knowledge which constitutes her identity. Her attempts to keep these distressing thoughts at a distance are increasingly unsuccessful, and she is tormented by 'die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten', particularly at night, which, in the novel, is also a time when unconscious material floods the conscious mind:

⁶⁸Duden [1985], 1994, p. 136.

⁶⁹Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 129.

⁷⁰Duden and Weigel, 1989, pp. 129-30.

⁷¹Duden and Weigel, p. 130.

⁷²Duden [1985], 1994, p. 129.

⁷³Duden [1985], 1994, p. 130.

⁷⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 67.

Schlimm waren nur die angehäuften Erinnerungen, die sich nie zersetzten und die ich Tag und Nacht allesamt aushalten mußte. Ein Waffenarsenal unglaublichen Ausmaßes. Und die sich daraus ergebende Erkenntnis, die mir jeden Tag ein Stück mehr über den Kopf wuchs. Nachts wuchs sie auch noch in die entgegengesetzte Richtung, nämlich unter mich, und brach hinterrücks in mich ein.⁷⁵

At the same time, the motivation of 'die Person' in the text springs from her desire to find a location in which she can be reunited with her memories. The fragmentation to which she is subject (which is also *the condition* of her existence as a subject) is the result of her attempt to restrict her memories to a place outside of her 'self'. In keeping with psychoanalytic theory, any attempt to repress unconscious material only reinforces the power of that material to break through into consciousness. There is no utopianism in the desire of 'die Person' to be at one with her memories: rather than seeking to escape pain, she strives to find a place in which pain and suffering can be acknowledged and openly expressed. The text leaves no doubt that this is a risky undertaking; by surrendering herself to the canvas, by rejecting her corporeality, 'die Person' also abandons her subjecthood: 'Ich komme an und werde wegen der herrschenden Lebensgefahr nicht mehr ich sagen.'⁷⁶ Time represents a further crucial concept in Duden's exploration of memory in *Das Judasschaf*. The focus of 'die Person' is not the present, which is described in shadowy and unenthusiastic terms, but the past. The memories of 'die Person', as has already been demonstrated, are those of her culture's history, and her overwhelming need is to reintroduce these memories into the present. Time functions in the text as an effective distancing mechanism, enabling her culture to separate itself from the knowledge of its past. Therefore, the collapse of temporal boundaries is essential to the facilitation of the reintroduction of those memories: 'Es wird übrigens auch nicht getrennt zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, sondern es ist alles eins. Die Vergangenheit ist auch die Gegenwart.'⁷⁷

This treatment of time is crucially connected to the concept of history in the novel, which is derived from Walter Benjamin's description of 'der Engel der Geschichte'.⁷⁸ It also bears a strong resemblance, as do many aspects of the novel, to the

⁷⁵Duden [1985], 1994, p. 48.

⁷⁶Duden [1985], 1994, p. 128.

⁷⁷Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 145.

⁷⁸Walter Benjamin [1955], 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), p. 255.

psychoanalytic process, in which the marks and imprint of the past are always deemed to be accessible within the present. However, unlike Benjamin's angel, 'die Person' describes herself as being driven forwards into the future, enmeshed 'In der Mechanik der Welt'.⁷⁹ However, one choice is open to her as she is driven forwards: she is able to turn round so that, in common with Benjamin's angel, she faces the past, while she is swept backwards into the future. In doing so, though, she is forced to confront the most painful of all realisations: that the past has been erased from the memory banks of her culture:

Es ist schwieriger, so in den laufenden Stillstand zu rennen, die zukünftige Zeit, das Vorwärts umgekehrt anspringend; und sicher fällt sie bald, mit Gesicht und Körperfront vornüber, in die spurenlos zertretene Vergangenheit.⁸⁰

Whereas Duden's image envisages a past which has been expunged, Benjamin's angel is compelled to witness the ever-increasing heap of 'Trümmer' which represents history's record of destruction. The central motivation in Duden's novel, however, is the inability of the central figure to accept the erasure of the past. This finds expression in her attempt to honour the 'Trümmer' by refusing to accept her culture's injunction against mentioning those events which it would prefer to forget. In a gesture which could be deemed grandiose, then, 'die Person' supplants 'der Engel der Geschichte', a collective motif, replacing it with her individual self. However, this move is in fact intended to represent the opposite of grandiosity; as Duden explains, it expresses an admission of complicity on the part of 'die Person', and a refusal to abnegate responsibility:

Die Person, das weibliche Subjeckt kann sich, so gesehen, gar nicht hinter einer anderen Figur verstecken. Sie hat diesen Blick wie der Engel der Geschichte bei Benjamin, sie ist, wengleich ohne Flügel, in der Position der Engel der Geschichte. Ja, sie ist dann auch der Engel der Geschichte. Sie hält alles aus.⁸¹

The medium through which her culture is apprehended and through which the destruction takes place, in common with the text '*Übergang*', is the central figure's body, which is, to use Weigel's terminology, 'ein Körpergedächtnis'.⁸² As this

⁷⁹Duden [1985], 1994, p. 120.

⁸⁰Duden [1985], 1994, p. 121.

⁸¹Duden and Weigel, p. 144.

⁸²Weigel, 1994, p. 21.

analysis of the text has sought to demonstrate, the disintegration of self to which 'die Person' is subject is expressed in predominantly corporeal terms. In the first chapter her attacks of vomiting, for which there appears to be no physiological basis, are described. In the second chapter, 'die Person' envisages her memories as a hostile force which seeks to penetrate her body as she is sleeping. In the New York chapter, the struggle on the part of the central figure to maintain a tenuous sense of identity is described in terms of her fragmenting body. In the final chapter, she experiences her growing sense of entrapment as a layer of molten metal which, as it solidifies, coats her entire body, leaving only her eyes uncovered.⁸³ As her awareness intensifies, on the other hand, that her continued existence as a subject is impossible, 'die Person' experiences a distancing from her corporeality: 'Sie war hier in dieser Gegend nur eine vertikale Schattigkeit, Widergänger aus einem aufgegebenem Tafelland.'⁸⁴

As Weigel argues, the body has a paradoxical function in the novel; it represents both the channel through which culture is able to destroy 'die Person', but also her salvation from the denial practised within that culture:

Es ist der Körper, der als Medium der Erinnerung die Person peinigt, umhertreibt und in Erregung hält und sie in einen Zustand versetzt, der als äußerst ambivalent erscheint, hindert er sie doch einerseits an der ersehnten Ruhe, während er sie andererseits vor einem einfachen Dahinleben bewahrt, vor »jener ruhigen Mittellage«, die sie um sich herum beobachtet.⁸⁵

The association of the concept of memory with the body, therefore, increases its radical impact. The memories to which the text refers are 'other' to the culture in which 'die Person' is located. The body, as this thesis has argued, also functions as an Other in Western culture, in which the mind is privileged. In her conversation with Weigel, Duden describes her focus on the body in terms which are strongly reminiscent of Grosz's corporeal theory:

Der Körper ist dann die materielle Grundlage jeden Zustands. Denn das ist bei uns der größte Tabubereich. Nicht der Körper ist das Tabu - es wird ein ungeheurer Körperkult betrieben -, aber der Körper in seiner Wirklichkeit und Auswirkung ist es, in seiner Unidentifizierbarkeit.⁸⁶

⁸³Duden [1985], 1994, p. 110.

⁸⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 115.

⁸⁵Weigel, 1994, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁶Duden and Weigel, p. 137.

Duden's focus on the body works counter to the binary opposition mind/body, whilst at the same time powerfully reinforcing the message of the text with regard to the appalling corporeal destruction wrought by the Holocaust. Duden's aim, then, is to incorporate the body, and therefore also 'memory' into her texts as a lived experience, rather than in an idealised form. This distinction between 'dead' and 'living' (body-)memories is seen by Weigel⁸⁷ as analogous to Plato's account of Socrates's distinction between *mneme* (Gedächtnis) and *hypomnesis* (Erinnerung), which was the basis for his rejection of the written, as opposed to the verbal, communication of knowledge. Whereas 'Erinnerungen' can be derived in 'dead' form, from written accounts, 'Gedächtnis' is a visceral form of knowledge which can only be acquired through lived experience. Duden's concern is to explore history in such a way that its true corporeal impact can be not only apprehended, but also felt and experienced at a physical level.

5.6 Conclusion

An important addition to the concepts of memory and body, discussed in the previous section, is that of femininity. Although many of the themes which the novel addresses have equal relevance to both men and women, nonetheless, it is a version of female subjectivity which is produced here, and certain crucial differences in the way the world is experienced by the two sexes are suggested by the text. In *Das Judasschaf* the concepts of memory, body and history are crucially connected with that of femininity. Thus, 'die Person' accords a 'feminine' quality to her memories: 'Männlichere Aussichten konnte sie bei sich nicht anwenden. Denn es fehlte ihnen, was sie erst noch durch Zusammenstoß mit sich selbst und Versteinerung beseitigen mußte: Gedächtnis.'⁸⁸ In producing 'Gedächtnis' as both a corporeal, and a feminine, concept Duden makes an intervention into the dialectic of 'self' and 'other', exploring the space which lies outside of culture, to which all others are consigned. Margret Brüggmann⁸⁹ and Sigrid Weigel⁹⁰ both argue that Duden's engagement with the feminine is as a location which lies outside of discourse, that

⁸⁷Weigel, 1994, p. 39.

⁸⁸Duden [1985], 1994, p. 45.

⁸⁹Brüggmann, 1989, pp. 253-274.

⁹⁰Weigel [1987], 1989, pp. 126-128 (the analysis refers to 'Übergang', rather than to *Das Judasschaf*, but it is applicable to both texts).

which is unrepresentable, and they refer here to the theoretical writings of Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Duden's narrative technique is strongly reminiscent of Kristeva's theory of the 'semiotic'.⁹¹ This theory is also particularly interesting because of the close correspondence, derived from the work of Jacques Lacan, which Kristeva observes between subject, text and the social environment.⁹² The Lacanian subject is irrevocably split by the radical disjunction between the 'symbolic', the linguistic frameworks of the culture in which it is located, and the 'imaginary', the experience which precedes the mechanisms of the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex. Although Kristeva retains Lacan's notion of the symbolic, the 'imaginary' becomes the 'semiotic' in her theoretical writings. The semiotic is viewed as the area which lies outside of representation; a dark and radical force which has a close relationship with the infant's pre-Oedipal relationship with its mother's body.⁹³ Although outlawed from representation, the semiotic maintains a continual pulsating pressure on the symbolic, erupting periodically when it breaches the membrane separating the two psychological domains.⁹⁴ This dynamic is to be observed in the psyche of the human subject, in the social world and, most significantly for this chapter, in texts. The semiotic, according to Kristeva, is radical because it continually undermines the status quo. The symbolic, and by extension, the self, consciousness, the mind is always a tenuous state which is continually threatened by the excesses of the semiotic.⁹⁵

The area explored by Duden's texts, as Brüggemann and Weigel argue, has strong similarities with the Kristevan notion of the semiotic. This space, because it is associated with the maternal body, has a feminine quality;⁹⁶ it is also corporeal, in that the process of becoming a subject involves the repudiation, not only of the mother's body, but also of the body in general, in favour of the mind; finally, it also embodies the concept of memory, in that the semiotic acts as a vehicle for those memories which culture does not deem acceptable to subjecthood. Kristeva identifies three areas in which the semiotic plays a privileged role: 'madness,

⁹¹ Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 93-98.

⁹² See Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists* (St. Leonards, NSW 2065, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 68.

⁹³ Kristeva, 1986, p. 95.

⁹⁴ Grosz, 1989, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁵ Kristeva, 1986, pp. 103-104.

⁹⁶ Grosz, 1989, p. 44.

holiness and poetry'.⁹⁷ Similarly, Luce Irigaray, in spite of crucial differences between her own theoretical position and that of Kristeva, also accords central significance to discourses of madness, or its conventionally female manifestation, hysteria. On the one hand, hysterical behaviour is so closely identified with conventional conceptions of femininity that it is difficult to see how it can also have a radical function. In Irigaray's work, however, as Grosz explains, her technique is to take this apparently conventionally feminine behaviour, and to exaggerate it to the point of absurdity, thereby also performing a Derridean deconstruction of its structuring premises:

Irigaray shares the hysteric's *excessive* mimicry, the conversion of her passivity into activity by taking on, in the most extreme forms, what is expected, but to such an extreme degree that the end result is the opposite of compliance: it unsettles the system by throwing back to it what it cannot accept about its own operations.⁹⁸

Similarly, the text *Das Judasschaf* makes clear that the discourse of 'die Person' is that of 'eine Verrückte'.⁹⁹ In the use of the word 'verrückt', the German language offers the possibility of interpreting 'verrückt' as implying both 'madness', and 'displacement'. The novel details the process by which the central figure becomes aware that she can no longer conceal or evade her displacement. In entering the world of the Carpaccio painting, therefore, 'die Person' takes her 'Verrückung' to its logical conclusion, embracing her displacement as her true location. The hysterical discourse of 'die Person', then, emanates from a place of 'Verrückung' *vis-à-vis* the dominant culture. Duden describes her literary treatment of the concept of madness in terms which are very reminiscent of those of Grosz's reading of Irigaray:

Ich sagte, monströs und wahnsinnig ist immer das, was sich nicht mit dem zur Verfügung stehenden Instrumentarium greifen/begreifen läßt. Nun, man könnte mal das Instrumentarium untersuchen, ob es überhaupt noch tauglich ist, man könnte es vielleicht ausbessern, erweitern, gegen ein anderes auszutauschen versuchen wenigstens. Man kann es aber vielleicht auch gleich durchschauen in seinem völligen Versagen und dann endlich erleichtert links oder rechts liegen lassen, um sich dem anderen ohne alle Hilfsmittel zuwenden zu können, und wenn's gut geht, bei der eigenen Wahrnehmung endlich ankommen. Ich denke, das entspricht in etwa dem Versuch den ich mache. Ich nehme

