

Music, National Identity and the Past in Postwar Austrian Literature

by

Simon Trevor Walsh

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Vanessa H. Agnew, Co-chair  
Associate Professor Johannes von Moltke, Co-chair  
Associate Professor Mark A. Clague  
Professor Julia C. Hell

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

The Austrian-American filmmaker Billy Wilder once quipped that the Austrians are a brilliant people for having made the world believe that Hitler was a German and Beethoven an Austrian.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, Wilder's comment underscores the significant investment in and emphasis on music that has taken place over the course of Austria's Second Republic, the Austria of today.<sup>2</sup> In 1946, one year after the demise of Nazi Germany's 1000-year Reich, Austria "discovered" its 950 years of history, staging celebrations prominently scored by Mozart's music.<sup>3</sup> After an extremely successful European tour in 1947, the Vienna Philharmonic was told by its Jewish conductor Bruno Walter that their performances had evoked considerable sympathy for the people of Vienna, and that the city remained one whose "culture and musical life evokes the

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<sup>1</sup> "Die Österreicher haben das Kunststück fertig gebracht, aus Beethoven einen Österreicher und aus Hitler einem Deutschen zu machen." Cited as a footnote in Jay Julian Rosellini, "The Seminar for Freshmen as a Platform for Raising Awareness of Austrian (and German) Studies," *Unterrichtspraxis* 45 (Fall 2012), 160. Rosellini notes that Wilder's "joke" is well-received in the classroom and hence useful as a pedagogical tool for teaching undergraduates about Austria.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelia Szabó-Knotik, "Mythos Musik in Österreich: die Zweite Republik," (*Memoria Austriae I. Menschen, Mythen, Zeiten*), ed. Emil Brix, Ernst Bruckmüller and Hannes Stekl (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> "Das offizielle Österreich berief Mozart zum Botschaftler des befreiten und bevormundeten Österreich, erkor ihn zum Genius austriacus," wrote Gert Kerschbaumer and Oliver Rathkolb in reference to the ubiquitous presence of Mozart's music at the official celebration in 1946 to mark Austria's 950<sup>th</sup> birthday. Cited in "Selbstinszenierung und Handlungsbilanz," 357. "Official Austria appointed Mozart the ambassador of a liberated Austria, chose him as the Genius austriacus"

greatest admiration.”<sup>4</sup> In 1955 the signing of the Austrian State Treaty, which signaled Austria’s full restoration to sovereignty and the withdrawal of the Allies after a ten-year occupancy, merged symbolically with and was perhaps even trumped by the re-opening of the famed Vienna State Opera. And music quickly became and has remained a cornerstone of the thriving Austrian tourist industry – alone Robert Wise’s 1965 film *The Sound of Music* has inspired countless Anglo-Americans to pilgrim to Salzburg and surrounds. During the 1980s – the principal decade that this study engages – a promotional booklet prepared by the Austrian *Bundespressdienst* claimed for Austria the status of a musical superpower – “musikalische Großmachtstellung” – and referred to “music” and “Austria” as terms that were practically synonymous.<sup>5</sup>

This dissertation focuses on *literary* manifestation of contemporary Austria’s musical claims. As Vincent Kling has recently put it, Austrian literature is well known for having produced “an unusually large number of authors with strong musical ability and a marked tendency to adapt musical content and form to their literary work.”<sup>6</sup> I concentrate here on three authors: Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek, and Gert Jonke, each of whom belong to the second generation of Austrian authors who were raised

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Hella Pick, *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (London & New York: Tauris, 2000), 93.

<sup>5</sup> The full sentence reads: “Die europäische Kultur hat in den Schöpfungen der Musik einen besonders charakteristischen Ausdruck gefunden, die Musik Österreichs steht an so zentraler Stelle, daß “Musik” und “Österreich” fast als gleichbedeutend gelten.” Harald Goertz, *Österreich: Land der Musik*. Wien: Bundespressdienst, 1984, 5. The sentence is repeated in the equivalent *Bundespressdienst* document from 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Vincent Kling “Gert Jonke.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction*; Spring 2005; 25, 1: 23.

during or after the war. The work of each is populated with musical institutions and artifacts, and by characters and sometimes also narrators who discuss, contemplate, listen to, and perform music. Much of the musical activity they describe in their work is identifiably Austrian, both in the sense that Austria invariably forms the narrative setting for their work; and in the sense that the reader often encounters references in their work to local musical venues, musical personalities, and to composers who lived and worked in Austria.

The conceptual key to my inquiry lies in the notion, which I have already begun articulating above, of contemporary Austria as the “Land der Musik” or Land of Music. Mayer-Hirzberger offers us an initial purchase on the notion by parsing it into two interlacing rhetorical strands.<sup>7</sup> According to the first, Austrians can lay claim to a musical inheritance of unrivalled quantity and quality. This inheritance is grounded in the achievements of the “master” composers of Viennese Classicism, such as Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, complimented by representatives of the Romantic era, for instance Schubert, Brahms, Bruckner, Strauss, and Mahler. Contributing secondarily to this tradition of “serious music” is a popular vein of folk or “lighter” Austrian musical production seen in musical forms such as the “Ländler” and the operetta, genres to which Johann Strauss famously contributed. The second argumentative strand holds that Austrians are an inherently musical people with a special aptitude for music. Although a belief in Austria as a particularly musical land has circulated for at least two centuries

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<sup>7</sup> Anita. Mayer-Hirzberger, “‘...ein Volk von alters her musikbegabt.’ *Der Begriff ‘Musikland Österreich’ im Ständestaat.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008.

(Mayer-Hirzberger's larger study centers on the cultural meaning of music in Austria's Corporate State, that lasted from 1934 to 1938), my own interest is in its explicit manifestation *after* 1945.

Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke exhibit a literary fixation with music that partially reproduces, even affirms a notion of Austria as the Land of Music. Under their collective pen, contemporary Austria – with Vienna and Salzburg as its sonic focal points – is arguably a country whose residents are preoccupied, whether directly or indirectly, with asserting and maintaining Austria's status as a profoundly musical place. That said, I submit that the literary-musical participation of these three authors is propelled by much more than a benign wish to celebrate Austria's musical heritage. My thesis is that, in reflecting ceaselessly on musical Austria, these three authors key their literary-musical accounts to postwar Austria's troubled trajectory, more specifically to two deeply interrelated phenomena: the (re)negotiation of national identity that has taken place over the course of the Second Republic; and the failure of postwar Austrians to deal adequately with their country's National Socialist past. Wilder's quote is additionally instructive here, for he suggests a postwar strategy whereby Austria, subsumed into Hitler's Germany in 1938 but reborn as a Republic in 1945, sought to leverage its musical stock while simultaneously downplaying its National Socialist history, accomplishing both tasks at the expense of Germany. Responding to this strategy, we might say that Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke identify the *notion* of Austria as the Land of Music for what it really is, a dominant and politicized *discourse*.



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At its narrowest, the study focuses on music in Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke as a way of supplementing, revising, responding and contributing to the secondary literature on each of these authors, including the ever-growing scholarship on music in their work. At its broadest, the study argues on behalf of music's place in the world as a vital tool, one that people recruit and contest as a way of accomplishing specific types of cultural, social, and political work. Taking postwar Austrian literature as my example, I argue that music served the above authors, not principally as an aesthetically pleasing site of escape *from*, but as entry *into* the contentious political, national, and historiographical narratives underpinning postwar Austria's troubled trajectory. By arguing for newly productive ways of accounting for postwar Austria's musical engagement, this study attempts to revivify music as broader object of literary study. In developing my methodological approach, I consult, connect, and sometimes augment the work of literary theorists, historians, cultural theorists and especially historical musicologists, with the aim of showing that Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke construct musical meaning in ways that speak to, and in some cases, anticipate contemporary musicological discourse. At its heart, then, my project constitutes a rethinking of what (modernist) literary representations of music are capable of achieving. There is more at stake than has hitherto been assumed.

This introduction intervenes in the (inter-) disciplinary conversations that crisscross my topic. The narrative is self-consciously theoretical insofar as it strives to fulfil Jonathan Culler's recent description of theory as "work that succeeds in

challenging and reorienting thinking in fields other than those in which it originates.”<sup>8</sup>

My point of departure is to sketch the evolution in the Second Republic of a nascent national imaginary, one founded on the widely accepted myth of Austria as the first victim of Nazi Germany. If that myth went largely uncontested until the early 1980s, I emphasize the role of literary writers in forcing Austria’s victim narrative into the light of public scrutiny. Pointing out that Jonke (and especially) Jelinek and Bernhard participated in this literary consciousness raising, I reinforce my thesis that musical activity in their work was central rather than peripheral to this critical project. Having effectively professed my intention of examining music in the work of these three authors as a mobile and contested cultural form, I step back to critically examine the existing scholarship on music in these three authors. I argue that this scholarship, in keeping with broader research on music in (Austrian) literature, has articulated a narrow approach to music which has limited the kind of questions that we can ask of music as an object of literary discourse. In articulating an alternative, I marshal theoretical assistance from scholars who, in recent decades, have written under the banner of “new musicology”, a self-consciously interdisciplinary field in step with intellectual developments within cultural studies. Toward the end of the chapter I reverse the equation by suggesting that it is the very *literariness* of their project that allowed these authors the freedom and creative space to develop their collective account of musical Austria.

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<sup>8</sup> Culler continues: “Theory is analytical, speculative, reflexive, interdisciplinary, and a counter to commonsense views.” *The Literary in Theory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 4.

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Most of literary texts I examine in this study were published in the 1980s, the decade in which postwar Austrians were forced to belatedly confront their country's wartime past. The historical coordinates leading to this confrontation bear rehearsal here. Steven Beller and Frank Trommler have pointed to two radical discontinuities, one historical and one moral that defined and "drastically complicated" the way postwar Austrians have related to their country's pre-1945 past. Both disconnects emerge from the circumstances surrounding the founding of the Second Austrian Republic in 1945. The historical disconnect refers to the creating of a nascent Austrian identity after 1945. Versions of an "Austrian" identity circulated long before 1945, but it only makes sense to talk about that identity as truly *national* (or at least aspiring to be such) *after* the formation of the Second Republic.<sup>9</sup> Prior to 1945 – namely from the beginnings of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867, through to the formation of the First Republic in 1918, and from there to the period of Austrofascism lasting from 1934 until the German annexation of Austria in 1938 – those living in Austria were much more likely, if not certain, to understand themselves as nationally German, however else they might have used and applied the categories "Austria" and "Austrian."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Steven Beller & Frank Trommler. "Austrian Writers Confront the Past, 1945-2000: An Introduction." *New German Critique*, 93 (2004): 3-19.