⁹⁷ Kristeva, 1986, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁸ Grosz, 1989, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Duden [1985], 1994, p. 46.

das angeblich Monströse, den Wahnsinn beim Wort. Daher rührt wohl auch die Angst einiger Leute vor meinen Texten ...¹⁰⁰

Duden's texts, then, can also be viewed as 'hysterical', in the radical sense of the word. Reactions to her work, which has only been read by a wider audience in the last few years, have been ambivalent, as Weigel, writing in 1994, indicates: 'Die Literaturwissenschaft und -kritik hat sich bislang schwer getan mit Dudens Prosa.'¹⁰¹ In the longer quotation above, Duden herself also refers to the disturbing effects of her texts on some readers. One of the chief difficulties in reading Duden's work is negotiating the extreme sensitivity of the central figure, whose every feeling, sensation and response is explored in minute detail. Its purpose is analogous to Grosz's analysis of that of Irigaray in her theoretical writings:

The hysteric's symptom is a response to her annihilation as an active subject, a resistance or refusal to confirm what is expected of her. Not able to take up an active position by will alone (this would mean, at most, acting like a man), she lives out and uses her passivity in an active defiance of her social position. She (psychically) mutilates herself in order to prevent her brutalisation at the hands of others - hence the tragic self-defeat entailed by hysterical resistance.¹⁰²

In Duden's work the reader observes an apparently exaggerated focus on the self, the body, the sensations and the emotions. 'Die Person' is obliged to abandon attempts to continue existence as a subject in her own right, as her attempts to do so have resulted only in illness and collapse: '[ich] alternde und in diesem Moment schwerkranke Person'.¹⁰³ Her illness represents a strident protest against the inhumanity of her cultural environment, the only alternative to which is to adopt 'Weitsicht', a split mode of being which is unacceptable to her. She has no recourse to a more distanced or pragmatic perspective which she, in common with Irigaray's hysteric, would view as masculine ('Männlichere Lebensaussichten konnte sie bei sich nicht anwenden').¹⁰⁴ Her illness takes the form of vomiting, a general sense of discomfort and dis-ease, thoughts of death and suicide, violent dreams, and extreme anxiety symptoms. The body of 'die Person' expresses both her status as victim of society's destructive processes, and her resistance to it, which resembles that of the

¹⁰⁰Duden and Weigel, 1989, p. 147.

¹⁰¹Weigel, 1994, p. 22. See also introduction to this chapter.

¹⁰²Grosz, 1989, p. 138.

¹⁰³Duden [1985], 1994, p. 54.

¹⁰⁴Duden [1985], 1994, p. 45.

Christian martyrs, a strong theme in the paintings addressed by the text. At the end of the text, the central figure expresses regret at the necessity to end her existence as a subject, wishing that she could adapt herself to be able to live within her culture: 'Fast hätte sie doch noch eine späte Lebenskünstlerin werden können.'¹⁰⁵ However, the quotation continues with her expression in symbolic terms of the irreversible deformation of her body/subjectivity which renders any alternative to 'death' impossible: 'wären nicht die fünfzehn oder sechzehn Pfeile gewesen, die von den Füßen bis zu den Schulterrundungen aufwärts kreuz und quer in ihrer Körpermasse steckten.'¹⁰⁶

One of the difficulties in interpreting this novel is in finding a meaning for the apparent passivity of 'die Person', whose protest appears to take the form of individual fragmentation and withdrawal, rather than engagement with society as a whole. This passivity is strongly reminiscent of stereotypical accounts of femininity, albeit in a form which renders it unfamiliar and, at times, almost grotesque. Clearly, there is a fine balance to be maintained between making use of the tools available within a particular writer's culture, and being controlled by them. Similarly, in stepping outside of that culture, as Jelinek's play *Krankheit* demonstrated so graphically, the female subject runs the risk of not being heard at all. The danger of writing from a female position, from the semiotic, from the zone outside of representation, is that the resulting voice simply cannot be heard within existing cultural frameworks, and is therefore ignored; the fate of much women's writing. It is necessary to question whether, by fragmenting and absenting herself from the cultural mainstream, 'die Person' merely reinscribes a conventional version of femininity. It could be argued that she serves a convenient purpose for her culture, acting as a cloaca for those memories which it refuses to confront. When she retreats into the painting, therefore, 'die Person' takes with her the disavowed material relating to the Holocaust, provided a safe and insulated space in which its dramas can be played out without ever impinging on the dominant culture. At the same time she re-enacts a conventional female pattern in depicting a figure who bears a strong resemblance to other female martyrs. Can it be that Duden's professed aim for her writing: 'Gegen das Verstummen des weiblichen Subjekts gerade richtet sich mein Schreiben' fails by portraying the liberation of a female voice, only to divert it back

¹⁰⁵Duden [1985], 1994, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶Duden [1985], 1994, p. 125. See also Weigel, 1994, p. 21.

into silence and obscurity? This is the 'tragic self-defeat entailed by hysterical resistance', to which Grosz refers.

A way out of the 'double bind' indicated in the paragraph above is offered by the Deleuzian theories outlined in the final section of the previous chapter. The body of 'die Person', in Deleuzian terms,¹⁰⁷ can be interpreted as having become a rigid 'Body without Organs', no longer open to the flows and intensities which are an integral part of the process of becoming (-woman). This is a direct result of the emotional and corporeal abuse to which 'die Person' has been subjected by her culture, which has resulted in her fragmentation and virtual collapse. If the analogy to Deleuzian theory is extended, the Renaissance paintings which occupy such a central position in the novel can be viewed as 'machines'. In Deleuzian terms, there is no reason why the body, which is composed of 'desiring-machines', cannot flow into a painting, or any other 'machine' outside of itself. The aim of this fluidity is the destratification of the body, a state in which it is freed from the constraints of its culture, and is engaged in a continual and kaleidoscopic process of creation, breakage and re-linking of different flows and intensities. The Deleuzian cosmos, also, is 'flat'; it is composed of surfaces. Thus, lacking as it does any secret inner compartments in which disavowed material can be concealed, everything is available within that culture. This is strongly reminiscent of the gesture on the part of 'die Person', in surrendering her subjectivity to the surface of the Carpaccio painting as a location in which she can be at one with her 'knowledge'. Viewed in these terms, then, the final gesture of 'die Person' can be interpreted more positively as her desire to destratify the body so that its health can be restored, so that this 'weibliche Person' can genuinely 'become-woman'. In addition, as 'die Person' has representative, rather than individual, status in the novel, the final merging with Carpaccio's painting can be viewed as an act of healing directed at her culture as a whole.

¹⁰⁷See Chapter 4.

6.1 'Übergang': Introduction

'Übergang'¹ is the central text in the eponymous collection of short prose texts published in 1982 as Anne Duden's first work. Duden's texts frequently describe attempts by the central female figure to escape the constraints of a subjectivity which she perceives as unendurable. Typically, these attempts involve intense physical discomfort, or a dreamt or imagined assault on the body. In Duden's work, therefore, the two concepts of the body and subjectivity can be seen to converge. Her texts resonate powerfully with Grosz's theoretical writing in the sense that they construct the body as repressed and marginalised within a culture in which the hegemonic value system is explicitly rational, cognitive and non-corporeal². In a deliberate subversion of this view of reality, the body constitutes the filter through which Duden's figures view reality, and its sensations and processes are described in minute detail. To gain access to corporeality within a culture in which this dimension of experience is both repressed and denied is a complex and difficult undertaking. The texts, therefore, often relate the consequences of a violent shock or traumatic episode which ruptures the familiar surface of the narrator's everyday life, and precipitates her into the repressed areas of the psyche. In most cases these traumas arise within the inner world of the narrator, often in the form of nightmares or night terrors. In the text 'Übergang', however, the trauma takes the unusually concrete form of a severe wound to the mouth suffered by the narrator following a violent assault, and the subsequent process of treatment and recovery. The injury to the narrator's body is experienced both as a physical and a psychological assault, and it triggers a radical re-examination of her identity.

6.2 'Ein Überfall also'

¹ Anne Duden [1982], *Übergang*, with an afterword by Uwe Schweikert (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1996).

² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 5-6.

At the beginning of the text the narrator is at a discotheque in West Berlin with her brother, his girlfriend and a male friend. Her brother becomes the focus of attention of a group of black GIs³ when he leaves his table to buy a packet of cigarettes from a vending machine. Following an initial blow to his face, he returns to his table to face both a renewed attack and a beating from the American soldiers, who are impervious to the pleas of those around them. The attack is watched by other visitors to the discotheque; however, none of the assembled people is able or willing to offer help in spite of the entreaties of the young man's party. On leaving the building the narrator's car is approached by the same group of American soldiers. On this occasion a large stone is hurled through the windscreen, striking the narrator in the mouth and causing extensive injuries.

On arrival at hospital the brutal circumstances which have given rise to the narrator's injury are marginalised, as her body comes under the control of the medical staff in attendance. The doctor's terse response to a description of the narrator's horrific experience demonstrates a disregard for the emotional trauma occasioned by the assault: 'Ein Überfall also, sagte der Arzt'.⁴ Paradoxically though, this clinical statement is experienced initially by the narrator as a liberation from the lingering terror of the attack.

Mit einem unblutigen, präzisen Schnitt trennte der Arzt mich ab von dem, was war. Ein Überfall also. Hinter dem zentralen Wort sackte alles weg. Es setzte sich augenblicklich an die Stelle dieses Gemisches aus Sequenzen, Wirbeln und Stillständen, aus hohler Dunkelheit und diffuser Beleuchtung, angespannt ruhig verharrenden und abrupt agierenden Körperteilen, Gesichtsarealen und Mauerkanten, aus diesiger Feuchtigkeit und glänzendem Asphalt.⁵

The use of the word 'Überfall' to describe the narrator's experience functions as a surgeon's knife, slicing cleanly through the bonds which link her with the everyday. Once uttered, this word precipitates her into a chaotic space, structured only by disconnected perceptual fragments. This space is also characterised by the collapse of conventional spatial and temporal relationships:

³ For a discussion of the implications of the use of black American soldiers as attackers in the text, see Leslie Adelson, 'Anne Duden's *Übergang*. Racism and Feminist Aesthetics: A Provocation', in *Making Bodies: Making History: Feminism and German Identity* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 37-53.

⁴ Duden, 1982, p. 61.

⁵ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 62.

Es verschluckte und verdaute zur selben Zeit und sonderte sogleich auch das Produkt, den fertigen Überrest, ab.⁶

It is significant that the space opened up by the doctor's comment is framed by a visceral, corporeal metaphor, in which ingestion, digestion and excretion occur simultaneously. The narrator's perception of a discordant and chaotic world is reminiscent of Melanie Klein's description of the inner world of the pre-Oedipal infant.⁷ The attack on the narrator has rendered the organ of speech, the mouth, useless, and the narrator is only able to communicate with the medical staff through her brother. Infants, too, inhabit a pre-verbal world, described by Klein as terrifying, chaotic and lacking a central ordering principle. In this sense, then, unable to communicate her needs verbally, the narrator is plunged into the chaos of early infant existence. However, as Lacan describes, this phase of life is also characterised by a blissful sense of wholeness and completion, which is shattered by the schisms of the mirror stage and the Oedipus complex. Thus, the narrator's experience of the injury to her mouth, although painful and distressing, also contains the promise of a return to that oceanic state which precedes the acquisition of a socially acceptable, individual subjectivity:

Ich spürte deutlich, daß Großes, ja Bedeutungsvolles geschehen war. Etwas, das die Kraft hatte, mich aus diesem Leben in Schönheit - des Körpers und des Verstandes - endgültig, das heißt auch physisch nachweisbar, rauszuwerfen.⁸

Further, the preverbal infant, according to Klein, has not as yet experienced any separation between mind and body: its body is its self, and it is at one with its physical needs. Similarly, the narrator is brought back into contact with her repressed corporeality:

Dabei konnte ich doch vom Glück sagen, daß nun endlich auch meine Anatomie einen Knacks bekommen hatte, daß der Körper aufzuholen beginnen konnte, was bis dahin allein meinem Gehirnkopf vorbehalten war, nämlich dem grenzenlosen Chaos der Welt auf allen

⁶ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 62.

⁷ Melanie Klein, 'Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant' (1952), in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (London: Virago, 1998), pp. 61-93.

⁸ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 63.

Schleichwegen und überallhin zu folgen, wo es sich bemerkbar machte, es also auch in mich einbrechen und in mir wüten zu lassen.⁹

By espousing pre-Oedipal chaos, the narrator hopes to regain a sense of wholeness by means of the reconciliation of apparently opposing poles of her subjectivity. She expresses the belief that the cataclysmic event which has occurred will reintegrate her corporeality with her reason, and that the splits in her psyche will be healed.¹⁰ This produces in her the ecstatic sensation of complete liberation from the constraints of everyday life, and particularly from the passage of time:

Ein Gefühl wie vor Antritt ewiger Ferien breitete sich in mir aus, als würde ich nie wieder arbeiten müssen. Und federleicht erschien alles, was vor mir lag, weil es an keine Zukunft mehr gebunden war. Ich hatte plötzlich nichts mehr vor, brauchte nichts zu erreichen oder nachzuholen. Ich war frei.¹¹

6.3 'Mein Gedächtnis ist mein Körper'¹²

The pre-Oedipal space which the narrator now inhabits provides access to the culturally repressed body, its experiences and memories. Significantly, the pre-Oedipal phase is known in Freudian theory as the 'oral' phase,¹³ and the opening up of this unconscious space is precipitated by the injury to the narrator's mouth, an operation to repair the damage, and the subsequent wiring of her jaws to promote healing. The symbol of the mouth, therefore, functions in this text as the crucial link between mind and body, between body and psyche. The mouth's normal functions,

⁹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 63.

¹⁰ The acquisition of identity, viewed psychoanalytically, is predicated on the subject's acceptance of internal splitting and separation. This is expounded particularly clearly in the work of Lacan, although all psychoanalytic theorists provide similar explanations of the process of individuation. Crucially, according to Lacan, the subject must accept the split between subject and object without which she would be deemed to be psychotic. The infant's acceptance of this separation is the result of its recognition that it is an autonomous being, and that it is not merged with its mother. The autonomous subject, though, never fully adjusts to its independent existence, and its psychical life is permeated by the desire to return to blissful oneness with its mother. A further structural split in the infant psyche occurs when it becomes aware of the culturally determined separation between mind and body, a binary opposition in which the body is deemed to be inferior to the controlling mind. For a full explanation of this aspect of Lacanian theory, see Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 47-48.

¹¹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 63.

¹² Duden [1982], 1996, p. 127.

¹³ Sigmund Freud [1905], 'Die infantile Sexualität', in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*, introduced by Reimut Reiche (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), p. 99.

eating and speaking, are interrupted by the injury and, as a result, the narrator is propelled into her inner world, where she relives the experiences which have been formative for her subjectivity. These appear in the text as italicised passages which are interpolated into the description of the narrator's period of recovery. A central focus of these passages is one of the mouth's primary functions: the ingestion of material which is to be swallowed. During the period of recovery, though, the narrator is able to eat only with great difficulty and, following the postoperative wiring of her jaws, her diet is restricted to liquid food. The interruption of the physical functions of ingestion and swallowing, however, exposes the psychical swallowing which has characterised the narrator's existence. She thus becomes aware of the extent to which she has been invaded since early childhood by cultural material which she has had no alternative but to ingest. The digestive metaphor, however, when applied to the psyche, differs from its physical counterpart in that, although ingestion has occurred, neither digestion nor excretion are possible. The subject is therefore compelled to retain unwanted and alien cultural sedimentation:

Der Vakuummund wurde zum wichtigsten Organ. Er lernte nur eines: aufzunehmen und nach innen wegzuschlucken. Das Umgekehrte funktionierte nicht. Er war unfähig zum Ausdruck. Das einwärts Gegessene wurde zur Grammatik einer schwerzungigen, nicht zu sich kommenden Sprache, einer Sprache im Traumzustand, jenseits der Sinn- und Formenschwelle. Augenlos und dunkel.¹⁴

In this powerful evocation of the unconscious mind, the repressed material takes the form of a language which is not comprehensible within the paradigms of the culture which has produced the narrator as a subject.¹⁵ The language bears no resemblance to that of the everyday, it obeys different laws, and has a different grammatical structure. The language of the unconscious is associated with night and darkness, and it is, therefore, frequently accessed in Duden's work through sleep and dreams. This other language is 'schwerzungig', suggesting an altered state of consciousness, such as that which might occur after the consumption of alcohol or drugs, or as the result of an illness; 'eine Sprache im Traumzustand', it is a *traumatic* experience which frequently provides the means of access.

The body, as Weigel argues, is the locus of memory, 'Gedächtnis', in Duden's writing. The memory to which the text refers, in common with *Das Judasschaf*, is

¹⁴ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 65.

¹⁵ See Grosz, 1990, pp. 91-105.

not merely specific to the individual subject, rather it is also a collective, cultural memory.¹⁶ The individual female subject in this text also serves as a conduit to the memories of the entire culture in which she is located, and her psychological wounds are those that have been inflicted on the same culture by history. The mouth in 'Übergang', therefore, is not only the link between the individual subject's conscious and unconscious minds, but also between the individual and her historical and cultural context. It is only possible for the narrator to understand the other language represented by the contents of her body-memory following the traumatic injury which has ruptured her connection to the everyday. The memories to which the narrator refers are those relating to her cultural and historical context as a German woman born in 1942, close to the location of the Wannsee-Konferenz which gave rise to the full horror of the Holocaust. The injury to the narrator's mouth forces her gaze inward, where she relives in cinematic fashion the images which have formed her tormented subjectivity:

*Ich schluckte ganze Schlachten weg, Leichenberge von Besiegten. Für einen Moment von Frieden, der nie eintrat. Es war ja ein Geheimnis, und die anderen wußten es nicht.*¹⁷

The narrator is here not merely a subject of history but, to recall Foucault's terminology, she is totally subjected by history.¹⁸ The close association between her own birth and the deaths of millions of Jewish people has framed her subjectivity. As a representative of her culture she has become a silo, a gaping repository, absorbing the material which that culture has dissociated. The narrator has become an inverted mouthpiece of that culture, engaged in relentless swallowing, rather than speaking.

The accumulation of painful memories to which the narrator has been subject expresses itself as physical discomfort, and fears of death. The processes of memory, central to the acquisition of subjectivity, are described in relentlessly corporeal terms in the text. The body is shaped and disfigured by its social and historical context. It is portrayed as a vulnerable and highly absorbent sponge-like material which is

¹⁶ Weigel, 1994, pp. 21-22.

¹⁷ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 71.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy and History' (1971), in Paul Rabinov (ed.), *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 83.

compelled to ingest the images with which it is bombarded, rendering it, to use Weigel's terminology, a 'Körpergedächtnis':¹⁹

Es wurde langsam manifest, daß alle einzeln niedergedrungenen und abgetriebenen Momente meines Lebens heimlich in meinem Körper geblieben waren. Sie hatten sich in mir wieder zusammengerottet und sich zu einer unförmigen Masse verbunden. [...] Hielten sich amöbenhaft in bestimmten Körperregionen auf, vor allem irgendwo hinter den Kniescheiben, und verteilten sich nur, wenn ich im Dunkeln aufstand, um zum Klo zu gehen, als dickflüssiges Gift im ganzen Körper. Leichengift.²⁰

Once again, from a Foucauldian perspective it would be possible to argue that the body is deliberately produced as a sponge by culture, so that it can hide its dark secrets within the presumed inner space represented by the individual subject. The subject's societal function is to maintain silence regarding its contents, its secrets which can never be articulated:

Und ich war wie eine Tafel, auf der ununterbrochen geschrieben wird, aber nie ein einziger Buchstabe stehenbleibt und nachzulesen ist: der Körper das unbeschriebene Blatt. Beweis für das Verschwinden von Kriegen.²¹

The body has the quality of a quicksand: no sooner is it inscribed upon than the marks disappear into its interior, leaving the surface apparently unchanged. However, the material which has been integrated cannot be processed or digested, remaining in the body as a toxic substance which threatens its continued existence. The body's secrets can never be told because it is language itself which has been ingested, thereby simultaneously annulling the possibility of communication: '*ich hätte nichts darüber sagen können, da die Sprache ja das Gegessene und Verschluckte war*'.²²

6.4 Isolation

A recurrent theme in 'Übergang', and in Duden's work in general, is cultural and historical indifference to violence. This is expressed in the text by the hospital staff's

¹⁹ Weigel, 1994, pp. 21-22.

²⁰ Duden [1982], 1996, pp. 80-81.

²¹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 71.

²² Duden [1982], 1996, p. 71. Also, see Chapter 4 for an analysis of Foucault's concept of history and its effects on bodies.

studied avoidance of any allusion to the violent circumstances of the narrator's injury, and their carefully metered clinical compassion. Similarly, the narrator's memory of the silence which surrounded the reality of the War during her childhood is a source of particular torment to her, reinforcing as it does her sense of isolation and uniqueness:

*Draußen der Krieg, über den niemand ein Wort verlor, den niemand als solchen bezeichnete. Immer aufs neue erschien er als Ausnahme, Unfall, zu überwindendes Hindernis auf dem Weg zur Harmonie. Verschluckt, aber nicht verdaut. Ein ganz persönliches Versagen meiner Mutter oder der ganzen Familie. Oder von mir. Ich der Krieg, weil ich überall Dinge sah, die die anderen gar nicht wahrzunehmen schienen, die also nicht da waren.*²³

The narrator's sensitivity to the violent fates of other human beings produces a feeling of alienation from those around her, as if she is the only person who sees what is really happening. The unprovoked aggression of the attack by the American soldiers is also the catalyst which exposes to the narrator the reality of the Holocaust, a historical fact which she has absorbed, but never acknowledged:

*Ich war gerade dreiunddreißig Jahre alt geworden, als ich mir endlich eingestehen konnte, was ich lange schon geschluckt hatte, nämlich daß es um Ausrottung ging. Die Spezies, zu der ich gehörte, kam zu allerletzt dran; es war zugleich die Spezies der Verantwortlichen. Die meisten unter ihnen wußten nicht einmal das. Auch ich war von kleinauf immer vom Gegenteil ausgegangen. Das Gegenteil war Gesetz, unterbrochen durch Schicksalsschläge wie Tod und Weltkrieg.*²⁴

The narrator finds herself in a paradox: she is constrained to accept her Germanness, and the historical fact of her birth at a particular moment in history. On the other hand, she rejects this same identity as both morally culpable, and in flight from its moral responsibility to confront the facts of the Holocaust. Faced with the choice of aligning herself with either the culprits or the victims, the narrator identifies with the victims of the Shoah.

The act of swallowing which has characterised the narrator's life has produced a distorted subjectivity, an identity which she feels is not her own, but which she is compelled to adopt. An unbearable tension exists between what she perceives to be her 'true' self, the self which is in possession of full awareness of the murderous

²³ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 70.

²⁴ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 64 .

nature of human beings, and the culturally-determined self which is in denial of these facts. This is expressed in terms of a mutilation of the body: she dreams that she has undergone a form of cultural decapitation to render her subjectivity acceptable to society. The symbolic decapitation also deprives the narrator of the ability to process information, and to respond accordingly:

Ich wollte partout nicht auf der Strecke bleiben. Jede Minute und Stunde, jeden Tag, jahrein und jahraus mußte ich das im Gedächtnis behalten: werde die du nicht bist. Es gab keinen Augenblick Erholung davon, ich durfte nicht einmal nachlassen, nachgeben, mich mir selbst und anderen überlassen. Ich mußte mich ständig selber unterkriegen, in meinen Träumen wurde ich daher geköpft und lebte ohne Kopf weiter.²⁵

Society, viewed from the narrator's perspective, is in denial of its apparently unlimited capacity for violence and aggression. This gives rise to intense feelings of persecution within the narrator's psyche, accompanied by a sense of doom and imminent destruction. Her own aggression is not acknowledged in this text (although this is not the case in Duden's later work), but appears to be projected outwards onto her environment, further reinforcing her sense of victimisation and persecution:

Unzählige Male wartete die Vollstreckung eines Todesurteils auf mich, etliche Male erschienen Bomberverbände am Nachthimmel und wollten mich zerfetzen.²⁶

The narrator's sense of her own extreme vulnerability is expressed in terms of violent, frequently military, imagery and metaphors which reinforce the central message of the texts: namely, that the human race is characterised by an urge to slaughter, maim and mutilate its own kind, most notably in the context of wars. This message is reinforced by Duden's other central preoccupations: the maltreatment of the planet, environmental pollution and the accumulation of waste, noise pollution, the menace of the motor car ('die Todesmaschinerie')²⁷ and the slaughter of animals on the roads.

The consequence of the accumulation of memories to which the narrator has been subject is increasing emotional distress and the disintegration of her subjectivity:

Aber es haute nicht hin. Das Geschehen wollte nicht deckungsgleich mit mir werden. Ich kam ans Glück einfach nicht ran. [...] Da traten

²⁵ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 80.

²⁶ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 80.

²⁷ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 93.

*allmählich die ersten Zerrüttungsmerkmale auf. Kleinste Enttäuschungen führten zu Weinkrämpfen, ein toter Vogel vor der Haustür verursachte tagelang anhaltende Traurigkeit, Essen mußte über Berge hinweggeschluckt werden.*²⁸

The uneasy tension between the narrator's troubled identity, and the requirements of society are no longer in balance, and she finds it increasingly difficult to maintain any semblance of normality. The physical injury to her mouth serves the function of exposing the operations of power within her cultural context, interrupting the flow of societal injunctions. However, release or liberation from the toxic sedimentation within the body is not achieved. The italicised passages in the text come to an end when the narrator is discharged from hospital, and the window into her unconscious is closed. In the final section of the series, the narrator is transfixed by a lizard which she discovers in a drain in the courtyard of the block flats where she lives. Fascinated by the lizard's unblinking gaze, its reptilian immobility becomes a metaphor for her future:

*Es läßt mich nicht aus den Augen. Ich bin im Bann, ich kann mich nicht bewegen, schon gar nicht weggehen. Wie es da den Stamm umklammert, mit allen vier Echsenbeinhänden, babyhafte Falten an den tapsigen Füßen. Der Ast ist genauso dick wie der Körper. Er ist einfach alles, der übriggebliebene Rest der Welt. Es geht nur noch darum, sich festzuklammern und zu kucken.*²⁹

The narrator's solution to the radical disjunction between her own world view, and that of the society in which she is located, is to adopt a permanent role as observer. She is compelled to witness the inhumanity which characterises her environment; however, she holds out no hope of effecting change, and finds some solace in her alienation.

6.5 'Ich war aufgebahrt in der Hölle meiner selbst'³⁰

The main section of the text details the assaults on the narrator's body, both in terms of the original attack, and the medical interventions which are designed to repair the resulting damage. Every intervention and indignity to which the narrator is subjected is related in painstaking, and frequently, gruesome, detail. In a particularly shocking

²⁸ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 74.

²⁹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 89.