<sup>10</sup> On the Demarcation of Austria from Germany after 1945, see Oliver Rathkolb, *The Paradoxical Republic: Austria, 1945-2005*, trans. Otmar Binder, Eleanor Breuning, Ian

The second – moral – disconnect relates to the line, promulgated by post-45 elites and accepted and shared by the majority of the population, that in 1938 a belligerent Hitlerite Germany had annexed an unwilling but defenseless Austria. Hence postwar Austria was to be regarded, then and always, as a victim of Nazi Germany. The so-called Moscow Declaration, signed by the Allies in 1943, provided the tonic this line needed. Hoping to spur wartime resistance, the Allies claimed Austria as the first free country to fall prey to Nazi aggression. A subsequent clause in the Declaration urging Austrians to take responsibility for their actions in the war was quickly forgotten.

In noting that a “society that regards itself as a victim of German annexation did not lose the war, rather it won the war with Western allies and does not have to subject itself to further self-flagellation,”<sup>11</sup> Egon Schwarz captures the private and public mood that persisted in Austria after 1945, as Austrians proved exceedingly unwilling to recognize much less confront their country’s willing, active, and substantial

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Fraser and David Sinclair-Jones (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 11-14. For an account of Austria’s cultural ties to Germany in the early decades of the twentieth century, see Michael Steinberg, *Austria as Theater and Ideology: The Meaning of the Salzburg Festival* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000). For a general overview on Austro-German identity, see Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger “Beyond *The Sound of Music*: The Quest for Cultural Identity in Modern Austria.” *The German Quarterly* 76 (Summer 2003), 292.

<sup>11</sup> Egon Schwarz, “Austria quite a normal nation,” *New German Critique*, 93 (2004), 178.

Citing opinion surveys conducted by the US occupation soon after the end of the war, Oliver Rathkolb notes that their results showed “how deep-rooted the social processes already were that overnight pronounced almost all Austrians to be “victims” and victors, without awaiting the outcome of the political and legal clarification of the share of Austrians in the Nazi terror and expansion regime, and in the Holocaust.” *The Paradoxical Republic*, 14

participation in the excesses and crimes of Nazi Germany. Although, as Schwarz also points out, the victim theory had some basis in the political realities of the late 30s,<sup>12</sup> its continued acceptance in post-45 Austria was untenable in light of the enthusiastic reception Austrians granted Hitler in 1938, the pogrom against the Jews that took place in the weeks following the *Anschluss*, the ease and rapidity with which Austria transitioned into a Nazi state, and, most telling of all, the active involvement of many Austrians in the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> If failing to confront the past meant failing to address these specific events, Dagmar Lorenz has convincingly argued that it has also meant failing to address the “authoritarian attitudes, intolerance, racism, and chauvinism” that, having flourished in the ideological soil of Nazi Germany, continued to find expression within Austrian society and culture after 1945.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The case would revolve around the Austrofascist opposition to the Nazis, and the Nazi assassination, as part of a failed coup attempt in 1934, of the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuß.

<sup>13</sup> Tony Judt succinctly summarizes the moral and factual flimsiness of treating Austria as a victim: “Austria could hardly be treated as just another Nazi-occupied country whose local Fascists and Nazi-collaborators would need to be punished, after which normal life could be resumed. In a country of under 7 million inhabitants there had been 700,000 NSDAP members: at the war’s end there were still 536,000 registered Nazis in Austria; 1,2 million Austrians had served in German units during the war. Austrians had been disproportionately represented in the SS and in concentration camp administrations. Austrian public life and high culture were saturated with Nazi sympathizers – 45 out of 117 members of the Viennese Philharmonic Orchestra were Nazis (whereas the Berlin Philharmonic had just 8 Nazi Party members out of 110 musicians).” *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Dagmar Lorenz “Austrian Responses to National Socialism and the Holocaust,” 181. *A History of Austrian Literature 1918-2000*, ed. Katrin Kohl and Ritchie Robertson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 181. Lorenz offers this as a description of “everyday fascism,” a concept that is important for my reading, in chapter 3, of Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*.

The victim theory has been referred to as modern-day Austria's "founding myth." From the beginning, then, the positive print of post-45 Austrian identity was constructed against its negative image, that of having *not* been German and therefore of having *not* been complicit – or only minimally so – in German war crimes. The myth has been symbolically strengthened by two stability measures that have come to characterize the Second Republic. I refer here, firstly, to Austria's official declaration of neutrality, which followed closely on the heels of the signing of the State Treaty in 1955;<sup>15</sup> and secondly to the institutionalized system of social partnership, formalized in 1957, that virtually eliminated all labor dispute in postwar Austria.<sup>16</sup> If Bunzl has pointed out that the victim myth, along with the country's neutrality and its political system of social partnership "came to serve as the central tenet of postwar Austrian nationness"<sup>17</sup> that defined postwar Austria as an "Island of the Blessed," Konzett has equally reminded us that these apparently peaceful and reconstructive endeavors failed in addressing "the deeper social divisions that led Austria into complicity with the Nazi

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Knight has emphasized that Austria's attainment of sovereignty, which came with the declaration of the Austrian State Treaty in May 1955, went hand in glove with its subsequent declaration – in October of the same year – of permanent neutrality, which is to say that sovereignty and neutrality expressed intertwined national strivings that were both realized in 1955.

<sup>16</sup> See a succinct description of Austria's system of social partnership, see Peter Thaler's *The Ambivalence of Identity: The Austrian Experience of Nation-Building in a Modern Society*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2001, 28-31, and 111.

<sup>17</sup> Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 32.

genocide.<sup>18</sup>

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The 1980s heralded the belated and discomfiting reflux of the Austrian past into its public sphere. The chief catalyst was a series of public scandals concerning the Nazi connections and sympathies of a number of prominent public figures, the most notorious being the election of Kurt Waldheim to the President of Austria in 1986. As it appeared in retrospect, revelations during the election campaign concerning his hidden complicity in Nazi war crimes did not appear to hinder Waldheim; on the contrary, he was elected with a robust fifty-four percent of the vote. Waldheim's presidential assent triggered an international outcry culminating in sanctions against Austria.

Political events at the turn of the century ensured that national and international debates concerning Austria's engagement or non-engagement with the past would persist into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 1999, the right-wing and possibly neo-fascist Freedom Party led by Jörg Haider narrowly displaced the Conservative People's Party as the second-largest in Austria. The Social Democratic Party remained the largest, but found itself unable to govern alone and unable to renew with any credibility its coalition government with the People's Party. Three months later, the Austrian president, Thomas Klestil, asked his own People's Party to form a coalition government with the Freedom Party, thus bringing into a government a party of the radical right known for

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<sup>18</sup> Matthias Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 12.

multiple invocations of racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic notions that, however, remained broadly accepted among the populace.<sup>19</sup>

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The trajectory of postwar Austrian literature follows the curve of the national historical amnesia outlined above – but only up to a point. From the 50s until the early 70s Austrian literature was mired in a project of simultaneous restoration and avoidance. The national image constructed to suit that project was of the Second Republic as the latest instance of an Austria that should seek its roots in the glory days of the Habsburg Empire.<sup>20</sup> The period between 1938 and 1945 could contribute little to that national imagery, because during that time Austria had been canceled out by the Nazi occupation. Hence Austrian authors showed scant interest in engaging critically with the wartime past.

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<sup>19</sup> The rise of Haider together with the response of Austrian writers prompted a 2002 conference, attended by a large group of literary theorists and historians, that took place in Philadelphia under the title “Austrian Writers Confront the Past, 1945-2000.” An eponymous collection of papers that grew out of the conference were published in a special issue of *New German Critique*, edited by Steven Beller and Frank Trommler, in fall 2004. This introduction benefits significantly from the essays in this volume, particularly from Beller and Trommler’s introduction and subsequent essays by Dagmar Lorenz and Egon Schwarz.

<sup>20</sup> The classic account is Claudio Magris’ *Der habsburgische Mythos in der österreichischen Literatur*. Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1966. Magris explored the phenomenon of longing for the bygone world of Habsburg Austria and showed, as Lamb-Faffelberger puts it, “that the more desolate and obsolete its [20<sup>th</sup>-century Austria’s] political and social reality became the more utopian became the longing for Habsburg Austria.” “Beyond *The Sound of Music*,” 292. See also Dagmar Lorenz, “Austrian Responses to National Socialism and the Holocaust,” 182-187



As late as 1979 Ulrich Greiner, in his study *Der Tod des Nachsommers*, attributed symptoms of escapism, social inertia, and political apathy to recent Austrian fiction.<sup>21</sup> Subsequent literary historians such as Klaus Zeyringer have challenged this assertion, pointing out that Austrian authors had, by the 1970s, already started to produce meaningful response to National Socialism and the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup> One thinks here of Ingeborg Bachmann, an important literary predecessor of the three authors I examine in this dissertation – especially of her so-called “Todesarten” or “Ways of Death” project, a planned trilogy left incomplete at the time of her premature death in 1973. Written against the backdrop of the Auschwitz trials of Nazi officials, which prompted Bachmann to study the medical and legal literature on Auschwitz, the project yielded *Malina* as its sole completed work.<sup>23</sup> The novel portrays the attempt by a female narrator to come to terms with her life in late sixties Vienna. At its heart, the novel deals – from the neglected perspective of a woman – with the different, oftentimes poisonous, ways in which men and women interact. Bachmann uses Austria’s fascist past –

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<sup>21</sup> Ulrich Greiner, *Der Tod des Nachsommers. Aufsätze, Portraits, Kritiken zu österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur* (Munich: Hanser, 1979). See also Helga Schreckenberger, “Suffering from Austria: Social Criticism in Prose Fiction of the Seventies and Eighties.” *Shadows of the Past: Austrian Literature of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Hans Schulte and Gerald Chapple (New York et. al.: Peter Lang, 2009), 107-125.

<sup>22</sup> Klaus Zeyringer, ““Kein schöner Land” und “Keinem bleibt seine Gestalt.” Tendenzen österreichischer Literatur der 80er Jahre.” *Die Zeit und die Schrift: Österreichische Literatur nach 1945*, ed. Karlheinz F. Auckenthaler (Szeged: JATE, 1993), 5-26. See also Klaus Zeyringer, *Innerlichkeit und Öffentlichkeit: Österreichische Literatur der 80er Jahre* (Tübingen: Franke, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971).

thematized in the book, for example, in the nightmare middle section, where a symbolic father depicted as a concentration camp commandant cuts out his daughters' tongue and presides over a cemetery of "murdered daughters" – as a frame for her investigation.