³⁰ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 67.

passage in this text, the narrator describes her experience of a postoperative X-ray of the inside of her mouth. The mere act of opening her mouth so soon after the operation is experienced by the narrator as almost unbearably painful and invasive: 'Zusammenreißen Auseinanderreißen Aufreißen.'³¹ The medical procedure is effected by means of a metal stalk over which the patient is expected to place her mouth so that it can be photographed. The penetration of the narrator's mouth by the phallic apparatus, her 'Entmündigung', is described in terms which evoke an image of rape: 'Sie stülpte mich über das Ding, als sei ich hohl, ein Ballon, ein wendbarer Gegenstand. Aufgespießt.'³² Once impaled by the stalk, the narrator fantasises that it swells to such proportions that it invades her whole body:

Der Stab durchragte mich wie ein Pfahl, der mir von hinten in die Kehle gepflanzt worden war. Und er wuchs in mir, nahm beständig an Umfang zu und wurde länger. Ich spürte mich schon mit ihm anschwellen. Er drängte das Geklumpe fort; an einer Stelle, wo sich sogleich ein überwältigender Eisengeschmack ausbreitete, stieß er auf etwas Hartes, Metallenes. Von dort machte er sich über meinen Hals auf den Weg in die Eingeweide.³³

The total experience of the X-ray is so profoundly dehumanising that the narrator is further alienated from the everyday world and experiences herself as located in a no-man's-land between life and death: 'Von den sichtbar Lebenden, die in mein Blickfeld tauchten, war nichts zu erwarten, schon gar nicht Nähe, die unsichtbar Toten gab es nur als verschwiegene Zahl. Ich war zwischen beiden angesiedelt.'³⁴

Both the original attack, and the further 'attacks' which take place on the narrator's body in the context of her hospital treatment, resonate powerfully with the narrator's descriptions in the italicised passages of the text of the cultural assault which has taken place on her subjectivity. The account of the X-ray experience, described in the previous paragraph, is a particularly evocative and chilling metaphor for this psychological assault. The penetration of the narrator's mouth by the metal stalk of the X-ray machine, and its subsequent fantasised invasion of her intestines, is analogous to the infiltration of her body by alien cultural material. Her illness, then, is a reflection of the sickness which inhabits her subjectivity. In Duden's work, and with strong echoes of Jelinek, the metaphor of illness and disease symbolises existence as

³¹ Duden, 1995, p. 76.

³² Duden, 1995, p. 76.

³³ Duden, 1995, p. 76.

³⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 76.

a German woman located in late twentieth-century society. Dis-ease occurs because the narrator is offered only possibilities for the construction of her subjectivity which are unacceptable to her: as a German these are inevitably saturated both with the awareness of the atrocities of the Second World War, and the refusal of society to adequately acknowledge the human destruction which has taken place. However, she is also sick because she is unable to change herself to fit the norm; the illness, therefore, also represents her protest against cultural expectations. The emphasis on physical suffering and its emotional reflection reinforces the corporeal message of the text. The Holocaust, which involved the destruction of millions of bodies, as is so graphically demonstrated by photographs from the opening of the concentration camps after the Second World War, is frequently described in Duden's work in terms of the image, 'Leichenberge'. A focus on the body and its experiences, then, reinforces the message of the text regarding the cultural suppression of history's corporeal toll.

The narrator's initial euphoric reaction to her situation following arrival at hospital is short-lived. The 'out-of-mind' experiences³⁵ which Duden describes in her work typically involve a heightened awareness of pain. In this case, the narrator's inability to communicate isolates her from others, paralleling the isolation which she experiences in terms of her relationship with her culture as a whole:

Für einen Augenblick von schlagender Tragweite erkannte ich meine Lage. Ich war aufgebahrt in der Hölle meiner selbst. Es gab keine Anzeichen dafür, daß dies bald vorbei sein würde.³⁶

A sense of unboundaried freedom is replaced by its opposite, a claustrophobic feeling of imprisonment and containment. Although corporeality had appeared to offer a liberation from the conceptual realm, it is now the confinement and restrictions of the body which torment the narrator. Following an emergency operation to the narrator's shattered mouth, her jaws are wired together to facilitate healing. The narrator's body, the locus of her subjectivity, becomes a prison from which there is no escape, and whose confines are unendurable:

Ich wälzte mich stundenlang in mir selber herum, auch im Dunkeln noch den eigenen verbarrikadierten Ausgang vor Augen und die brutale

³⁵ See the text 'Fleischlaß' in Anne Duden, *Wimpertier* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1995), p. 11-25, and particularly pp. 11-13.

³⁶ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 67.

Kraft spürend, die ihn zusammenpreßte. Ich war mir schon jetzt zu eng, und es kam durch all die Schwellungen, Verschleimungen und Wände auch nicht genug Luft in mein Verlies.³⁷

The confrontation with her subjectivity exposes to the narrator the constraints of her identity at both the conscious and unconscious levels, reinforcing the impossibility of escape. The barring of the narrator's mouth is experienced in psychical terms as an imprisonment of her self within its own boundaries. Unable to speak, her speech becomes directed inward, and she conducts a dialogue with herself. Her gaze is also redirected away from the outside world into the inner space of her psyche, where she relives the experiences which comprise her memory, and therefore her identity

The briefly anticipated, blissful reunion between the different parts of the narrator's self cannot therefore take place. Rather, the sealing of her mouth initiates an inner confrontation between different parts of the self which is both painful, and intensely disturbing, emphasising as it does the deformations of the narrator's identity. Lacanian psychoanalytic theory argues that the development of a sense of identity is predicated on the repression of those aspects of the self which are culturally unacceptable.³⁸ Any confrontation with the unconscious, therefore, necessitates a meeting with repressed psychical material, with the forgotten parts of the self, an encounter which must inevitably produce pain and distress. Further, the relationship between the self and its own other, the unconscious portions of the self, is one of dissonance and discordance, rather than one of complementarity. As the narrator reflects following the doctor's announcement of his intention to wire her jaws together:

Als mein Besuch kam, hatte ich es noch immer nicht begriffen. Das fortlaufend in mir etwas zusammengezwungen werden sollte, was dafür nicht bestimmt war.³⁹

The clamping together of the two sections of the jaw mirrors and symbolises the collision of the narrator's conscious identity with her unconscious, culturally denied self, expressing metaphorically the impossibility of fusion between elements which have been irrevocably split.

³⁷ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 85.

³⁸ This is particularly obvious in Freud's theory of the acquisition of gender (see Chapters 2 and 4).

³⁹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 84.

As the process of treatment and recovery continues, the links between the italicised passages relating to the past, and the main body of the text, which relates to the present, intensify. The immediacy of the attack has receded, but the narrator is aware of its existence as a shadow which undermines her peace of mind.⁴⁰ The attack has taken up residence in her body in a manner which is reminiscent of the permeation of her subjectivity by historical events. While the trauma of the injury has enabled the narrator to access the repressed language of the unconscious, the treatment process deprives her any possibility of its expression. Her frustrated desire to speak is experienced as a need to vomit, a release which is prohibited by the enforced closure of her jaws:

Eine aufgebrachte, tobende Sprachlosigkeit wollte sich die Seele aus dem Leib schreien und wurde am Ausgang, an der Schwelle zum Ausdruck immer wieder zurückgeschickt. Ich spürte es hochkommen wie einen dicken Klob. Zurückkrutschen. Hochkommen.⁴¹

The removal of the wires following her return home produces no sense of relief of liberation. The narrator is dominated by her fears of a further assault, and imagines attackers at every corner. Rather than a reduction of feelings of isolation, her alienation appears to have been consolidated by the experience, and she is left with feelings of emptiness and desolation:

Die Welt ist hier im Innersten schon ausgestorben; einzig draußen an den Rändern der Lärm der Todesmaschinerie, den man hier nur noch sehr gedämpft hört. Niemand scheint mehr in diesem riesigen Gebäude zu sein, die hohen Etagen vollkommen still.⁴²

The emptiness of the building reflects the inner emptiness of the narrator. Her protest, the act of making explicit that which society does not allow to be expressed, has served to reinforce her own separation from the rest of the world:

Es gibt Reste von Leben, aber die winden sich beschwerlich dahin und haben miteinander ohnehin nichts zu tun.

Irgendwie bin ich vergessen worden bei einer schon gelaufenen Flucht oder sonstwas Aktion.⁴³

⁴⁰ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 82.

⁴¹ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 85.

⁴² Duden [1982], 1996, p. 93.

⁴³ Duden [1982], 1996, p. 94

Nonetheless, her words also represent a transition, as the title of the text suggests from passive acceptance and swallowing, to some degree of acceptance of her marginalisation. Her passionate appeal to her attackers is indicative of her attitude towards humanity as a whole:

Ich versteh euch nicht, ich hab nicht den leisesten Schimmer, wie ihr was macht. Ich weiß aber ganz genau, daß ihr alle so weit seid, daß ihr nur noch auf das Kommando, das letzte wartet. Ihr seid alle schlacht- und schlächterreif. Über euch wölbt sich nichts mehr außer der vernebelten Erwartung des Kommandos. Ihr seid die ganze Zeit schon bereit, ihr seid an eurem und aller anderen Ende angekommen.⁴⁴

The narrator no longer needs to maintain a pretence of belonging. The price for this, though, is her isolation from other human beings, with whom she shares little common ground.

6.6 Conclusion: *Übergang*

The text represents a defining moment in the narrator's personal history, a transition from one way of being to another, initiated by the severe injury to her mouth, and the subsequent process of treatment and recovery. At the structural level, the text oscillates between two levels of experience: one located in the present, the other in the past. The violent attack opens up a space within the narrator's psyche to which she had had no access until this point in time, and which endures for the period of her stay in hospital. This psychic space has similarities to Winnicott's concept of the transitional space, a notion which also resonates with the title of the text.⁴⁵ This space is associated with play and creativity, and correlates with the infant's attempts to make sense of its environment. The transitional space occupied temporarily by the narrator enables her to examine her subjectivity, and the historical circumstances by which it is structured. Following her departure from hospital, the italicised passages disappear from the text, and the narrator no longer explores her experience of the past. Having inhabited this new space, though, she is also not able to return to her former mode of existence, and her position at the margins of society is both

⁴⁴ Duden [1982], 1996, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁵ D.W. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 95-103. Also, 'The Place where we Live', in the same collection of texts, pp. 104-110. See also conclusion to Chapter 1.

consolidated and accepted. Although no utopian vision of the future is offered, the text nonetheless appears to imply that the process of psychological swallowing has been permanently interrupted by the experience of the attack.

The two levels of the text are mediated by the symbol of the mouth. The narrator's physical mouth, having been initially ripped open by the attack, is wired shut for several weeks. In contrast, the psychological mouth remains open for the majority of the period during which the actual mouth is closed. The sections of the text which relate to the present describe in uncompromising detail the processes to which the narrator's body is subjected during the course of her period of treatment and recovery. The italicised passages relating to the past record assaults on the narrator's psychological body, on her subjectivity. The attack is the counterpart to the repeated assaults which have taken place on the narrator's sense of self in the years which have preceded it. The paradox is that, although the attack appears to be a manifestation of society's tendency to carry out random and senseless acts of violence, it also functions in the text as the catalyst for change within the narrator. Illness in the text, then, represents both menace and possibility, both damage and the possibility of healing.

The version of subjectivity produced in Duden's work is crucially connected to her portrayal of the body. The narrator's body in 'Übergang' articulates the repeated erosion to which her subjectivity has been subject over the years of her life: body and subjectivity are therefore portrayed as inextricably linked. The swallowing of toxic historical and cultural material represents both a physical and an emotional threat to the narrator. As a result, she exhibits both physical symptoms, and signs of emotional overload and collapse. This concentration on the body's reality is a powerful area of resonance with Grosz's corporeal feminist theory. Grosz's thesis in *Volatile Bodies* is that subjectivity is corporeal, and that the body is marginalised within Western culture. A belief in the culturally marginalised body is also a feature of Duden's work. In the essay 'Der Wunde Punkt im Alphabet', in the eponymous volume, Duden discusses artistic representations of dragon-slaying as an example of the fear of 'Körperliches' which pervades the cultural history of the West. The dragon, she argues, represents the savage and untamed aspect of corporeality which is so threatening that the only solution is to eliminate it:

So etwas ist der Körper des Vergehens schlechthin, das corpus delicti. Was Wunder, daß man sich seiner entledigen will. Soll dieser Körper doch endlich aufhören mit seiner Unverschämtheit, derart Körper zu sein [...] Weg muß er. Darüber besteht Einigkeit.⁴⁶

The suppression of the body can be viewed as analogous to that of other realms of experience which are excluded from the hegemonic system of cultural values, including what Duden perceives as the violent and murderous tendencies of human beings which, arguably, reached their apotheosis in the Holocaust. Duden's concentration on the body's reality, then, is transgressive of the Cartesian privileging of mind over body.

In common with Duden's other writings, the central figure in the text is female. It is therefore also a female body which is depicted in this text. The body/subject constructed in 'Übergang' is portrayed as vulnerable and impotent, a victim of the machinations of an uncaring and frequently brutal society. There is no better illustration of this than the central image of the metaphor of the gaping, gulping mouth. Duden portrays a subject who is obliged to absorb distressing social messages, depicted as a corrosive sediment which takes residence in her body. No resistance is offered by the subject to the influx until she is thirty-three, presumably the age at which the attack occurs; rather, the messages pour into her by means of a continually gaping orifice, the mouth. This impression is reinforced by the narrator's experiences in hospital during the attack, when she becomes the focus of invasive medical procedures, carried out by staff who demonstrate only a detached, professional concern for her. The most horrific manifestation of this experience of the medical world is the X-ray of the narrator's mouth, which is portrayed as a brutal rape. In this text there is no separation between the corporeal and cultural worlds, society's power structures invade the body of the female subject, altering and constructing it in its own image. The female subject is produced out of her historical context, and her subjectivity is located within a field of tension between her historical legacy, and her attempted resistance to it. The body of the narrator, then, has not merely been written on by the events of the German past; these events are depicted as having taken up residence in the flesh and bloodstream in the form of psychological toxins. The body's continued existence is threatened by the presence of these reminders of its past. The subject's only apparent defence against the

⁴⁶ Anne Duden, *Der Wunde Punkt im Alphabet* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995), p. 80.

imposition of an alien identity is to fragment, thereby weakening the despised cultural identity, but also threatening her future existence.

Nonetheless, in the text it is this very vulnerability which becomes the source of the narrator's resistance to societal onslaught. The unprovoked attack functions as a catalyst which unleashes a process of inner disruption and change. The outlook of the text, in common with Jelinek's work, however, is pessimistic. The possibilities available to the subject for change in accordance with her newly acquired insight are limited. The text avoids any suggestion that an integration has occurred as a result of the confrontation within the narrator of different parts of herself. The narrator's achievement is to separate herself from the influx of social material, and to distance herself from this. However, by doing so, she places herself at one remove from the rest of society, and condemns herself to a position of isolation. In the conclusion to the text, the theme of double bind recurs: the subject's choice is between complicity, which implies the inexorable erosion of self and peace of mind, or separation and distance, but at the expense of any sense of companionship or belonging. The subject's power is therefore very limited in the face of the implacability of the system, a further point of contact with the work of Jelinek.

6.7 *Wimpertier*: Introduction

The collection of short prose texts and longer prose poems entitled *Wimpertier* was published in 1995, ten years after the publication of the novel *Das Judasschaf*. The work in question is divided into five sections. The first two sections consist of short prose pieces, written in the associative and intensely subjective style which is characteristic for the work of this writer. The third section comprises two essays, one of which is a tribute to the life of the writer Erich Fried, and the second an analysis of Marlen Haushofer's novel *Die Mansarde*. The fourth section consists of a cycle of five poems, and the fifth is an afterword in which Duden discusses the creative processes which give rise to her work.

While the same themes can be observed in *Wimpertier* as in the text 'Übergang', certain important differences are also evident. In the later work, the historical background of the Second World War and the Holocaust is far less prominent than in the earlier work, giving way to a more personal, existential dimension. As in the previous work, Duden's style in *Wimpertier* is characterised by its lyrical evocation

of existential pain and intense inner experience. Her language is rich in powerful metaphors, images and similes which express the violence with she perceives both in the world around her, and in herself. Her themes continue to revolve around the areas represented by the second term in the dichotomous pairs to which Grosz refers: the repressed or marginal, the shameful, the female, the violent aberrations of human beings, the sensations and processes of the body, the omnipresence of death, history's catalogue of atrocities, environmental pollution, noise pollution, and the waste produced by Western society. The central figure in the texts is always a woman, frequently a first-person narrator, although sometimes referred to in the third-person. In *Wimpertier* the only other character of substance is the narrator's lover who maintains a warm and loving presence, but has no individual characteristics.

6.8 'Ja, also hier sitze ich, in der Todesfalle aller Tage, und finde nicht mehr zurück'⁴⁷

The five prose texts which comprise the first section of the volume take as their focus the narrator's experience of night terrors. As in both *Übergang* and *Das Judasschaf*, night is depicted in Duden's work as a zone which represents the Other⁴⁸ and, as such, it is also associated with female subjectivity. It is a time in which the sense of self is at its most fragile, and the unconscious is therefore able to assert its dominance over the conscious, rational portion of the mind. This provides the narrator with the opportunity of exploring those aspects of her identity which are not accessible to the conscious mind, functioning as an 'Initiation in den anderen Bereich', as Duden terms it in her afterword to *Wimpertier*.⁴⁹ The Other is always depicted in Duden's writing as a locus of pain and conflict, manifested in terms of fear, terror and anxiety. In the ironically-titled text, 'Fancy Calling it Good Friday',⁵⁰ the narrator describes a premonition of impending crisis during an aeroplane flight

⁴⁷Duden, 1995, p. 14.

⁴⁸ The 'Other' or 'Autre' is used here in the Lacanian sense of the term to represent that area of experience which has been repressed into the unconscious at the point at which the subject enters the Symbolic, or representational system, and becomes subject to its laws. It is to be differentiated from the 'other' or 'objet petit a', which refers to the idealised internal representation of the (m)other, a feature of the earlier mirror stage. The 'Other' always embodies a sense of both the subjection to the 'Law' which produces the unconscious, and the subject's resistance to that subjection which also arises out of the unconscious. For further explanation see Grosz, 1990, pp. 73-74.

⁴⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Duden, 1995, pp. 33-36.

from which she is met by her lover. The reassurance provided by his presence is short-lived, and she wakes during the night to be overwhelmed by fears of annihilation. She then experiences an unravelling of her subjectivity, powerfully expressed as a loss of corporeal shape and form, and a surrender to the chaos of the unconscious which acts as a centrifugal force opposing the cohesion of identity:

In den wenigen Minuten, in denen ich die Gefahr erkannt hatte, war ich schon bis zur Unkenntlichkeit zersetzt und zerfressen, einem Ameisenhaufen ähnlich, der ja auch nur eine Masse aus Wegen und Bewegungen ist. Wie komme ich zur Ruhe, dachte ich. Wie kann ich mich aus dem Gewimmel retten und mich meiner Haut wehren. Wie kehre ich überhaupt in meine Haut zurück. Das Herz raste schon, vollkommen wild geworden, auf und ab und rundherum. Ich mußte es, ich mußte mich halten. Statt dessen schoß ich minutenlang in alle Richtungen davon. Einmal spürte ich ganz genau, wie irgendein versprengter Teil von mir sich unter dem Stück der Zimmerdecke aufhielt.⁵¹

The association with the pre-Oedipal phase of life is strengthened by the fact that the narrator cannot retrieve her sense of identity until she is comforted by her lover, who functions as a containing and, by extension, parental figure in this text.

The ironically titled text 'Die Jagd nach schönen Gefühlen' satirises the narrator's need for comfort and reassurance from her lover: a sleepless night produces both physical distress and feelings of abandonment in the narrator, 'Ich war bereits unsäglich krank. Jede einzelne Zelle wußte es.'⁵² She is then driven into an intense confrontation with her body, an experience outside the cognitive domain, 'ohne Sinn und Verstand',⁵³ as she describes it. An awareness of outer reality gives way to an intense focus on the pumping action of her heart. The rhythmic movement is translated into an inner visual experience:

Bei jeder Pumpeinheit zerplatze ein milchig-violetter, von Nebelschleiern überflatterter Ball in unzählige Staub- und Bläschenpartikel, die als Schwarm aufstiegen und sich in der Ferne verloren, um plötzlich am ganz nahen Horizont als weiße Vision in der Gestalt eines auf seine Spitze gestellten gleichschenkligen Dreiecks wiederaufzutauchen. Ein Pyramidenaugen.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Duden, 1995, pp. 35-36.

⁵² Duden, 1995, p. 22.

⁵³ Duden, 1995, p. 23.

⁵⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 23.

This opening-up of an inner landscape can also be interpreted as marking a return to the roots of identity, the pre-Oedipal stage, symbolised by the inverted triangle. This phase of life, according to psychoanalytic theory, precedes the act of repression which produces the split subject, bifurcated by the cultural insistence on the separation between mind and body, and self and O/other.

In the text 'Wimpertier', a movement in the opposite direction from the previous two examples is described: from blissful formlessness into the rigours of identity. It describes a young girl's experience of the uterine security of sleep. In this state, analogous to the pre-Oedipal phase of life,⁵⁵ she experiences her body/self as protozoan and complete: 'Ihr Körper, [...] ein nächtliches geschlossenes Auge, ein großes schlafendes Wimpertier.'⁵⁶ The girl is forced by an external sensory impingement into a sudden and violent awakening. This is experienced as a brutal rupture, expressing metaphorically the division of the self into conscious and unconscious on which identity is predicated :

Vieles von ihr blieb unten hängen, ab- und ausgerissen, der ganze ihr mögliche Frieden, so daß sie rundum wund nun hochgezerrt wurde. In allergrößter Nähe zum Tumult schon richtete sich ihr Wollen noch einmal auf das Entschwindende, auf die Behutsamkeit des Abgelagertseins. Aber sie ist schon an der Schwelle, sie wird schon über sie hinweggeschleift.⁵⁷

In all three of the texts considered, the force which jeopardises the harmonious existence of the female figures in the texts is 'die Wahrheit', the brutal aspects of reality which repeatedly reassert themselves, disrupting any illusion of peace and security the narrators may have created: 'Die Wahrheit war zurückgekehrt nach zwei Jahren. Diese enge, mörderische, durch und durch verlogene Wahrheit.'⁵⁸ The nature of 'die Wahrheit' in this section of the texts is not as clearly delineated as in the two earlier works considered in this thesis, and there is almost no historical or cultural context. Nonetheless, the violence of the central figures' environment is clearly identified as one component of this unacceptable 'truth', as the narrator in the text 'Fleischlaß' observes in response to the urban landscape which she surveys from the

⁵⁵ See Johanna Bossinade, 'The Poetics of Anne Duden', in Chris Weedon (ed), *Postwar Women's Writing in German: Feminist Critical Approaches* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn, 1997), pp. 147-148.

⁵⁶ Duden, 1995, p. 29.

⁵⁷ Duden, 1995, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Duden, 1995, p. 35.

window of a house in which she is staying as a Christmas guest: 'Schließlich war jedes einzelne Haus in diesem Heer voller Zellen, und jede Zelle voller Schlachten und jeder Mensch in ihnen nochmals eine Schlacht.'⁵⁹ The brutal facts of life, illness, ageing and death, are also implicated: in the text 'Wimpertier', the trauma which wrenches the girl from sleep is hearing her mother, who appears to be terminally ill, cry out during the night. In the text 'Fleischlaß', the writer's fiftieth birthday, and her increased awareness of the proximity of old age, provides a catalyst for the traumatic events described: 'ich [merkte], daß ich fünfzig geworden war, morgen also sechzig und übermorgen siebzig werden würde.'⁶⁰

The self depicted in the texts is, therefore, intensely vulnerable, oscillating between fears of annihilation and brief moments of solace painfully wrought from a brutal reality. She is intensely dissatisfied with the identity she is forced to inhabit, and yet any attempt to free herself from that subjectivity only creates further possibilities of entrapment. This theme is particularly in evidence in 'Fleischlaß', the first text in this section of the volume. Once again, the theme of the pre-Oedipal in relation to the concept of corpo-reality is addressed. The narrator has a dream in which she is being tormented by an uncontrollable physical sensation, which she describes as a 'Reizmasse'. The 'Reizmasse' is reminiscent of the Freudian concept of the libido, which is both a sexual drive, and a metaphor for the life force as a whole. The presence of the 'Reizmasse' is almost unbearable: 'Daß es sich nicht dingfest machen läßt, daß es mich benutzt und an mir herumprobiert, als wäre ich ein Kadaver, ein vorgefundenes Fressen, das ist die wahre Qual.'⁶¹ On the other hand, when the sensation subsides, the narrator feels no relief, rather a devastating emptiness and sense of loss which causes her to wake abruptly, 'als hätte ich mich gerade gehäutet und der lebende Leib hätte sich davongemacht und ich wäre nur noch die pergamentene verknitterte Umhüllung.'⁶²

The 'Reizmasse', then, also functions as a metaphor for 'die Wiederkehr des Verdrängten'. Embodied existence, whilst painful and distressing, is represented by Duden as being fully alive, whereas a flight from the body is synonymous with death. Night traumas, such as that just described, represent both the embodied self's time of greatest danger, and its primary opportunity to reintegrate its dissociated

⁵⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 16.

⁶⁰ Duden, 1995, p. 18.

⁶¹ Duden, 1995, p. 11.

⁶² Duden, 1995, p. 11.

aspects. Following the traumatic experience of the 'Reizmasse', the narrator's attempts to open her eyes are accompanied by an overwhelmingly loud noise inside her own head which reminds her of an explosion. In a typical blurring of the boundary between inner and outer experience, however, she is unsure whether the sound emanates from her own body or from outside. Mirroring the experience of the 'Reizmasse', when the deafening sound ceases, the narrator experiences not release, but an intensification of her terror in the form of complete sensory numbing. From a microcosmic focus on her own physical sensations her awareness expands to macrocosmic proportions, producing an image of an overwhelmingly barren universe, devoid of all form, including the human form, of light, colour and music. This perception is marked by the agonised question, 'Leben soll sein?'⁶³

The narrator's agony, which appears to represent an overwhelming sense of the pointlessness of existence, is depicted by Duden as a struggle to maintain form. The body's urge is toward dissolution, towards flattening; at two points in the text in this episode the narrator perceives herself as an empty bag of skin, with no recognisable shape. The boundaries of the body, the skin, are represented as illusory: the 'Reizmasse' is able to breach them with no difficulty. On the other hand, the only inner space that seems to be available to the narrator is the same unbearable sensation. There is no resting position for this subject - the choice appears to be between an intolerably painful identity, represented as corporeal form or life, or complete absence of feeling and perception, and total formlessness, analogous to death. The text 'Fleischlaß' continues to describe the events which preceded the narrator's descent into 'die Todesfalle', expressed in terms which represent an even more striking example of the destructive potential of inner annihilatory forces. The narrator relates the events of a Christmas spent at the home of her lover's mother. In the preceding days she had become aware of an increasing dissatisfaction with herself, one that leads her to contemplate extreme measures: 'Mehrere Male täglich dachte ich daran, mich von mir zu trennen und einen Schlußstrich unter mich zu ziehen'.⁶⁴ The desire to split or separate from herself, or to put an end to herself, is a recurrent motif in Duden's work, implying the death of the subject, or of identity; the narrator seeks to distance herself from the self that she is, which is also, she feels, the self she is not.