At any rate, the 1980s also heralded the full arrival of Austrian literary responses to Austria's past. Naming Thomas Bernhard and Elfriede Jelinek as exemplary authors, Zbigniew Świątłowski spoke of literary works in this decade, "die mit Staat und Gesellschaft scharf ins Gericht gehen, die harmonisierenden Legenden zerfleischen, Konflikt mit historischen Untätern geradezu suchen."<sup>24</sup> And indeed, this was the period in which Bernhard and Jelinek solidified their local reputation as "Nestbeschmutzer," authors intent on "soiling their own nest" by ceaselessly and often dramatically drawing attention, both in their works and in their public pronouncements, to Austria's moral and political shortcomings.<sup>25</sup> Grouping Bernhard and Jelinek with Peter Handke, Matthias Konzett argues that all three have sought to occupy insider-as-outsider positions of dissent and difference calculated to break the complacent homogeneity of Austria's cultural sphere, long shaped by a consensus mentality that also "helped shape

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<sup>24</sup> ... "works that took the Austrian State and society heavily to task, which lacerated harmonizing legends, and which sought out conflict with past perpetrators."

Zbigniew Świątłowski, "Das Identische und das Nichtidentische. Zum Wesen der österreichischen Literatur (und des Österreichischen)." *Nationale Identität: Aspekte, Probleme und Kontroversen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, eds. Joanna Jabłkowska and Małgorzata Półrola. (Wydaw: Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 313.

<sup>25</sup> On Jelinek's entangled in Austria as a "Neschbeschmutzerin" see *Die Nestbeschmutzerin. Jelinek und Österreich*, ed. Pia Janke (Salzburg: Jung und Jung, 2002).

the fascist paradigms of Austro-German culture and politics.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, in the wake of the Waldheim affair, Austrian authors such as Josef Haslinger, Gerhard Roth, and Robert Menasse became well known to the public through their essays, many of which appeared in newspapers, that were critical of Waldheim and the symbolism of his continued popularity among the public.<sup>27</sup> If the novelty of these essays lay in their unprecedented discursive incursion into the public sphere, they also evoked a certain familiarity, since their appearance spoke to entrenched expectations among politicians, the public, and the media that literary authors would indeed weigh in heavily on these debates. These essays, moreover, supplemented existing *literary* projects in which Haslinger, Menasse, and Roth confronted the continued presence of the Austrian past much as the previous generation of Austrian authors had done.

In relaying the above I have been driving toward two related points. The first is that a heightened sensitivity among Austrian authors toward their country’s past, combined with a determination to turn that unacknowledged past into literary material, is characteristic of a stage in the history of Austrian literature in which I also locate Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke. (We might put this otherwise by saying that a feature of

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<sup>26</sup> Matthias Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National*, xi. Konzett’s valuable study, which I particularly draw on in chapter two, is important insofar as he explicitly reads these three authors for their politicized literary incursions in the public sphere, thus marking them as writers worth reading and discussing for more than just aesthetic and formalist reasons.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Menasse, *Das war Österreich: Gesammelte Essays zum Land ohne Eigenschaften*, ed. Eva Schörkhuber (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005) ; Gerhard Roth, *Das doppelköpfige Österreich: Essays, Polemiken, Interviews*, ed. Kristina Pfooser-Schewig (Fischer: Frankfurt a.M.: 1995) Josef Haslinger *Politik der Gefühle: Ein Essay über Österreich* (Frankfurt a.M., Fischer, 1987).

contemporary Austrian literature has been its blurring of literary and historical registers.) My second point is that, although historians such as Anton Pelinka, Gerhard Botz, Ernst Hanisch, and Oliver Rathkolb have made their own important contributions to the correcting of the historical record in postwar Austria, there remains a sense in which the severely unsettling truths of Austria's wartime past were first brought to the public's attention not by historians, but by writers who have been curating this task ever since. Indeed, as Botz himself said as much in 1994, singling out Thomas Bernhard as an author who had done more to provoke public engagement with the past than any historian.<sup>28</sup> More recently, Dagmar Lorenz, noting of Austrian authors that "their opinions are heard and taken seriously, and that they take part in shaping public opinions and politics," has argued that the intense level of political engagement is a phenomenon specific to German-language writers, one that an Anglo-American audience might find difficult to conceive.<sup>29</sup>

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If the 80s were the decade in which literary responses to Austria's Nazi past reached their maturity, so too was this the period in which Austrian authors

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<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Botz, "Krisen der österreichischen Zeitgeschichte," *Kontroversen um Österreichs Zeitgeschichte: Verdrängte Vergangenheit, Österreich-Identität, Waldheim und die Historiker*, ed. Gerhard Botz and Gerald Sprengnagel, (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1994), 62.

<sup>29</sup> Dagmar Lorenz, "The Struggle for a Civil Society and beyond: Austrian Writers and Intellectuals Confronting the Political Right," *New German Critique* 93 (2004), 27.

demonstrated a particular willingness to engage music in their texts. Casting a retrospective eye over Austrian literature of the decade, Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler noted for instance: “Es fällt zunächst einmal auf, daß die österreichische Literatur es mit der Musik hat, und zwar ganz innig.”<sup>30</sup> Although Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke are the three authors Schmidt-Dengler mentions in connection with this remark, he adds that he cannot properly explain the recent preoccupation with music that has manifested itself in their work. From the perspective of this dissertation, this emerging convergence may not be coincidental but rather symptomatic. As I will argue in these pages, it was the historical wound of Austria’s past, ever more apparent, that prompted Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke to engage music, as a privileged cultural form, particularly ferociously. If, in their works, there always lurks the promise that music could be recruited as a personal or public remedy, the exposed historical wound provokes out of them the recognition that music, as an privileged cultural form, is deeply entangled, even complicit, in postwar Austria’s troubled trajectory.

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By no means am I the first reader of contemporary Austrian literature to identify or examine its musical dimensions. On the contrary, scholars have increasingly

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<sup>30</sup> “It is immediately noticeable that Austrian literature is occupied with music, and intimately so,” Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, *Bruchlinien: Vorlesungen zur österreichischen Literatur 1945 bis 1990* (St. Pölten: Residenz, 2010), 450. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation from German to English are my own.

converted the face validity of this literature's "musicality" into full-blown investigations. If Thomas Bernhard has received most of the monographic attention, each of Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke are, by now, the subject of music-related essays, a good percentage of which appear in edited volumes likewise bearing musical titles.<sup>31</sup> These contributions almost always revolve around a single author; very seldom are multiple authors brought together, as I propose doing here, in a single, continuous narrative. More importantly, the secondary literature has not delivered any sustained attempt at locating what Bernhard, Jelinek, or Jonke have to say about music within the wider context of postwar Austria's historical trajectory. Instead, music is deemed important insofar as it provides a wellspring of aesthetic ideas or suggests structural possibilities that each of these authors then transpose into their literary narratives. It is

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<sup>31</sup> Scattered throughout the literature are numerous isolated contributions on music in Bernhard, Jelinek, or Jonke. These will be cited when necessary throughout the text. For now, I will mention monographs on music and Thomas Bernhard that have appeared in the last two decades, all published by Königshausen & Neumann in Würzburg. The oldest, from 1996, is Gudrun Kuhn's "*Ein philosophisch-musikalisch geschulter Sänger*". *Musikästhetische Überlegungen zur Prosa Thomas Bernhards*. Nearly a decade later, in 2005, Karl Solibakke published his comparative study on music in Thomas Bernhard and Ingeborg Bachmann: *Geformte Zeit: Musik als Diskurs und Struktur bei Bachmann und Bernhard*. This was followed a year later, namely in 2006, by Lisbeth Bloemsaat-Voerknecht's *Thomas Bernhard und die Musik: Themenkomplex mit drei Fallstudien und einen musikthematischen Register*. In the early 2000s two conference proceedings were published in Austria, the first *Die Musik, Das Leben und der Irrtum: Thomas Bernhard und die Musik*, was edited by Otto Kolleritsch. The second, edited by Roman Kopřiva and Jaroslav Kovář was published in 2003 and entitled *Kunst und Musik in der Literatur: Ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen in der österreichischen Literatur der Gegenwart* (Vienna: Praesens, 2003). It contains two essays on Jelinek and music. Appearing also in 2003 was a volume appearing in Graz and edited by Gerhard Melzer and Paul Pechmann: *Sprachmusik: Grenzgänge der Literatur* (Graz: Sonderzahl, 2003) five of its eleven chapters are dedicated to either Bernhard, Jelinek, or Jonke.

common, for instance, for scholars to ask after the “Musikverständnis” Bernhard, Jelinek or Jonke, that is the given way in which each author portrays music in his work as a self-contained aesthetic form. Often the ultimate goal of such accounts is comparative, describing the interrelationships that obtain in these authors’ work between music and language as meaning-making forms.<sup>32</sup>

The secondary literature has been particularly forceful in claiming, for example, that Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke construct their sentences in discernably musical ways. An argumentative spectrum is discernable here among critics, ranging as it does from offhand and unsubstantiated remarks attesting to the general musicality of a given author’s prose – Jelinek’s 2004 Nobel Prize citation, for example, begins by praising her “musical flow of voices and counter-voices”<sup>33</sup> – to sophisticated attempts at mapping musical forms onto their work.<sup>34</sup> To cite a recent instance of the latter, Gregor

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<sup>32</sup> Hence the subtitle, “ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen,”/“aesthetic interrelations” of the above-mentioned volume.

<sup>33</sup> "The Nobel Prize in Literature 2004". *Nobelprize.org*. Nobel Media AB 2013. Web. 12 Jun 2014. [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/2004/](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2004/)

<sup>34</sup> See Jonathan Long’s summary of previous attempts analyze Bernhard in terms of musical prose *The Novels of Thomas Bernhard: Form and its Function* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), 11-15. In her chapter on Jelinek, Pia Janke notes that it is hard to find “Untersuchungen von Jelineks sprachlichen Verfahren, die ohne den Hinweis auskommen, Jelineks Texte wären quasi-musikalischen Verfahren verpflichtet, sie wären als Sprachpartituren zu klassifizieren, die sich als ein kontrapunktisches Gewebe (ideologiehaltiger) Sprachpartikel konstituierten,” (“Examinations of Jelinek’s treatment of language that get by *without* referring to Jelinek’s texts as if they were indebted to quasi-musical processes, or as if they were classifiable as language scores which manifest themselves in a contrapuntal webbing of (ideology-laden) particles of language.” “Elfride Jelinek und die Musik. Versuch einer ersten Bestandsaufnahme,”) *Grenzgänge*, 190. For arguments concerning Jonke’s “musical prose,” see my fourth chapter.