⁶³ Duden, 1995, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 15.

The narrator then makes the decision to separate from herself, an act which is expressed in terms of a separation from her body, from her corporeal self to a place where she can observe herself in apparent safety: 'Hingegen passierte es nun wirklich: Ich trennte mich endgültig von mir und war hellwach, um alles genau mitzubekommen. Das Herz hämmerte zuerst wütend auf mich ein, machte dann einen Satz und schlug sich klar auf die andere Seite. Es war sofort mit ihr einig.'⁶⁵ Although the separation achieves clarity of perception for the narrator, it has serious consequences for her corporeal self, appearing to unleash an uncontrollable female force within her, one which is no longer willing to accept its containment:

War es eine Wölfin, eine Bäarin, eine Raubkatze, die jetzt wild in mir aufheulte, den Ton anhielt, dann wieder neu einsetzte und endlich verstummte, weil sie Maul und Kehle für anderes brauchte? Da sie noch keinen Ausweg aus mir heraus gefunden hatte, bewegte sie sich körpereinwärts. Ganze Stücke Fleisch, Muskeln, Eingeweide, Knochen riß sie heraus, würgte sie hinunter, erbrach sie in meine schlingernde Bauchhöhle. Sie hatte wütende Kraft, mein pumpendes Herz versorgte sie. Schließlich kam sie bei den Nervenenden an und riß sie allesamt aus ihren Verankerungen.⁶⁶

This description, which is both shocking and comic-grotesque, introduces the theme of female subjectivity, of female embodiment, which is also dominant in Duden's work. The constraints of female subjectivity are thematised in this text, which appears to express the wish to separate from a restrictive identity. The separation having been effected, the full force of repressed female energy is released, with apparently catastrophic results. The relationship to female subjectivity becomes particularly clear in the following striking description which continues the episode just quoted. The violent inner force has just ripped all the narrator's nerve endings out of their anchorings:

Das verursachte die ersten Austritte aus der Haut. Wie verrenkte Drähte durchstachen sie die Glätte und ragten bald überall ungeordnet aus mir heraus. Am deutlichsten im Gesicht, denn das war ja unbedeckt, und auf dem Kopf, denn ich trug keine Mütze. Zwischen den Beinen hatte ich vorher schon geblutet. Ich konnte mich unter keinen Umständen mehr zurücknehmen. Also machte ich mich auf den Weg zurück, so wie ich war: Medusenschrott. Diese paar Schritte nur um die Ecke. Das Nervengewirr wippte bei der

⁶⁵ Duden, 1995, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Duden, 1995, p. 17.

kleinsten Bewegung nach, jedesmal, wenn ich auftrat wurde es wie in heftigem Sturm hin und her gerissen.⁶⁷

This powerful piece of writing engages with a number of stereotypes regarding female embodiment. The torn nerve endings which penetrate the skin of her face, producing a Medusa-like appearance, evoke the sense of a female body which is unruly and disorderly once containment is removed. The leakiness of the female body, its mysterious fluids, is alluded to in the simple statement: 'Zwischen den Beinen hatte ich vorher schon geblutet.'⁶⁸ The reference to Medusa, a well-known, and much-used image of female rebellion and menace, intensifies the picture of a rebellious and terrifying femininity. The term 'Medusenschrott' as a description of female subjectivity is evocative both of a deep-seated fear of woman, and of her cultural marginalisation and devaluation. The ending of the story reinforces the sense of a femininity which is devalued within its cultural context, associated as it is with 'die Todesfalle'. When the narrator attends hospital with her partner, the (male) doctor's diagnosis, conveyed in starkly clinical terms, is that she is terminally ill. The only relief which can be offered to her is by means of a grotesque procedure known as 'flesh-letting': 'Beißen Sie ihr alle zwei Tage ein großes Stück Fleisch aus ihrem Körper. Das wird sie nicht wollen, aber es ist lebensnotwendig und tut ihr gut, glauben Sie uns.'⁶⁹ This metaphor for the deformations of female subjectivity within Western culture evokes a recurrent theme in Duden's work, namely, the contortions which the (female) subject is obliged to undergo in order to take up a place within that culture. The resulting repression causes deep unhappiness and despair; however, any attempt to evade it also provokes unbearable distress: the double bind which is so characteristic of both Duden and Jelinek's treatment of female subjectivity.

6.9 'Die Mörder aller Zeiten sind hinter ihr her'⁷⁰

In the texts in the second section of the volume '*Wimpertier*' the themes introduced in the first section are given clearer form. A picture is created of an overwhelmingly hostile, and male-dominated, environment, within which the female subject cannot possibly thrive. The narrator oscillates between the necessity for survival, achieved

⁶⁷ Duden, 1995, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸ Duden, 1995, p. 17.

⁶⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Duden, 1995, p. 44.

by limited acceptance of cultural constraints, and the desire to keep her culture at bay, and to minimise its destructive impact, a dilemma which is explored in the text 'Kurzatem Grauglut'. In this text the narrator has a sense of her life having slowed down, of stasis, a life lived through the senses. As she describes this: 'Hier befinde ich mich; vibrierend vor Zurückhaltung, überwiegend in Gesellschaft von Toten, Tönen und Farben.'⁷¹ The metaphor used in this text to represent the threat to this precarious state of harmony is the narrator's breath, which appears to seek egress from the captivity represented by her body. The breath's impulse is to move up through the body, and to leave it through the head. The narrator's struggle is to control her rebellious breath and force it to oxygenate her lower regions as well as her upper body. The narrator imagines that she could obtain relief from the inner conflict if she could menstruate. The relief that bleeding would provide, she imagines, would result not just from the loss of blood through the vagina, but through the blood spreading through her entire body and running out of the top of her head. The blood thus appears to represent a female principle, which has the potential to ground the body, and to retain the connection between thought and feeling. The narrator's breath, a male principle, perhaps, and also a metaphor for her own resistance to the limitations of female subjectivity, is intent on sabotage of this potential harmony, and has distanced itself from the reality of her female body:

Der Atem muß dem Blutfluß nicht mehr folgen, er ist jetzt selbständig und ungebunden. Er versorgt die unteren Bereiche, in denen die meisten weiblich festgelegten Menschen ihre, wenn auch hartumkämpften, Schlafplätze haben und immer wieder finden, meistens nicht mehr, hat Dringlicheres zu tun, in das er mir keinen Einblick gewährt.⁷²

The narrator then reflects on what her unruly breath might represent, concluding that it might indicate: 'eine gräßliche Überheblichkeit, vielleicht, eine unaufhörliche Weitsicht, die alle Gefühle für die Schlachtorgien und zahllosen Toten in den Müllbergen und auf den Halden verwehrt, die die Blicke zum Schweifen anhält, zum Überflug.'⁷³ The destruction to which Duden constantly returns is that of the Holocaust, clearly implied here in the reference to 'Schlachtorgien' and to the 'zahllosen Toten in den Müllbergen'. The narrator in the text 'Kurzatem Grauglut' now becomes aware that, as a result of her wayward breath, the connection between

⁷¹ Duden, 1995, p. 49.

⁷² Duden, 1995, p. 50.

⁷³ Duden, 1995, p. 50.

her head and the lower regions has almost been lost. This is represented metaphorically in the text by a salty fluid which builds up in the body just above the genitals. As the narrator says, 'Die einzige möglich gebliebene Verbindung zwischen unten und oben ist diese gesalzene Flüssigkeit.'⁷⁴ However, as she wryly remarks, reinforcing the sense of inner conflict, 'Gut, daß der Atem kürzer geworden ist, daß er nicht mehr von sich aus in dieses Massenlager der Nachzehrter hinabsteigt.'⁷⁵ Female subjectivity is represented as a sapping, downward-draining energy, in contrast to the free-floating masculine 'Atem'.

In the text 'Arbeitsgänge',⁷⁶ the dichotomy between mind and body is presented as a cultural prescription, as an imposition from an autocratic and alien society. In a dream the central character, known as 'sie' or 'die Frau', has stumbled into a trap, a recurrent motif for Duden, in which she is forced to join a queue of people who are awaiting decapitation. The decapitation is carried out by sword, and it is clearly intended as a punishment, although the woman's crime is not stated. The process, however, is not, as one would expect, fatal: following the victim's decapitation, the head is picked up and sewn back onto the neck. The reconnection, though, fails to re-establish head and body as a unit. The head is sewn back on in the roughest possible manner leaving a collar of flesh as a visible reminder of the punishment which has been carried out.⁷⁷ It could be interpreted that the punishment is a result of the female narrator's desire to maintain the connection between reason and emotion, to remain in contact with her body's reality. The text continues to portray its central figure in familiar terms for Duden as the victim of a hostile and predatory environment. On the morning after the nightmare, she fantasises that she is being persecuted by an all-pervasive and hostile coldness, a metaphor for her alienation from her cultural environment. As is frequently the case in this volume, the narrator's response to this perceived attack is expressed in military terms: 'Alle Fluchtwege hat sie [die Kälte] abgeschnitten; sie weicht keinen Zentimeter zurück. Lauert bereits in Waschbecken und Wanne.'⁷⁸ She finds herself virtually defenceless against the hostile environmental attack, her only line of defence being withdrawal into herself, a strategy which appears to extinguish what remains of her will to live:

⁷⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 51.

⁷⁵ Duden, 1995, p. 51.

⁷⁶ Duden, 1995, pp. 39-47.

⁷⁷ Duden, 1995, p. 39.

⁷⁸ Duden, 1995, p. 40.

Sie beobachtet, wie es von allen Seiten auf sie zukommt, sieht sich selbst zu wie einer Kerze, die im verbliebenen Rest von Sauerstoff noch schwach brennt, deren Schein immer weiter abnimmt, deren gelber Lichtkegel kleiner und kleiner wird, sich in einen blauen Glimmpunkt verwandelt, der ihre Pupillen noch trifft und dann schon nicht mehr ist.⁷⁹

The focus switches to a scene which recapitulates the decapitation experience. The narrator is walking down the street towards a group of male workers who are engaged in pollarding plane trees, using a mechanical saw and shredder. This scene expresses metaphorically a number of themes which are recurrent in this volume, and in Duden's work as a whole. In the first instance, the mechanical process to which the trees are being subjected suggest the mechanistic nature of existence, against which the embodied human subject is defenceless, a theme expressed particularly powerfully in the text 'Krebstgang'.⁸⁰

Einmal in den reißenden Strom der Grabtücher geraten, gibt es kein Zurück, keinen Halt mehr. Der Körper kann sich der Strudel nicht erwehren. Er wird weggerissen, abgeführt, in die Kloaken geschleudert und dann der vielfach und amtlich beklagten Zersetzung und endgültigen Auflösung kurz und sachlich trauernd überlassen, mit abgewandten Gesichtern.⁸¹

Life, then, is represented not as a state in its own right, but merely as a form of resistance to the inevitability of death. At the same time, an impression is also conveyed of a grim and unrelenting environment, tempered by little sensitivity or compassion, within which the individual is doomed to fragmentation and disillusionment. In the text 'Arbeitsgänge', in the scene in question, the plane trees are mutilated by means of a process which does not respect their nature or beauty. On the other hand, the trees themselves are already ailing as a result of damage through environmental pollution, evoking the damage which has been caused to the narrator through her exposure to a hostile environment. Significantly, one of the workers' appraisal of the narrator as she walks past is predatory and disrespectful:

⁷⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 40.

⁸⁰ Duden, 1995, pp. 57-58.

⁸¹ Duden, 1995, p. 58.

'Gerade noch sieht einer der Arbeiter sie an, tastet ihren verhüllten Körper ab mit seinen Blicken.'⁸²

In the final section of the text the narrator returns to the themes of knowledge and memory, already discussed in the context of the works *Übergang* and *Das Judasschaf*. As in the two earlier works, the narrator's existential difficulties are related to the 'knowledge' that she has accumulated during her life, and its manner of storage in her body. This 'knowledge' is particularly deadly to corporeal existence, taking the lacerating form of 'Messer Nägel Nadeln Pfeile'⁸³ or 'messerscharfe Bitterkristallen'.⁸⁴ As a result, not only is it almost impossible for the female subject to maintain any sense of self, but the subjectivity that she possesses functions as a place of torture for her, structured as it is by the corrosive sedimentation of 'knowledge': 'Und sie erkennt sich wieder, ihren Körper, der eine Schreckenskammer ist, weil er keine Wahl hat, weil er das anwesende Wissen aufnehmen, sich immer für es bereithalten muß.'⁸⁵ The narrator conceptualises her difficulty by means of an identification with the dead. She aligns herself with the 'Untoten', and particularly with the female members of that group. The 'Untoten' are characterised by their location between the dead and the living, and their inability to find refuge with either group, resulting in a particular, and at times disabling, sensitivity: 'So kommt es, daß sie einiges, häufig zuviel, von der anderen Seite wissen, der der Toten, auf die sie eigentlich gehören. Sie wissen aber auch, und das macht sie natürlich untragbar, zuviel von dieser Seite, der der Lebenden. Sie blicken durch, am ausgeprägtesten nachts.'⁸⁶ This striking metaphor, whilst not used in the text to apply to exclusively female individuals, is nonetheless an interesting evocation of the status of the female subject, and her location between cultural inclusion and exclusion. This form of existence offers no possibility for resolution, only endurance of the discomfort which is the inevitable concomitant of the state. Once again, the female subject finds herself in a familiar double bind.

The text concludes with a vision of a nightmarish urban landscape, covered with a thick veneer of consumer waste. In a further pessimistic evocation of the role of the female subject in the dominant culture, and in a description which is strongly

⁸² Duden, 1995, p. 43.