Hens has argued that the significance of Bernhard's *Der Untergeher*, a novel I analyze in my first chapter, lies predominantly "in der erzählerischen Form der Strukturen der Musik."<sup>35</sup> Hens claims that the novel manifests a fugal structure, firstly because its three protagonists respond to each other fugally (both at the level of their personalities and in terms of their artistic biographies); and secondly because the text, according to Hens, allows itself to be divided into four sections which likewise exhibit fugue-like interactions. Significantly, Hens is guided by the premise that the thematic content of Bernhard's novel is subordinate to its polyphonic nature, declaring at one point that Bernhard's "uneconomical" way of conveying the spoken word would bore the reader were it not for its intrinsically musical nature.<sup>36</sup>

Critics who venture arguments such as this one can readily draw support from Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke themselves, each of whom are on record ascribing musical features to their own writing.<sup>37</sup> In a much-quoted remark from the 1980s, for instance,

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<sup>35</sup> "...in the narrative forms of the musical structures." Gregor Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste: Der Untergeher, Holzfällen, Alte Meister* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 1999), 18.

<sup>36</sup> Hens notes: "Es fehlt also die in natürlicher Sprache nötige Ökonomie des Textes, der den Leser dementsprechend unendlich langweilen müßte, wäre da nicht die musikalische Struktur, die die Wiederholungen motiviert." ("What's missing is the textual economy native to language; this would be endlessly boring to the reader were it not for the text's musical structure upon which the repetition is based.") *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>37</sup> In an essay on Jonke, Jelinek refers to her colleague as a "Musiker" or "Sprachkomponist" ("language composer). Jonke himself remarked in an interview that he instinctively draws on musical forms not, as Kling reports, "as a deliberately applied principle of composition but simply from being so saturated with musical structures that they emerge on their own with no set intent on his part." Quoted in Kling, "Gert Jonke," 26. Asked about the relation obtaining between music and language in her work, Jelinek



Bernhard reports as follows:

Was mich zum Schreiben treibt, ist ganz einfach die Lust am Spiel...Den Stoff im eigentlichen Sinn halte ich für ganz und gar sekundär, es genügt, aus dem zu schöpfen, was um uns ist...ich würde sagen, es ist eine Frage des Rhythmus und hat viel mit Musik zu tun. Ja, was ich schreibe, kann man nur verstehen, wenn man sich klarmacht, dass zuallererst die musikalische Komponente zählt und dass erst an zweiter Stelle das kommt, was ich erzähle. Wenn das erste einmal da ist, kann ich anfangen, Dinge und Ereignisse zu beschreiben. Das Problem liegt im *Wie*.<sup>38</sup>

Subordinating content to form, Bernhard directs our attention to the musical how of his prose (above all, its rhythmical character) rather than the musical what.<sup>39</sup> If Bernhard

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told Annette Doll “Alle musikalische Komponenten sind beim Schreiben für mich sehr wichtig.” “All musical components are very important for my writing.” Cited in Annette Doll, *Mythos, Natur und Geschichte bei Elfriede Jelinek: Eine Untersuchung ihrer literarischen Intentionen*. M&P: Stuttgart, 1994, 87. Doll quotes Jelinek describing her texts in a separate interview as “Sprachkompositionen,” 88.

<sup>38</sup> “What moves me to write is simply the pleasure I take from being playful...I consider the actual material to be completely secondary, it is sufficient to fashion something out of what surrounds us...I would say that it is a question of rhythm and has a lot to do with music. Yes, one can only understand what I write if one realizes that, what counts first and foremost are the musical components and that what I write is only a secondary concern. If this first thing is there I can begin to describe things and events. The problem lies in *how*.” *Von einer Katastrophe in die andere. 13 Gespräche mit Thomas Bernhard*, ed. Sepp Dreissinger (Weitra: Bibliothek der Provinz, 1992), 109.

<sup>39</sup> I perceive a readiness in the secondary literature to accept statements such as these at face value. Further, as I see it, that acceptance is part of a wider overreliance among critics on (auto)biographical aspects of Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke’s musical production. As Barthes has reminded us, the author does not precede the work but is born with it. (“the death of the author” 1968 in his *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen

speaks rather casually of drawing his material from “what surrounds us,” I propose an alternative line of argument according to which postwar Austrian society’s preoccupation with music is precisely that which forms a vital thread of the “around us” that found its way into the fabric of Bernhard’s work and the work of his two literary colleagues, Jelinek and Jonke.<sup>40</sup>

Many criticisms have been made of arguments advancing the case for a prose that is musically structured.<sup>41</sup> To the extent that the lexical meaning of words do not get

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Heath (Hill and Wang: New York, 1977), 142-8. In my view this can all too quickly lead to a situation whereby biographical appeals are used as a way of establishing an unwavering musicality or musical commitment in each author that is projected unproblematically onto their work.

<sup>40</sup> Writing against Bernhard I have elsewhere argued that the “problem” of music in his work also lies in the “what” of his musical occupation. I readily extend this argument to Jelinek and Jonke. See Simon Walsh, “Das Problem liegt auch im "Was". Thomas Bernhards "Alte Meister" im Spiegel des Diskurses von Nachkriegsösterreich als "Land der Musik," *Thomas Bernhard. Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2012), 93-114.

<sup>41</sup> In a review of Hens’ book, for example, Pfabigan commented “daß es... im Feld der Musikalität von Bernhards Sprache - mittlerweile eine Unzahl von miteinander konkurrierenden Erklärungen gibt, die in summa nur belegen, daß Bernhard offensichtlich bewußt mit musikalischen Formen spielte, die aber kein kohärentes Muster sichtbar machen und sich teilweise selbst aufheben.” (“As regards the literature on the musicality of Bernhard's language: by now there are an immense number of mutually contradicting explanations. Taken together they merely prove that Bernhard consciously played with musical forms, but these explanations don't permit any visible pattern to emerge and partially cancel each other out.") Gregor Hens: Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste,” *Literaturhaus Wien* [www.literaturhaus.at/index.php?id=3841](http://www.literaturhaus.at/index.php?id=3841) (accessed August 3, 2011) Elsewhere, Christa Gürtler speaks of “Gemeinplätze in der Beschreibung ihrer literarischen Verfahrensweisen als kompositorische Techniken.” (“...platitudes used to describe her literary method in terms of compositional technique.”) “Elfriede Jelinek und die Musikerinnen,” *Kunst und Musik in der Literatur: Ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen in der österreichischen Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Roman Kopriva and Jaroslav Kovar (Vienna: Praesens, 2005), 171. As far as the Jonke scholarship is concerned, Ulrich

in the way of the musical content they might otherwise wish to impart, it remains difficult to advance a case for the musicality of prose without lapsing into imprecise metaphor or generalized description. Instead of engaging this debate at length, I propose coming at the question of musical prose from a different angle, namely by suggesting that we recast these arguments as an interpretive bias that is symptomatic of the Land of Music Discourse. Viewed in this way, both the scholarly readiness to advance structural arguments about the musical characteristics of these authors' writing, together with the willingness of Bernhard, Jonke, and Jelinek to ascribe musical features to their writing, can be partially understood as a reflex response to postwar Austria's presumed musicality. Insofar as that is the case, the constant pursuit of these arguments in the secondary literature has distracted us from pursuing other questions when it comes to the problem of postwar Austrian literature's marked turn to music.

I have been describing specific scholarship on music in contemporary Austrian literature, above all in Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke. But note that these studies belong to the longer-shot of scholarship on music in German-language literature, and that that broader scholarship can, in turn, be located within the wider panorama of "Word and Music Studies," as the field calls itself. As a research stream Word and Music Studies can trace itself back at least as far as 1968, when Steven Paul Scher published his

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Schönherr, whom I cite in my fourth chapter, has cautioned strongly against overreach in making claims about Jonke's musical prose. For a more general account of the argumentative incommensurability of prose and music see Hans Eggebrecht, *Die Musik und das Schöne* (Munich: Piper, 1997), 19.

seminal *Verbal Music in German Literature*, and German-language literature has served as a major source for Word and Music Studies ever since. In recently casting his eye over the field, the Germanist Marc Weiner laments that it continues to provide insights that are “either descriptive or largely formal in nature.”<sup>42</sup> My claim about the circumscribed approach to music in Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke is one, then, whose import carries far beyond this narrow scholarship.

Marc Weiner makes the above claim in his recently reissued book *Undertones of Insurrection: Music, Politics, and the Social Sphere in the Modern German Narrative*. Concerned with the narrative strategies employed in sophisticated German-language literature of the first half of the twentieth century (texts examined include *Steppenwolf* and *Doktor Faustus*), Weiner argues that the musical references in this literature evoke sociopolitical issues through a number of narrative devices and thus function “as part of the modernist narrative’s strategic makeup.”<sup>43</sup> To cite one pertinent example, the

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<sup>42</sup> Weiner writes: “Unfortunately, this state of affairs continued well past the initial publication of this book in 1993, as even the most cursory examination of studies since then makes clear. In other words, there remains a dearth of investigations of music in German, Swiss, and Austrian literature that take into consideration the social and ideological forces involved in the generation and the reception of the arts, both individually and when they meet.” Moreover, in casting his eye over the book series that, since 1997, has served as the central organ of the field, Weiner diagnoses an absence of title formulations indicating “a concern for those dimensions of inquiry that go beyond the positivistic, the biographical, the descriptively historical, and the New Critical. Hence, the series carries titles such as *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field* (1999); *Word and Music Studies: Essays on Literature and Music* (1967-2004), and “not, say, *Word, Music, and Culture*, or *Word, Music, and Politics*, or *Word, Music, and the Ideology of Form...*” Weiner, *Undertones of Insurrection: Music and Cultural Politics in the Modern German Narrative* (New Brunswick, N.J.; Transaction, 2009), xii.

<sup>43</sup> Marc Weiner, “Introduction to the Transaction Edition,” xii.

description by Schnitzler in *Der Weg ins Freie* of his protagonist, Georg von Wergenthin, attending a Viennese concert of *Tristan und Isolde*, is judged by Weiner to be replete in covert (hence “sophisticated”) references to contemporaneous sociopolitical forces such as “anti-Semitism, Zionism, [and] pan-Germanism,” all of which are communicated to us through “the narrated monologue’s topical subtext.” Thus music’s ability to function as what Weiner calls a “social sign.”<sup>44</sup>

In his willingness to associate literary portrayals of music with such issues as democracy, nationalism, and gender identity, Weiner is an instructive guide. However, the cultural background (defined no more precisely than “societies of German modernism”) against which he works is diffuse, ranging as it does from fin-de-siècle Austria to immediate postwar Germany. This enables Weiner to examine an intriguing spread of early twentieth-century musical-literary interactions, but lacks the kind of focus I impart on my project by reading postwar Austrian literature’s encounters with music against the specific, localized problematic of postwar Austrian national identity and the past.

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In a newly-written preface to his book, Weiner once again allies his methodological approach with the trajectory of contemporary musicology. As before,

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<sup>44</sup> *Undertones of Insurrection*, 2. The Schnitzler passage is conferred exemplary status in Weiner’s study. Placing it at the beginning of his introduction, Weiner uses the passage to explain his approach to music in literature, and also distinguishes it from other literary examples (which he is consequently not interested in) in which music is simply reflected upon without any form of narrative subterfuge.

though, he remains content to pay his respects in passing, and there is little in his study in the way of direct engagement with current musicological thought. The current study styles itself differently, since it identifies in contemporary musicology a conceptual idiom that can be made very productive for an explicitly social investigation into the role of music in postwar Austrian literature. Consequently, I will devote some pages here to briefly outlining the trajectory of recent musicology. Its chief achievement in the past few decades has been to open up music as an object of inquiry, and it has achieved this by applying significant pressure to the concept of music itself.

Articulating a wide-ranging feminist musicology in her 1991 book *Feminine Endings* – a key text for the emergence of what has come to be known as “new musicology” – Susan McClary saw herself compelled to admit: “I am no longer sure what MUSIC is.” She reached this conclusion after having judged music capable of serving “as a public forum within which various models of gender organization (along with many other aspects of social life) are asserted, adopted, contested and negotiated.”<sup>45</sup> Repeating McClary’s productive admission of doubt, Phillip Bohlman soon after criticized musicology for having “essentialized” its object,<sup>46</sup> that is of constructing music as if

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<sup>45</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings* McClary articulates a wide-ranging feminist music criticism which professes to examine not only the neglect of women as producers of music, but also the construction of music or music histories as if they had nothing to do with gender or with issues of sexuality. See my second chapter – on Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin* – for an attempt to use some of the tools of a feminist musicology for reading literary constructions of music.

<sup>46</sup> At one point Bohlman says “The title of the present article is meant to decenter, to make us wonder, like Susan McClary, if we know what MUSIC is anymore. “Musicology as a Political Act.” *The Journal of Musicology* 11 (Autumn 1993), 418.

were unproblematically something “out there” whose “metaphysical presence and ontological reality” the “singularity of its name” assures.<sup>47</sup> Bohlman went on to describe musicology’s traditional preoccupation with notation and analysis as two common essentializing “modalities” which had had the effect of containing music, of limiting both the type of questions that can be asked of music and who can ask them. This criticism speaks to the story that is often told of postwar Anglo-American musicology as a highly formalist enterprise. Partly shaped by historical circumstances, musicologists were highly sensitized to the task of isolating “aesthetic and logical discourses from ideology” and were inclined to view musicology as a “mode of mathematics.”<sup>48</sup>

We might note here that the notion of an exclusive musical autonomy still bubbles away within the field of Word and Music Studies (which, by definition,

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<sup>47</sup> Philip Bohlman, “Musicology as a Political Act.” *The Journal of Musicology* 11 (Autumn 1993), 419-20.

<sup>48</sup> As Michael Steinberg additionally reminds us, this disciplinary bias was shaped by musicology’s wartime history. A large number of postwar American musicologists had been forced to flee Hitler’s Germany, in which musicology flourished as a practice dedicated to pressing music into service of Nazi ideology. *Listening to Reason: Culture, Subjectivity, and Nineteenth-Century Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2. On this topic, see Pamela Potter’s study *Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler’s Reich*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998. The musicological debates I am discussing above (and which have lost some of the intensity they engendered in the nineties) have often been framed around the concept of musical *autonomy*, the idea that music has no other content other than music. To clarify, this study does not dispute the capacity of music to detach itself from the world and operate in a way that seems to point radically to itself. Nor do I dispute that musical analysis can function as a powerful and sophisticated tool. What it *does* dispute is that once one has described music’s autonomous side and conducted musical analysis that one has therefore reached the end of what one can possibly say about music.

includes the secondary literature on music in postwar Austrian literature). As I have tried to show above, the field continues to treat music as a closed albeit aesthetically transferable form that has little to do with social and cultural phenomena, therefore articulating a methodological position that is out of step with contemporary musicology. For following interventions such as McClary's, more and more musicologists have come to appreciate that (to use a phrase from Edward Said) "the study of music can be more, and not less, interesting if we situate music as taking place, so to speak, in a social and cultural setting."<sup>49</sup>

Jane Fulcher has delivered one of the most recent and most cogent statements on the current trajectory of new musicology. In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, a volume appearing under her editorship, Fulcher identifies and describes an emergent research tradition, practiced by musicologists and historians alike, that is effectively a synthesis of a "new cultural history" and a "new musicology." As Fulcher sees it, the theoretical voice around which the new cultural history of music arranges itself is not the ubiquitous Theodor Adorno but rather Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>50</sup> Tracing an intellectual line from Clifford Geertz to Michel Foucault,

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<sup>49</sup> Edward Said, *Musical Elaborations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), xvi.

<sup>50</sup> If Fulcher is right to remind us of the importance of Bourdieu for current musical-historical thought, I nevertheless find her too dismissive of Adorno. Adorno's value for the present study would remain high had he not written a word about music. Not alone does Adorno's withering critique of late modernity provide – as I hope to show – critical grist for the literary mill of my chosen authors. He also helped define the argumentative coordinates of the academic and political debates that began to emerge in 1950s in Germany concerning "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" or coming to terms with the (Nazi) past. As it turns out, however, roughly half of Adorno's massive oeuvre



Fulcher arrives at Bourdieu's abiding concern with "how social power is insinuated in symbols and the symbolic responses this elicits." Under Bourdieu's influence "historians and musicologists," says Fulcher, "are now asking similar kinds of questions about past cultures and employing a new synthesis of methodologies."<sup>51</sup> Those practicing a new cultural history of music – the volume contains contributions, among others, by Richard Leppert, Michael Steinberg, and Fulcher herself – are asking questions about musical practice and performance, the larger cultural and political contexts of listening; music and alterity, and music as it manifests itself in public meanings, experiences and memories. And they are approaching these questions via

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explicitly concerned music. Moreover – and here is the rub – his positions on music were inextricably linked to his wider cultural critique. Rose Subotnik has drawn our attention to Adorno's constant, if constantly unacknowledged and undervalued, influence on new musicology's trajectory. "Adorno and the New Musicology." Nigel Gibson & Andrew Rubin (Ed.) *Adorno: A Critical Reader*. Malden: MT, 2002: 234-255. Richard Leppert's annotated edition of Adorno's essays on music provides an excellent starting point for Adorno's musical thought. See *Essays on Music: Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. R. D. Leppert, trans. S. H. Gillespie et al.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Fulcher, "Introduction: Defining the New Cultural History of Music, Its Origins, Methodologies, and Lines of Inquiry," *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music*, ed. Jane Fulcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 9. Fulcher's own account of French musical culture of the 1920s is a good example of the Bourdieu-inflected brand of historical musicology she advocates, one committed to examining music as a "cultural form that communicates diverse kinds of discourses, including ideology or political rhetoric..."Ibid., 10. More specifically, drawing upon Bourdieu's analytic prism of symbolic violence and contestation, Fulcher writes elsewhere about the "socially emblematic moment" of Gabriel Faure's funeral, which was held in 1924, a time of profound social uncertainty and political discontent in France. Fulcher argues that the funeral constituted both a religious and a national celebration whose aim it was to "thwart further symbolic collapse and to shore up existing symbols." "Symbolic Domination and Contestation in French Music: Shifting the Paradigm from Adorno to Bourdieu," *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 316.

topics relating to the constructions of the body, gender, sexuality, and race; subjectivity and the shaping of the self in society; nationalism, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism; and popular and elite cultural intersections or exchanges

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It seems to me that Fulcher slightly overstates the novelty value of musicologists and cultural historians coming together to work on project of mutual interest. For instance, in the last decade or so scholars such as Celia Applegate, Pamela Potter, Vanessa Agnew and Barbara Eichner have persuasively demonstrated the instrumentality of musical discourses and practices for wider and ongoing discussions, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, about how to define Germany and what it meant to be German.<sup>52</sup> In the introduction to their co-edited volume *Music and German National Identity*, for example, Applegate and Potter describe how, at roughly the turn

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<sup>52</sup> See Celia Applegate, "What is German Music? Reflections on the Role of Art in the Creation of a Nation," *German Studies Review* 15 (Winter 1992): 21-32; "How German is it?" Nationalism and the Origins of Serious Music in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany" *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music* 21 (Spring 1998): 274-296; Pamela Potter, *The Most German of the Arts: Musicology and Society from the Weimar Republic to the End of Hitler's Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, ed., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: National and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2005); Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Barbara Eichner, *History in Mighty Sounds: Musical Constructions of German National Identity, 1848-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2012). For wider, European, perspectives see Philip V. Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).

of the nineteenth century, musical activity became a kind of binding agent in the face of political fragmentation. Although composers such as Mendelssohn and Wagner came to possess a heightened sense of the importance of music for the national question, the public promotion of music throughout this century was largely entrusted to scholars, critics, educators, and musicologists, all of whom understood that their success depended upon emphasizing the affinity between the words “German” and “music.”<sup>53</sup> Agnew has more recently traced this narrative backwards, as it were, to the 1770s. Via her account of Charles Burney’s musical travels through the German-speaking lands (a narrative she brings into conversation with British colonial encounters with musical practice in the South Pacific), Agnew shows that a privileging of German music over competing national styles was a project that was already well underway in the eighteenth century. Her transnational account brings sharply into focus what Potter and Applegate also identify in the context of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, namely the ability of music to attach itself to a “discourse of alterity”<sup>54</sup> that is used to define and delimit, in short to produce musical Others. If the historical idea of Germans as a “people of music” provided a potent framing device within nationalist debates during this period, it is interesting to note that the above scholars are yet to make this configuration productive for an examination of musical-national imaginaries in postwar

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<sup>53</sup> Though the decisive interventions were made by non-composers such as Rochlitz and Forkel (who, in his Bach biography of 1802, was the first to argue for a specifically German music) nineteenth-century composers, above all Mendelssohn and Wagner, also possessed a heightened sense of the indispensability of music for the national question.