⁸³ Duden, 1995, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 45.

⁸⁵ Duden, 1995, p. 45.

⁸⁶ Duden, 1995, p. 45.

reminiscent of Jelinek's writing, the products of male spitting on the pavements are considered. This staging of the 'abject', to use Kristeva's term, is strongly evocative of women's marginal cultural status.⁸⁷ Women in the dystopia evoked by Duden are limited to an outsider position in which they are permitted only to consume the products which men do not want, or do not need, for themselves: '[...]jede zum Einkauf gehende Frau wird zum Speichellecker gemacht. Mit den Augen müssen sie es aufnehmen, aufwischen, bereinigen, nur damit Platz gemacht wird für den nächsten, immerzu neu sich produzierenden Quell- und Schmierstoff.' At the same time there is a compulsion, against which there once again appears to be no defence, to consume these contaminated cultural waste products: 'Als quallige Abfuhr kommt es in den Blick, geht ins Auge auch und gerade derjenigen, die das, was ihnen die Kehle hochkommt, mit Strömen von Tränen hinausschwemmen, -stammeln, -schluchzen und -schreien oder es gegen Bezahlung hinterlegen, abladen, versenken.'⁸⁸

6.10 'Ich war schwarz vor Wissen'⁸⁹

The volume *Wimpertier* is also an exploration of the profession of female writer. The problems of knowledge and truth are important themes for Duden, implying a sensitivity to the violence of history, the Holocaust, to death, and to the horror concealed beneath the familiar face of everyday existence. Knowledge and truth are also the forces which destabilise the subjectivity of the central figures in the texts, causing it to fragment. This process is usually depicted in the texts as a fragmentation of the body, reinforcing the message that subjectivity is constructed in and around the body. The prose poem 'Arbeitsplätze' returns to the question of knowledge, analysing the creative process in the context of female subjectivity. The poem describes the oppressive quality of the knowledge which has dominated the author's life, a presence which has undermined her corporeal existence, and therefore, applying the logic of the texts, her existence as a subject.

Das Wissen hat als einschwärzender Schatten
über jeder inneren und äußeren Knospe

⁸⁷ See conclusion to Chapter 4 for a discussion of Kristeva's concept of the 'abject'.

⁸⁸ Duden, 1995, p. 47.

⁸⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 94.

jedem Trieb und Sprößling meines Körpergeländes gestanden
jeden Anflug eines Erblühens im Keim erstickt.
Täglich hatte es sich in mir aufgerichtet:
Ich oder deine Körperzeit.
Ein Mörder.⁹⁰

On the other hand, although she has been tormented by her awareness, it has also functioned as the precondition of creativity, and the author is dependent on its power to develop her creative vision:

Jeden Tag stach es mich ab, stückweise
in Berlin zum Beispiel
und schärfte dadurch den Blick für die untoten Stellen
in den Landschaften der Städte
am Fuß der Betonmauern⁹¹

The act of writing is viewed by Duden as both a product of the 'Erkenntnisekel' which she describes, and its antidote. Language, or, as she describes it, 'die Worte' have enabled her to retain both her sensitivity, viewed as corporeal existence, and her awareness of atrocities. The suffering which her sensitivity produces is central to the creative process, as is her female body, providing the impulse behind her writing:

Die Worte.....
.....benötigen das absolute Gehör des Schmerzes
die Kryptästhesie der Knochen
und die Alarmbereitschaft der Grubenorgane.⁹²

Once again though, writing offers little relief from existential pain. The author's relationship to language is described in terms which almost suggest possession: she depicts herself as both the instrument of and the vehicle for 'die Worte':

Meine Krankheiten und Ausfälle
tragen zu ihrer [der Worte] Erholung bei
und bewirken vielleicht ihre Tagträume:
endlich anderswohin zu gelangen
als in immer dieselben Nachzehrregionen.
An meine Stimmbänder können sie sich halten
wenn sie aufschreien wollen
und verlassen können sie sich
auf meine Verschwiegenheit

⁹⁰ Duden, 1995, p. 96.

⁹¹ Duden, 1995, p. 96.

⁹² Duden, 1995, pp. 101-102.

wenn sie verstummen
oder noch nicht lautbar werden möchten.⁹³

The writer's identification with language increases to the point at which it becomes impossible to differentiate between the two; she has become 'eine Sprachexistenz'.⁹⁴ However, although she is dependent on her body for the act of writing, the borderline position which the female writer, officially excluded from culture in philosophical terms, must inevitably occupy, forces her to transcend her feminine gender. She cannot maintain a position as a 'weiblich festgelegter Mensch', as the text 'Kurzatem Grauglut' describes it, for this would signal the end of her creativity. The solution to this dilemma, the necessity to retain her female subjectivity, whilst at the same time escaping from it, is suggested in the form of an androgynous muse, a 'Dämmerzustand Zwitterwesen Traumfigur'.⁹⁵ This sphinx-like figure works counter not only to the dualism 'male/female', but all dichotomous thinking, it is:

Weder alt noch jung
zu gleichen Teilen über und unter der Erde
begraben und auferstanden
belebt und unbelebt
Pflanze, die im Verhältnis eines menschlichen Körpers
in menschliche Haut gehüllt
dem Wüstenboden entwächst
ihn durchbohrt hat, durchbrochen
hochgetrieben und gespeist aus heimlichen Quellen
Brunnen Grundwassern
Augenblickliche Oase oder Fata Morgana
zwischen den Abschlichtordnungen
Lagern und Gesetzen.⁹⁶

This 'Geschöpf zwischen den Geschlechtern'⁹⁷ offers an alternative to antagonistic thinking, a refuge from the brutality of embodied existence. Duden's creative muse, an image of stillness, and a refuge from the turbulence of her other texts, is located in a shifting sandy landscape which resists all fixed forms. The figure is strongly reminiscent of the description in the text 'Arbeitsgänge' of the narrator's relationship to the concept of memory, in which she identifies with 'the undead', a group of people who maintain a borderline position between life and death, and who have

⁹³ Duden, 1995, p. 102.

⁹⁴ Duden, 1995, p. 103.

⁹⁵ Duden, 1995, p. 103.

⁹⁶ Duden, 1995, pp. 104-5.

⁹⁷ Duden, 1995, p. 104.

developed a particular sensitivity to existential suffering. The muse in this poem occupies a similar location outside of the cultural mainstream, a position which can only be attained and maintained after some struggle, it exists 'in ihrem eigenen Narkosezustand nach schwerer Krankheit'.⁹⁸ Having separated from the dominant culture, the muse utters barely-audible words which are the raw material of the creative process. The figure also represents the borderline in the sense that it functions as a container for polarities, and opposes all solidification: 'halt- und gesetzlos/ hält sie Grund und Abgrund in Bewegung und in Atem/ verhindert Bodensatz und Feststellung'.⁹⁹ The writer's task is to interpret its messages, which will enable her to transform chaotic and apparently random experience into textual practice.

6.11 Conclusion: 'Körpersprache'

In the title to this conclusion the term 'Körpersprache' has been employed to describe Duden's textual practice. This applies both to the content of the individual texts, and to the creative process which forms an integral strand in the volume. Among the three works discussed in this thesis, the volume *Wimpertier* is arguably the text which renders corporeal existence most explicit. The narrator's body functions as the ground on which the conflicts of the texts are enacted. The act of writing is also viewed in *Wimpertier* as an activity which is located in the body, and the author's body therefore also makes explicit incursions into the textual body. In the poem 'Arbeitsplätze', Duden stresses the centrality of the body to the creative process: 'Die Worte [...] brauchen meinen lebenden Körper mit Haut und Haar'.¹⁰⁰ The body in this work thus resists its cultural marginalisation, surfacing not merely as corporeal themes, but also in terms of the construction of texts, which are represented as weavings out of the writer's body, as 'Sprachkörper'. The textual bodies constructed by Duden take the form of fissured and fragmented, rather than seamless and continuous surfaces. Her preference is for shorter texts of varying lengths and genres, consisting of prose texts, prose poems and critical essays. In the volume *Wimpertier*, all three of these genres are juxtaposed. In the context of individual

⁹⁸ Duden, 1995, p. 103.

⁹⁹ Duden, 1995, p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ Duden, 1995, p. 102.

texts also, narrative links are often tenuous or completely absent, the texts consisting of a series of episodes whose relevance to each other is not evident on the first reading. The gaps in the textual surfaces of Duden's work offer resistance to the possibility of a linear approach, requiring an associative reading which involves a repeated movement over the textual surface. This aspect of Duden's textual practice is reminiscent of Grosz's critique of the conventional view of the body as an integrated whole. To this holistic view Grosz juxtaposes a model of incompleteness, stressing the body's receptiveness to cultural manipulation and redefinition. The concept of the fragmented body is evident in Duden's work in terms of the structure of the texts and, in a merging of form and content, the theme of the discontinuous body is also mirrored in the texts at the thematic level: the bodies portrayed are in a state of flux, their form changing in response to both interior and exterior threats to their existence.

If the texts are viewed as 'Sprachkörper' using the superficial model suggested by Grosz, then the psyche of the text, its latent meanings, should be visible on its surface, rather than concealed in an invisible inner space. The wider dimension of the meaning of the texts, their primary process, relates to the Holocaust as the defining cataclysm in German history, and hence also the writer's personal history, which is inextricably linked to her cultural origins. The Holocaust, and, by extension, the barbarism of war in general, is present on the surface of the text as a tracery of images and metaphors. The images 'Leichenberge' and 'die zahllosen Toten in den Müllbergen' in *Wimpertier* evoke the opening of the concentration camps after the War. The term 'Schlacht' and its associated compounds 'Schlachtorgien' and 'Schlachtfeld' represent war and its wholesale destruction of human life. These metonymies for war are reinforced within the metaphorical network by other images of violence and brutality, such as 'Mörder', 'Schmerz', 'Schreckenskammer', 'Foltermächte', 'Folterwerkzeuge', 'Kadaver', 'Qual' and 'Blut', implying not just the events of the Second World War, but also the violence inherent in existence as a whole. These polyphonic images, often not meaningful in their isolated context, cause the reader to travel laterally across the text to other associated images and metaphors which elucidate their significance to Duden's work as a whole. In accordance with Grosz's 'superficial' model of the body, the lateral reading approach which Duden's work demands reinforces the sense of the textual bodies as inscribed surfaces.

If coherence within individual texts, and between works, is established through a network of related images, further links are created between Duden's writing and other textual bodies. In accordance with Grosz's argument that the human body is defined in terms of its location within a matrix of other bodies, a further dimension is represented by Duden's use of intertextuality. The volume *Wimpertier* establishes links with the works of Erich Fried and Marlen Haushofer, producing a further interpretative dimension. Quotations from the work of Artaud establish an important connection between his conception of the body and Duden's own. The texts, by incorporating fragments of other textual bodies, reinforce the author's message that the embodied subject is a product of its cultural context.

As I have argued, one of the most powerful aspects of Duden's work is her use of a 'Körpersprache' to express the experience of embodied subjectivity. Nonetheless, any engagement with the body is fraught with dangers, as Grosz points out, and the tendency to slide into essentialism and biologism is difficult to avoid. The depiction of the female body as a site of clairvoyance is one of the most problematic aspects of Duden's work, and this is particularly marked in the volume *Wimpertier*. This idealisation of female embodiment courts the risk of failure to break out of the dualistic framework which the texts otherwise undermine, collapsing at times into stereotypical constructs of the masculine and the feminine. In a sense, then, Duden's work reflects the contradictions inherent in the Western view of the body, presenting both a radical challenge to its cultural exclusion, and a reinscription of conventional paradigms. It is inevitable, though, that any engagement with the interface between dualistic concepts, with 'Zwischenräume',¹⁰¹ as Duden terms them, will produce cultural debris which is riven with contradictions. On the one hand, Duden constructs a somewhat stereotypically brutal and unfeeling 'male' world, in which the female subject must inevitably wither and fragment. On the other hand, she also provides a radical and deconstructive focus on the gaps and fissures within that gendered and divided world. Finally, her evocation of a 'Geschöpf zwischen den Geschlechtern', in the poem 'Arbeitsplätze', is a powerful metaphor for the need to shatter the gender categorisation which structures the Western world.

¹⁰¹ Duden and Weigel, in Koebner (ed.), 1989, 121 and 134.

(i) Borderline territory: 'the continuity-contiguity moment'

In *The Plural Psyche*, Andrew Samuels analyses the fascination of the psychoanalytic concept of the 'borderline' personality. This term is used to refer to a group of patients whose symptoms are neither neurotic nor psychotic, but occupy a zone between these two definitions of mental disorder.¹ While the borderline, in psychoanalytic terms, refers very clearly to a category of mental illness(es), its fascination extends far beyond this relatively limited domain. As Samuels argues: 'The borderline speaks to us so deeply because in it we test the *limits* of sanity and madness.'² The borderline patient, according to Samuels, functions within a liminal zone in which s/he has intimate knowledge of the states of both sanity and insanity, something a 'healthy' neurotic can never experience without compromising that status. Whilst clearly not 'well', this category of patient is also not definitively 'ill', s/he, 'corrals the ecstasy of madness [...] not completely crazy, not incapable of making a point or a decision, not dead.'³ In cultural terms, women, too, have been viewed as having a closer relationship to discourses of insanity than men, a stereotype which has been subverted by both Kristeva and Irigaray in their cultural theories.⁴ In addition, this thesis has attempted to argue that female subjectivity appears to be constructed in and around other borderlines or thresholds, such as those between nature and culture, masculine and feminine and mind and body. Arguably, it is this association of female subjectivity with 'the borderline' which produces the complex and contradictory attitudes to women which have already been discussed.