<sup>54</sup> Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus*, 165.

Austria, and that this possibility has otherwise only been realized patchily.<sup>55</sup>

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What are the implications of these new musicological inquiries for the present study? Taking advantage of the productive doubt expressed by McClary and others about the constitution of musical objects, we might join Christopher Small in asserting that “Music is not a thing, but an activity, something that people do.” Transferred to the concerns of the present inquiry, we can then expand Small’s definition of musical activity as the “entire set of relationships that constitute a performance”<sup>56</sup> such that we

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<sup>55</sup> To my knowledge a book-length study has yet to be published on the topic of music and postwar Austrian identity. For other sources that touch on this topic, see: Cornelia Szabó-Knotik, “Selbstinszenierung und Handelsbilanz. Die (Re)Konstruktion Österreichs nach 1945 mittels Musik,” *Musik-Wissenschaft an ihren Grenzen. Manfred Angerer zum 50. Geburtstag*, ed. Dominik Schweiger, Michael Staudinger, and Nikolaus Urbanek (Frankfurt/Berlin: Peter Lang, 2004), 355-82. Gert Kerschbaumer and Karl Müller. *Begnadet für das Schöne: Der rot-weiß-rote Kulturkampf gegen die Moderne* (Salzburg: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1992); Claudia Maurer Zenck, ““In Which Camp is Austria?” The Fight Against the Destruction of the New Music,” *Music and Nazism. Art under Tyranny, 1933–1945* (Laaber: Laaber, 2003), 241–257; Thomas Eickhoff, ““Mit Sozialismus und Sachertorte...” – Entnazifizierung und musikpolitische Verhaltensmuster nach 1945 in Österreich,” *Deutsche Leitkultur Musik? Zur Musikgeschichte nach dem Holocaust*, ed. Albrecht Riethmüller (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 85-101.

<sup>56</sup> Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998. In his introduction Small declares that there “is no such thing as music,” nothing further that music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing “music” is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely.” For Small, these “entire set of relationships” include not only performing, but also composing, listening and even, under circumstances, other forms of participation such as collecting tickets at

train ourselves to read Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke as authors who also “do music.” And, as I argue in this dissertation, they do music by constructing versions of postwar Austria as the land of music, and by furnishing characters and narrators who themselves “do music” by writing, speaking, performing, listening and thinking musical Austria into existence. Having set our aim toward examining music in contemporary Austrian literature through the lens of contemporary musicology, we should not be surprised, though, if Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke’s collective account starts to reflect back upon musicological thought. What I will try to bring out in what follows, then, are the ways in which the literary texts I examine constitute “musicological” sources – in the sense, also, of furnishing a partial account of the shaping of postwar Austrian identity through musical investments. On this basis it should be possible to show contemporary Austrian literature reflecting, supplementing, perhaps even anticipating what new musicology has been telling us about music as a privileged point of access into wider cultural debates.<sup>57</sup> We can broaden this by entertaining the question about whether it might be possible to use Bernhard’s, Jelinek’s and Jonke’s musical engagements as a way of supplementing or expanding our understanding of literary modernism? That is a question we will come back to at the end of the study.

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the door of a concert venue. Christopher Small, *Musicking: The Meaning of Performing and Listening* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 2.

<sup>57</sup> It might be suggested that the above claim too readily elides literary modes into musicological ones. Aren’t literary registers far more “subjective” than musicological ones? To this I answer that it is precisely literature’s weakness as musicology so conceived that could turn out to be its greatest strength.

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In Chapter Two, “‘Alles Hören:’ Postwar Austria’s Musical Monuments in Thomas Bernhard’s Late Work, I offer a reading of music and memory in Thomas Bernhard’s *Vor dem Ruhestand* (1979), *Der Untergeher* (1983) and *Heldenplatz* (1989), thereby contributing to recent scholarship on German and Jewish memory that has argued on behalf of a turn away from the visual toward the acoustic. I argue that in his late work Thomas Bernhard depicts musical sound as capable of carrying and reinforcing the memory of Austria’s wartime past. If the effect music has on Bernhard’s listeners depends very much on who is doing the listening, I suggest that in many cases music is perceived as a monument to Austria’s National Socialist past. On the one hand, Bernhard’s musical monuments make themselves available in these three works as a resource for postwar Austrians secretly wishing to mourn, celebrate and potentially resuscitate the past “achievements” of National Socialism. If this is a form of monumentalizing that takes place in the public sphere, Bernhard, I argue, allows a contrasting musical monument to emerge in the private sphere, and does so by inserting Jewish characters into his narratives who effectively confront the Land of Music with their own musical monuments.

In chapter three, “‘Gebote, Vernetzungen, Vorschriften’”: Music, Gender, and Austria in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspieler* ” I problematize Jelinek’s literary portrayal of music. Contrary to the existing literature, which has tended to explain away

Jelinek's musical preoccupation as biographically motivated and therefore incidental to her other concerns, I show how music forms the very vehicle for the interrogation of gender and sexuality the novel delivers. More specifically, I argue that Jelinek constructs Vienna as an aggressive city of music beholden to an abstract and metaphysical musical conception. According to this conception, which reveals itself in the way that music in the novel is spoken about and otherwise perceived, music is a pure and metaphysical product of the mind. Jelinek deconstructs this heavily gendered conception of music, demonstrating its latent fascist qualities and revealing its catastrophic effect on the eponymous pianist Erika Kohut.

My fourth chapter, "Kein Land der Neuen Musik: Gert Jonke and Postwar Austria's Sounds and Silences," is an examination of Gert Jonke's encounter with New Music. Jonke has frequently been glossed as a hermetic author, however I argue that his account of New Music reveals a hitherto unobserved engagement with postwar Austria's past. Jonke, in two of his prose essays from *Stoffgewitter* (1996), articulates a critique of musical Austria by contrasting its loud and repetitious musical pronouncements with its neglect of New Music. For Jonke, this is much more than a matter of taste. If postwar Austria's musical excesses enabled an unreflective mode of thinking, then New Music, according to the weighting of Jonke's account of its aesthetic, provided the tools for cutting through postwar Austria's sonic wall and articulating a silent space in and through which the kind of historical reflection that did not take place in postwar Austria might have occurred.

The concluding chapter takes as its starting point Max Paddison's observation

about Adorno's musicological approach, namely that there was "no resolution of the tension, in Adorno, between autonomous works and the social relations of their production and reception." If the thrust of my inquiry has been directed toward identifying and examining the circulation of music in postwar Austrian literature as a historically and culturally mediated form, I step back to consider here the extent to which the above tension remains present in the musical portrayal of Bernhard, Jelinek, and Jonke. I will argue that, although they were eager to engage music as an absolute form, one that held out promise as a redemptive and rehabilitating force in the face of postwar Austria's recent history, they ultimately recognized that the dimensions of that history severely undermined the chances of success for such a project.



## Chapter Two

### “Alles Hören:” Postwar Austria’s Musical Monuments in Thomas Bernhard’s Late Work

In 2010 the *Österreichisches Theatermuseum* staged an exhibition around the theme “Thomas Bernhard und das Theater.”<sup>1</sup> Visitors to the room dedicated to those of Bernhard’s plays associated with Vienna were at once confronted with an assemblage of items relating to *Heldenplatz*, Bernhard’s final work. Among them was a sealed glass booth. Stepping into the booth, the visitor was promptly assailed by the sounds of a screaming mass of people. This was an acoustic likeness of the estimated 100,000 people gathering in 1938 at Heldenplatz, a large square in front of Vienna’s Hofburg Palace, to greet Hitler along with the news he brought of Austria’s smooth assimilation into Nazi Germany. In Bernhard’s play, written on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this event, the “Massengeschrei” (screams of the crowds) torments Hedwig Schuster, wife of the recently deceased Josef Schuster, prompting her to collapse at the dinner table in the play’s final moments. The other characters do not hear the stuff of her nightmarish hallucinations. The audience, however, is subject to the screams on stage in the final act.

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<sup>1</sup> See also the companion book to the exhibition: “*Österreich selbst ist nichts als eine Bühne*”: *Thomas Bernhard und das Theater*,” ed. Manfred Mittermayer and Martin Huber (Vienna: Brandstätter/Österreichisches Theatermuseum, 2009).

The play's narrative is therefore framed by a prominent and palpable acoustic episode that permits the audience to join Frau Schuster in literally hearing the Third Reich. We are confronted with a version of what Leslie Morris, in a pivotal essay, has called the "sound of memory." Morris' argument, concerned as it is with post-Shoah German and Jewish memory, unfolds within the space of "postmemory," a concept Marianne Hirsch describes as defining the "relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up."<sup>2</sup> Within these parameters, Morris advocates a concentrated turn to the *acoustic* as a way of complementing the preoccupation with the *visual* and with the *written* word that is manifested in literary and critical studies of German and Jewish memory. As Morris puts it:

Conceptualizing the circulation of memory that we now designate as "postmemory" in acoustic terms demands a rethinking of the place of sound within cultural memory, which still remains largely unexplored in the key critical and literary studies that explore German and Jewish memory, eclipsed by the primacy of the visual.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This quote appears on Marianne Hirsch's postmemory website: <http://www.postmemory.net/> (accessed September 2, 2014), which she uses to promote the three books in which she has examined and elucidated her concept. See, for example *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Morris, "The Sound of Memory." *German Quarterly* 74.4 (2002), 369. We might regard her essay as a first approach at how sound figures into Holocaust remembrance. Morris frames her essay around the following questions: "Can we speak

Following Morris' lead on a specific turn to the acoustic in relation to German and Jewish memory, this chapter offers a reading of sound and (National Socialist) memory in Thomas Bernhard's work. Cast in terms congenial to Morris' inquiry, we might say that *Heldenplatz*'s screaming masses announce sound as a vehicle for a cultural (post-)memory rooted in Austria's collective postwar experience. However, if the above example from *Heldenplatz* would have us believe that Bernhard is interested foremost in the relationship between Austrian memory and generic sounds, I aim to show that the weight of his sound inquiry ultimately falls elsewhere. Bernhard, I argue, demonstrates the continuity of postwar Austria's wartime past through what we might call the "sound of music." If Morris' interest is in discreet iconic sounds in postwar Germany, part of my argument here is that music, as Bernhard portrays it acts in postwar Austria not as a purely abstract phenomenon amputated from the outside world, but rather as a highly pervasive and privileged *sound* modality, one capable of both carrying and reinforcing the disconcerting memory of Austria's National Socialist past. The additional punning reference to the American musical cum smash-hit Hollywood film *The Sound of Music* is, of course, intentional. By having the noble von Trapp