This thesis has employed a number of other terms which engage with notions of threshold or borderline zones. The 'transitional space', a concept derived from the work of the psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott forms a focus in the second chapter. Winnicott's concept is based on his theory of transitional objects (examples of which would be blankets or teddy bears), and transitional phenomena, such as thumb-sucking. These objects and behaviours, he argues, are a necessary prop to the

¹ Andrew Samuels, *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 108-111.

² Samuels, 1989, p. 109.

³ Samuels, 1989, p. 110.

⁴ See Conclusion to Chapter 5.

infant who is becoming aware of its autonomous existence, and therefore also of the space which exists between itself and its mother. They mediate between mother and child, representing the onset of the capacity for symbolic thinking which is essential if the infant is to develop a normal, non-psychotic personality.⁵ This concept is further developed by Winnicott into the notion of the 'transitional space', defined as a 'potential space', representing 'a place that is at the continuity-contiguity moment, where transitional phenomena originate'.⁶ The transitional space, according to Winnicott, represents not just the space between mother and infant, but also that between the individual and the social world. This space is also the locus of creativity, and healthy psychological existence for this writer is predicated on the individual having at least some access to this area of experience.⁷

Winnicott also emphasises the dangers inherent in the transitional space, and it is at this point that his arguments resonate particularly with both Samuels' description of the borderline, and the constructions of female subjectivity explored in this thesis. If the separation of the infant from merged existence with its mother is not sensitively handled, Winnicott argues, this can result in psychosis, or 'madness', in later life. 'Madness' is defined by Winnicott as 'a *break-up* of whatever may exist at the time of *a personal continuity of existence*'.⁸ A psychotic person, then, according to Winnicott's analysis, would have surrendered to the transitional space, losing any contact with reality. Thus, by extension, any attempt to explore female subjectivity by entering the 'transitional space' is accompanied by the threat of 'madness', as defined as a loss of whatever sense of self was already in existence. At the same time, though, if the female subject is to bring about any change in the construction of her subjectivity, the dangers of the transitional space must be negotiated. Ultimately, then, Winnicott's concept is fundamentally optimistic: if the perils of this space can be successfully negotiated, it offers access to creativity and alternative forms of being.

In accordance with much recent feminist theory, this thesis has also argued for closer attention to the role of the body in the construction of female subjectivity.⁹

⁵ D. W. Winnicott [1971], 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena', in *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-25.

⁶ Winnicott [1971], 1991, p. 103.

⁷ See also D. W. Winnicott, 'The Location of Cultural Experience', pp. 95-103, and 'The Place Where We Live', pp. 104-110, in Winnicott [1971], 1991.

⁸ Winnicott [1971], 1991, p. 97.

⁹ See Chapter 4.

This theme is developed in Grosz's reconceptualisation of the body, which constructs it as an 'interval' or transitional space in its own right, mediating as it does between nature and culture, and the individual and the social world.¹⁰ In particular, Grosz provides a reevaluation of the conventional view of the body, one echoed in psychoanalytical theory, as 'natural' material which is diametrically opposed to culture.¹¹ In addition, in terms which are very reminiscent of those employed by Winnicott, Grosz emphasises the dangers inherent in the use of this corporeal space in an attempted redefinition of female subjectivity. As she argues, the body has conventionally functioned for women as the locus of repression *par excellence*. Any corporeal approach, then, necessitates a constant reevaluation of the assumptions and premises on which the investigation is based, and an awareness of the tendency of the established order of binary oppositions to reinstate itself by stealth. On the other hand, as Grosz argues, no investigation of female subjectivity is possible without an engagement with this space.¹² Grosz's corporeal theory resonates in turn with Kristeva's theory of the 'abject' as the unwanted signifiers, which have been cast out of the signifying chain, only to hover precariously at its periphery, constantly undermining the stability of the symbolic order.¹³ In this respect, the body is a crucial example of 'the abject' as its products and processes, whilst central to human existence, are also, paradoxically, deemed culturally unacceptable. The concept of the body, then, encompasses both the potential of the abject to undermine the established order, and its tendency to be marginalised within that same order.

There are particularly strong resonances between the borderline concepts described above and the work of the writer Anne Duden. Duden argues explicitly that her work embodies a fascination for the exploration of threshold zones and intervals. Her texts attempt to embrace the experience of liminality, conveying the anxiety and confusion which characterises any such exploration. Her central figures are differentiated from those around them by the possession of insight, frequently gained as result of a traumatic or abusive experience. The figures are, therefore, located within a borderline zone *vis-à-vis* an alien cultural environment, functioning both as witnesses to, and victims of, that environment. The texts explore the

¹⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), Introduction and Acknowledgements, p. xi.

¹¹ Grosz, 1994, p. 23.

¹² Grosz, 1994, Introduction and Acknowledgements, p. xiv.

¹³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 4.

intrusion of this environment into the subjectivity of the central figures and the resulting sense of entrapment and despair which they experience. Unable to prevent the influx of unwanted cultural messages, they are forced to fragment, perhaps in the unconscious hope of reorganising their identity on a different basis. The characters, then, are repeatedly propelled into a transitional space in which the certainties of identity are revealed to be illusory. The experience of this space is frequently terrifying and overwhelming, recalling the arguments of Winnicott.

In addition, the transitional space in Duden's writing is closely associated with the body, and experiences of that space frequently involve an engagement with the body. Recalling Grosz's arguments, Duden uses the body as a transitional space in its own right: it is the body which mediates in her texts between the subject and its environment. Hence, the body becomes a repository or cloaca for discarded elements of the culture in which it is located. The use of the body in Duden's textual practice also resonates powerfully with Grosz's description of the cultural body: the bodies in this writer's work are always saturated by their cultural context. At the same time, Duden's bodies incorporate the fluid qualities articulated within the theoretical writings of Deleuze and Guattari. Thus, in the novel *Das Judasschaf*, the central figure is able to take the decision to abandon her identity and to merge with the two-dimensional world of a Renaissance painting.¹⁴ This decision, however, also recalls the dangers expressed by Grosz in relation to any engagement with the transitional space represented by the body. The central figure in this text can also be accused of excessive passivity and a final grandiose gesture of defeat. In the prose text *Übergang*, a violent assault on the body provides the catalyst which precipitates the central figure into her inner world, thereby revealing to her the extent to which she has both colluded with, and functioned as the victim of, her cultural environment.¹⁵ As Winnicott argues: '[...] exploitation of this area [the transitional space] leads to a pathological condition in which the individual is cluttered up with persecutory elements of which he has no means of ridding himself.'¹⁶ This is a very accurate description of the inner world of the characters depicted in the work of this writer, whose figures wrestle with the injunctions and prescriptions of their culture, a struggle which is frequently registered at the corporeal level as fragmentation.

¹⁴ Anne Duden [1985], *Das Judasschaf* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1994), p. 49.

¹⁵ See Chapter 6.

¹⁶ Winnicott [1971], 1991, p. 103.

(ii) Double Bind

The concept of the 'double bind' has provided an overall framework for this thesis. The term was used initially to describe the portrayal of female subjectivity in the six literary texts which form the central focus of this research project. While the term applies to the work of both writers considered in the thesis, it resonates particularly strongly with the work of Elfriede Jelinek. The analysis of texts by Jelinek has revealed an interest in the exploration of the interface between the individual and his/her wider environment, in an attempt to expose the hidden assumptions which structure subjectivity and social behaviour. In the work of this writer, culture functions as the 'mother' who is guilty of supplying contradictory messages, placing the female subject in a 'no-win' position, a central component of the double bind situation, according to Bateson.¹⁷ A further theme which emerges consistently from reading texts by Jelinek is that of the impossibility of 'escaping the field', to use Bateson's terminology.¹⁸ A recurrent theme in this writer's work, for example, is the conflict between a desire for love and approval, and the need to have access to some form of autonomous existence. These two aims in Jelinek's writing are depicted as mutually incompatible, and the possession of one automatically excludes the subject from access to the other. In Jelinek's texts, the main female characters attempt to find a means of circumventing the constraints of their daily lives, frequently through a relationship or other involvement with a man. The consequences of this, however, are overwhelmingly negative and usually result in an exacerbation of the circumstances from which the character was seeking to escape. These failed escape attempts are linked to a naive interpretation of the realistic possibilities available to the female subject within her cultural context.

This thesis has argued that Duden's textual practice is to be located within the transitional space itself. Jelinek's texts, on the other hand, do not explore the agonies and the ecstasies of this space; rather, they operate in and around the dualisms which structure Western thought and culture. However, the texts enact such a comprehensive process of deconstruction that the reader is precipitated into a

¹⁷Geoffrey Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 206-207.

¹⁸Bateson, 1972, pp. 206-207.

borderline zone in which his/her usual links to reality are severed. The reader is then left with the disorientation which the reading of Jelinek's texts produces. This writer's textual practice, therefore, resonates in turn with Derrida's theory of the 'supplement', introduced in Chapter 1. This concept constitutes an approach to the deconstruction of binary oppositions which involves neither the simple inversion of the existing terms, nor the creation of a third term; it is: 'neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither accident nor essence'.¹⁹ Deconstruction, according to Derrida, necessitates the overturning of binary oppositions as a necessary phase in the subversion of the hierarchy which places one term within an opposition as subordinate to the other. However, this 'phase' differs from the conventional use of the term in having neither a beginning, nor an ending point; therefore, overturning will always form part of the process of deconstruction, which involves 'an interminable analysis', as 'the hierarchy of dual oppositions always re-establishes itself'.²⁰

The interval created between the two extremes of overturning, and the creation of a new, third term, is marked by the notion of the 'supplement', which is closely related in Derrida's work to other terms, such as 'the pharmakon' and 'the gram'.²¹ In common with Winnicott, Derrida creates a compelling notion of a 'space-which-is-not-a-space', a future which consists of a perpetual engagement with what is already in the past. In terms of female subjectivity, Derrida's view is a necessary corrective to essentialist approaches which seek simply to invert the hierarchy inherent in the male/female opposition. While this may form part of a deconstructive approach, it has to be combined with an engagement with both sides of the binary divide. This approach is exemplified particularly in Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder moderne Frauen*, which engages directly with the discourses of male and female subjectivity. This writer, whilst clearly having greater sympathy for the difficulties experienced by women, never falls into the trap of idealising conventional femininity; rather, her strategy is to expose the pitfalls inherent in this position.

¹⁹Jacques Derrida [1972], *Positions*, translated and annotated by Alan Bass (London: The Athlone Press, 1987), p. 43.

²⁰Derrida [1972], 1987, p. 42.

²¹See Susan J. Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p. 171.

When Bateson's theory of the 'double bind' is viewed through the lens of Derrida's concept of the 'supplement', it acquires a more positive and dynamic meaning in terms of the subject of this thesis. The concept of the 'double bind' has undergone a development within the thesis from Bateson's justifiably negative description of an abusive parenting situation, having also been employed to provide a sense of the discomfort and bewilderment which characterises the experience of inhabiting the 'interval' or 'transitional space'. An engagement with this space necessarily produces the contradictory responses which have been discussed in the thesis with reference to the work of both Jelinek and Duden.²² These responses are analogous to Bateson's description of the 'double bind' situation, reflecting as they do the reader's sense of disorientation when engaging with the texts of both writers, which provide no real resolution or alternative vision. The reader is, therefore, taken into a place of instability and, effectively, abandoned there. This impression has been reinforced in the thesis by the theoretical texts analysed, whose approaches have exhibited many similarities to those adopted in the literary texts. Nonetheless, as Flax argues, toleration of the contradictions of the borderline zone represents the only possible condition of a redefinition of subjectivity within a postmodernist framework.²³ Any engagement with constructions of female subjectivity, viewed through the theoretical lenses described above, must inevitably involve a perpetual struggle with existing discourses. This again evokes the double bind situation in that it offers no means of escape from an intolerable situation. On the other hand, by confronting ambiguity and dissonance, the female subject is also propelled into the transitional space, and is thereby exposed to the possibility of change and development.

This thesis has entered a borderline zone of its own in attempting to produce resonances between two apparently opposed modes of textual practice: the theoretical and the literary. In common with the writers analysed, it therefore offers no solutions; rather, it attempts to provide a contribution to a debate which must, of necessity, remain as ongoing. Nonetheless, this thesis concurs with the more positive version of the borderline produced by Winnicott in his concept of the 'transitional space'. The model for this concept, according to Winnicott, is the 'space between the baby and the mother'.²⁴ He emphasises, however, that this is a 'hypothetical area that

²²See introductions to Chapters 2 and 5.

²³See Conclusion to Chapter 1.

²⁴Winnicott, [1971], 1991, p. 107.

exists (but cannot exist)';²⁵ as such, it is located neither inside nor outside of the subject, but mediates between the two. Winnicott's concept, whilst not written with any postmodernist intention, has striking similarities with the other theories expounded in this thesis. In particular, Winnicott asserts that the transitional space is not merely the source of creativity, which is prefigured by play, but also the location in which cultural experience takes place.²⁶ As this thesis has taken as its central focus the cultural experience of female subjectivity, this provides a further convergence between Winnicott's theory and the aims of this research project. The introduction to the thesis also emphasises the 'clinical' perspective of the thesis, which is informed by the author's training in, and practice of, counselling. Winnicott, too, draws a further analogy between his conception of the transitional space, and the analytic situation. The success of the analysis depends on the analyst's skill in negotiating the dangers to the analysand of the transitional space.²⁷ At the same time, though, this 'continuity-contiguity moment' is 'the only place where play can start.'²⁸ This thesis, also, concludes with the hope that the transitional space has been successfully negotiated, and that now play can start!

²⁵ Winnicott, [1971], 1991, p. 107.

²⁶ Winnicott [1971], 1991, pp. 95-103.

²⁷ Winnicott [1971], 1991, p. 54.

²⁸ Winnicott, [1971], 1991, p. 103.

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