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of iconic sounds as we do of iconic images? Can an exploration of sound help demarcate the lines that shape and define German and Jewish memory? Can we speak of a site of memory as the sound of memory? If the visual sites of memory...in Germany today suggest the enormous difficulties inherent in the project of remembrance...into what terrain does an exploration of the sound of memory lead us? Finally, how can a turn to the aural help us rethink the trope of the unspeakability of the Holocaust?" (368) It is this last question which most occupies Morris here. Combining reflection on the work of Friedrich Kittler and Giorgio Agamben, Morris looks for ways of rethinking the well-worn trope of the "unspeakability" of the Holocaust, suggesting instead that unspeakability might be present in the indeterminate tones contained in futile attempts to utter the Holocaust.

family sing their way to freedom across the Swiss Alps after the Nazis invaded Austria, Robert Wise's 1965 film is striking for forcefully (and to many viewers, entirely persuasively) fusing the idea of Austria as an unspoiled, benevolent and above all musical land with the myth of Austria as first victim.<sup>4</sup>

I focus my reading of music, memory and the Nazi past in Bernhard through the concept of the monument, more specifically the *musical monument*. I borrow the term from the musicologist Alexander Rehding, who has recently articulated a sustained examination of musical monuments in nineteenth-century Germany. Rehding builds his conceptual apparatus upon previous work by Andreas Huyssen, who, writing principally about late 90s Berlin, draws an important distinction between two kinds of monuments: those that reveal themselves through brute size and force, and those that function as commemorative events.<sup>5</sup> If the first way of conceiving monuments speaks to an intuitive, though naive understanding about monumentality most of us already possess, the commemorative monument signals a kind of memory-driven "anti-monumentality" much in vogue in recent years in Germany. Taking advantage of the argumentative opening Huyssen provides for writing about monuments other than familiar ones of built space, Rehding likewise questions the assumption that monuments – in this case

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<sup>4</sup> Such was its misrepresentation of history that Jacquelin Vansant has delcained the film as "one of the crassest examples of Austria's "denazification" in American cinema." "Robert Wise's *The Sound of Music* and the Denazification of Austria in American Cinema." *From World War to Waldheim: Culture and Politics in Austria and the United States*, ed. David F. Good and Ruth Wodak (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 166.

<sup>5</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Monumental Seduction." *New German Critique* 69 (1996): 181-200.

musical monuments – are always unwelcome. Rehding’s position, as he articulates it in the introduction to his study, is that that monumentality in music is not just a matter of musical effects but also about what musical monuments “stand for and how they are used.”<sup>6</sup> If this insight leads him to reaffirm the direct aesthetic appeal and native moral authority that musical monuments have often exerted on mass audiences, Rehding is nevertheless careful not to assume that monumental music must, by definition, express itself through sheer size or loudness. Rehding, then, invokes the commemorative dimension of monuments so productively identified by Huyssen, noting that the musical monument is also capable of forming an “object of commemoration” linking “the present with the perpetual past.”<sup>7</sup>

Huyssen and Rehding delineate an interpretative framework that can fruitfully be applied to Bernhard’s treatment of music and the Nazi past. In fact, writing from the present, Rehding makes it clear that he is approaching Germany’s past musical monuments through the experiential filter of National Socialism, which, as he puts it, has left its “indelible mark on the notion of monumentality.”<sup>8</sup> If he is thinking principally of the crude and aggressive monumentality so central to the Nazi aesthetic, Huyssen shows that it is precisely the monumental catastrophe of National Socialism that Germany’s recent spate of memory-driven commemorative monuments are responding to.

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander Rehding, *Music and Monumentality: Commemoration and Wonderment in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Huyssen, “Monumental Seduction,” 183.

<sup>8</sup> Rehding, *Music and Monumentality*, 14

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Tapping into the multiple, sometimes contradictory valences they are capable of registering, Bernhard, I argue in what follows, constructs numerous musical monuments on his late literary landscape. These monuments rise up to confront postwar Austrians with their country's National Socialist past. His initial move, achieved most succinctly in his 1978 play *Vor dem Ruhestand*, is to provoke his audience into hearing musical sound as an apparently straightforward and collective monument to Nazism. Although we first perceive this musical monument as a melancholy "nachtönende" or after-sounding celebration of the fascist past, we later come to hear it as a more covert "vortönende" or forward-sounding reanimation of society's latent Nazi sympathies. These essentially affirmative musical monuments to Nazism also circulate in Bernhard's 1983 novel *Der Untergeher* and in his final play *Heldenplatz* – but this time the context is explicitly Austrian. Moreover, Bernhard complicates his narrative by allowing competing musical monuments to emerge, monuments that are under the curation of Bernhard's overlooked Jewish characters.

My focus is therefore on the author's *late* period. As Matthias Konzett reminds us, it was not until Bernhard's later work (namely from the early 80s onward, on the other side of his autobiographical prose) that he was able to fully position his characters as agents in postwar society.<sup>9</sup> In doing so, Bernhard, as George Steiner puts it,

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<sup>9</sup> Specifically, Konzett remarks that Bernhard was able in his late work to overcome the "resignation, isolation and nihilism" afflicting his earlier characters and concretely position them as "agents in society and its public sphere." *The Rhetoric of National*

succeeded in extending the “nocturnal, coldly historical vision” of his earlier works into “the high reaches of modern culture,”<sup>10</sup> producing a hard-edged critique of Austria as a self-described “Kulturation.” Konzett, however, is content to keep his lens adjusted to the long shot of “high culture” or “the Arts,”<sup>11</sup> and does so despite the fact that many – if not most – of the instances of cultural reflection he cites in Bernhard are musical. My position in what follows is that Bernhard, despite invoking many kinds of artistic disciplines in his late work, exhibits a telling preoccupation with specifically *musical* objects.

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As Jeanette Malkin has reminded us, the “past is always present in a Bernhardian play or novel. It is frozen as an indelible trace into the landscape, situations, and behavior of his characters.”<sup>12</sup> If that past is typically conveyed by

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*Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek* (Rochester, NY: Camden House), 29.

<sup>10</sup> George Steiner, “Black Danube”, *The New Yorker* (July 21, 1986), 92.

<sup>11</sup> More specifically, Konzett argues that Bernhard came to insert successfully his own public voice as a disruptive element into Austria’s cultural public sphere. In doing so, he was able to diagnose the “coercive climate of historical amnesia and national self-canonization” prevailing “from within Austria’s cultural institutions.” *The Rhetoric of National Dissent*, xi. In complimentary fashion, Konzett later notes that Bernhard exposed “society’s dubious expressions of cultural narcissism, amnesia and revisionism.” (26)

<sup>12</sup> Jeanette Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 185. My use of Malkin as an interlocutor in the

Bernhard's monologue-producing characters in a circular, contradictory, and hyperbolic idiom of high pessimism, that pessimism is usually anchored, as she also reminds us, in a concrete historical experience that renders "specific and provocative what would otherwise be parabolic and abstract."<sup>13</sup> This is as true for Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* as it is for his earlier play *Vor dem Ruhestand*, grouped together by Malkin as overtly political memory-plays. Bernhard wrote *Vor dem Ruhestand* in response to a scandal involving the uncovered Nazi past of the conservative Minister President of Baden-Württemberg, Hans Karl Filbinger.<sup>14</sup> The main character of the play is Rudolf Höller, a retiring chief justice and former assistant commander of a Nazi concentration camp. He lives with his two sisters in a house that has belonged to the family for generations. The three of them gather for their annual celebration of the birthday of Heinrich Himmler, former head of the Gestapo. As is his custom on this day, Höller will dress in his SS uniform and sleep with his older sister Vera, who shares his political persuasions. Hanging over the current celebration is the question of whether Höller will, as he did one year prior, force his younger sister Clara (a revolutionary who was left paraplegic by an American

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first part of this chapter reflects not just the high quality of her argument, but also the circumstance that she is one of very few scholars who has written at length about *Vor dem Ruhestand*, which remains one of Bernhard's lesser-known works.

<sup>13</sup> Malkin, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama*, 185.

<sup>14</sup> In 1978 Filbinger reluctantly resigned from his position after it became known that he had indiscriminately inflicted death sentences for trivial offences while working as a naval judge in Nazi Germany. Bernhard wrote the play for his friend Claus Peymann, who was forced to resign from his position as director of the Stuttgart State Theater after having publically criticized Filbinger.



bombing raid at war's end) to shave her head and don the striped uniform of a concentration camp inmate.

Vera and Rudolf are both accomplished musicians (she on the piano, he on the violin) who repeatedly attest to the centrality of music in their lives: "ohne Musik ist das Leben ja gar nicht vorstellbar."<sup>15</sup> says Vera at one point, varying a famous saying of Nietzsche's. The present celebration, which doubles as a retirement party for Rudolf, is underscored by music from beginning to end. At Rudolf's bidding, Vera sits down at the piano in the first act to divert him with pieces by Mozart and Beethoven.<sup>16</sup> In the second act, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the so-called "Schicksalssymphonie" takes center stage. Vera plays passages from the piece on a record player while she and her brother are at the dinner table. And when Rudolf suffers an apparent heart attack at play's end, his sister instinctively returns to the machine to once again set the symphony spinning. It sounds as a valedictory in the background while her brother perishes. Beethoven's Fifth, the so-called "symphony of destiny" seems a fitting choice for the siblings, if only because the Nazis greatly approved of the piece and were keen to place it on concert programs. In the 30s the piece was heralded by Arnold Schering, a German

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<sup>15</sup> "Life would be unimaginable without music." Thomas Bernhard, *Vor dem Ruhestand: Eine Komödie von deutscher Seele* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), 23. All subsequent quotations are taken from this text and will be made in the main body.

<sup>16</sup> The secondary literature on Bernhard and music has shown little interest in making analytically fruitful Bernhard's references to specific composers or pieces, preferring to view such references as more or less arbitrary manifestations of Bernhard's underlying musical impulse. The position I am taking in this chapter is that, although Bernhard does tend to disperse musical references with abandon, it is nevertheless often possible to arrange these references into something meaningful and theoretically productive.

musicologist, as a “Symphonie der nationalen Erhebung,” or symphony of national exaltation, in which one could recognize a “Bild des Existenzkampfes eines Volkes, das einen Führer sucht und endlich findet.”<sup>17</sup>

Bernhard supplies supplementary details to drive home the status of the symphony as a musical calling card of the Nazis. Toward the end of act three, Rudolf and Vera are leafing through their Nazi photo album when they come across a photo of an “Akadamiekonzert” they attended during the Nazi years. As Vera recalls, Beethoven’s Fifth was being performed. They see themselves in the front row and they also spot Elley Ney, the famous German pianist who was also known to be an enthusiastic Nazi. Little else is said of the photo, but the moment of recollection is a grating one, since it comes directly on the heels of a photo of the Auschwitz concentration camp, which itself leads to a brief conversation in which Rudolf casually cites Adolf Eichmann’s estimate of 2.5 million Jewish deaths at the camp.

Commenting on the Stuttgart premiere of the play, a production by Bernhard’s favored director Claus Peymann, the author and literary critic Hellmuth Karasek expresses his displeasure at what he sees as the portrayal of serious music as a de facto Nazi phenomenon: “Im Theater hat es den Anschein, als sei E-Musik schon allein ein

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<sup>17</sup> “...the likeness of an existential battle of a people who seek and then finally find a führer.” Arnold Schering, “Zur Sinnbedeutung der 4. und 5. Symphonie,” *Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 16 (1934), 56. For an account of the National Socialist appropriation of Beethoven see Heribert Schröder, “Beethoven im Dritten Reich. Eine Materialsammlung,” *Beethoven und die Nachwelt. Materialien zur Wirkungsgeschichte Beethovens*, ed. Helmut Loos (Bonn: Carus Verlag, 1986), 187-221.

ebenso sicheres Parteiabzeichen für unverbesserliche Nazis wie das Hakenkreuz.”<sup>18</sup>

Shifting responsibility for the contamination of music from Bernhard’s text to Penman’s production, Karasek writes this sentence, which he prominently sets off as the review’s closing paragraph, as it were self-evidently *not* the case that music might occupy the same symbolic universe as the swastika. I submit, however, that the production’s “Nazifying” of music is entirely faithful to Bernhard’s ambition as well as to the crucial cultural role played by music in the Nazi era.<sup>19</sup> Rudolf and Vera recall, remember, and commemorate National Socialist “achievements” of the past not in spite of, or even incidentally to, but rather *through* music. The record, the piano, and the concert photos

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<sup>18</sup> “In the theater it appeared to be the case that serious music was, by itself, as much a Nazi emblem as was the swastika.” Hellmuth Karasek, “Aus glücklichen SS-Tagen: Thomas Bernhards “Vor dem Ruhestand“ in Stuttgart,” *Der Spiegel* (27, 1979), 154-155.

<sup>19</sup> Music served the Nazi regime as an indispensable cultural resource. They exploited the long-cultivated link between German national identity, imputing cultural superiority to Germany on the basis of “German” musical achievements. Inevitably, Nazi ideologues (among them many German musicologists) lent such lofty talk a racial basis by declaring Germans alone capable of producing and understanding musical masterpieces. Singling out the heroic Beethoven as a Nazi music icon, Michael Kater has summarized the relationship between music and the Nazi regime as follows: “Under the Nazis the German musical heritage was equated with the regime, and it became like a code. Whenever Germans heard a work of Beethoven on the radio or in concert, such a code had the objective of reinforcing their self-awareness as Germans and aiding the process of setting them apart from, even elevating them above, other peoples.” “Introduction,” *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933-1945*, ed. Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller (Laaber: Laaber, 2003), 9. See also, Michael H. Kater, *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). In postwar Austria, music, as I pointed out in my introduction, was (ironically) invoked as a distancing mechanism from Germany and as a way of reinforcing the notion of Austria as a cultured land. As I argue in this chapter, however, the Nazi resonances carried by music did not disappear after 1945; rather, they simply went unheard.

are musical media that function as the physical substrate of the monumentalizing music. As part of a minutely-planned reenactment of a Nazi-era birthday feast, these items are in turn functionally compatible with the other commemorative items – such as the SS-uniform, the Nazi photo album and the Fürst von Metternich champagne – that the Höller siblings haul out for celebration on this special day. In combination, the musical and Nazi items authenticate the Höllers' attempt at recuperating the historical past in and for the present.<sup>20</sup>

We can also regard this musical *commemoration* of Nazism, one that bears “a decisive memorial intention.”<sup>21</sup> This is a nominally private commemoration made *public* and forced upon a specific German-speaking audience by virtue of its presentation on the theatrical stage. As Gitta Honegger has noted, Bernhard's dramaturgy “needs the shared cultural memory of actors and audiences.”<sup>22</sup> Stated in the

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<sup>20</sup> Offering some orientating theoretical coordinates on historical reenactment – a phenomenon she views as still wanting for scholarly attention – Vanessa Agnew has precisely argued that reenactment's domain is a technical one whose mode is agglomerative. We therefore “find reenactment preoccupied with the minutiae of daily life” whereby “discrete pieces of information are gleaned and corroborated through firsthand experience.” Those comments are made as part of an introduction to a special issue around reenactment edited by Agnew and Jonathan Lamb. Agnew, “Introduction: What is Reenactment?” *Criticism* 46 (2004): 330.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Ivan Solibakke, “The Semiotics of Musical History in Thomas Bernhard's *Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige*, *Vor dem Ruhestand*, and *Heldenplatz*,” *New German Literature: Life-writing and Dialogue with the Arts*, ed. Julian Preece, Frank Finlay, Ruth J. Owen (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), 207.

<sup>22</sup> Honegger continues: “The Play's “action,” its playing with and against the audience, is its message.” Gitta Honegger, *Thomas Bernhard: The Making of an Austrian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 147-8. Malkin has also noted that “Bernhard's theater is aggressively self-reflexive and openly aware of the specific audience that is always its subject,” *Memory-Theater*, 83.

idiom of my overarching project, Bernhard disturbs the audience's self-satisfied musical complacency (the existence of which is suggested by Karasek's defensive remarks), obliging them to reflect on the centrality of music to the Nazi cultural program and on the possibility that music, as a continued object of cultural celebration in the present, is bound up with the denial of the past.

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Crucially, Bernhard's insistence in *Vor dem Ruhestand* on the nexus between music and Nazism takes on subtle dimensions as a warning about the putatively imminent rehabilitation of Nazi sentiment in Germany. (That Karasek comments on music's portrayed link to "unverbesserliche" or unreformable Nazis indicates that he is aware that Bernhard's unsavory account of music is calibrated to provoke a present-day audience.) More specifically, a careful reading of the play leads us to realize that the musical saturation of the birthday celebration, though consistent with the once ubiquitous presence of music in the siblings' lives (Rudolf: "Früher war die Musik hier so sehr im Vordergrund." 70<sup>23</sup>) is actually preceded by a prolonged period of musical absence. Thus, not only do Vera and Rudolf wonder out loud whether they are still capable of performing on their respective instruments; it was during Rudolf's "Kellerexistenz," the ten years following the war in which he hid in the cellar for fear of

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<sup>23</sup> "Music was once much more prominent here."

arrest, that music last played a significant role in their household. During that time Vera's performances at the piano were said to sustain and nourish the concealed Nazi. Consider further that Vera and Rudolf are adamant that the majority of Germans secretly share their private Nazi sympathies. To that end, the siblings believe that the day is approaching when every German might express these sympathies publically and without fear of rebuke.<sup>24</sup> It is symbolically fitting, then, that this willingness to openly avow Nazi ideology seeks the ballast of music, whose return to the household signals the Höllers' renewed sanguineness about Nazism. The scenario Vera invokes for how the siblings might publically declare their Nazi predilections relies on an explicitly musical setting: her optimistic waxing of the approaching day when "wir wieder ganz offen bekennen können was wir sind,"<sup>25</sup> (100) attaches itself to the imagined scenario of exhibiting Rudolf, fully regaled in his SS uniform, in the center box of the opera house. Thus, a specifically *musical* space is suggested as the appropriate one for their expected reintegration into present German society as card-carrying Nazis.

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<sup>24</sup> As Rudolf puts it in a particularly provocative passage in which he mimics the register of critics of Germany's failure to address its National Socialist past: "Irgend etwas/zieht sich zusammen/Ganz in unserem Sinne/Ich täusche mich doch nicht an den Menschen/die meisten sind gute Deutsche/die mit dem was jetzt vor sich geht/nichts zu tun haben wollen/Der gute Deutsche verabscheut was hier in diesem Lande vorgeht/Verkommenheit, Verlogenheit, allgemeine Verdummung/Das Jüdische hat sich überall festgesetzt/es ist schon wieder überall und in jedem Winkel." (85) ("Something just to our liking is beginning to concentrate itself/I haven't deceived myself about human beings/most people are good Germans/who don't want to have anything to do with what is currently occurring/the good German detests what is happening in this country/squalidness, mendacity, general stultification/The Jewish influence has taken hold of everything/is once again everywhere and in every corner.")

<sup>25</sup> "...we can once again confess openly to what we are."

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Bernhard also uses *Heldenplatz* to engineer a historically and musically informed provocation that is likewise carried out in the public sphere. But unlike *Vor dem Ruhestand*, which bears the subtitle “Eine Komödie von *deutschen* Seele” (“a comedy of the *German* soul”), *Heldenplatz* is directed toward a specifically Austrian audience. In fact with Bernhard’s last work we reach the point at which his long literary engagement with Austria’s National Socialist past is at its least concealed. Coaxed by Claus Peymann into writing a play on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Anschluss, Bernhard responded with an excoriating take on Austria’s “Bedenkjahr” or year of reflection as 1988 was officially being called. As is well known, a public scandal broke out when, a month before the play’s premiere, a number of local newspapers published without context or attribution some of the play’s most strident lines. Perhaps the most notorious of these was the “drama’s refrain” about contemporary Vienna containing more Nazis than the Vienna of 1938.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The phrase is Steven Dowden’s. See his book *Understanding Thomas Bernhard* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1991) See also Martin Huber “Was war der "Skandal" an Heldenplatz? Zur Rekonstruktion eine österreichischen Erregung,” *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. Johann Georg Lughofer (Böhlau: Vienna, 2012), 129-137.

The action on stage takes place in the wake of the death of Josef Schuster, a Jewish professor of mathematics at the University of Vienna. Schuster, who had returned to Vienna after a wartime exile in England, has committed suicide by jumping out of the window of his apartment adjacent to Heldenplatz. Gathered in his apartment, Schuster's family and domestic workers reflect, in the monologic form so typical of Bernhard, upon the deceased's life and the circumstances of his death. Along the way they evoke Austria's past, which drove the Schusters into exile, and the unchanged present, which finally led to Josef's suicide. Bernhard grants particular narrative prominence to Josef Schuster's brother Robert. His monologues carry the bulk of the anti-Austrian invective, and come to dominate the second half of the play.

At one point Robert Schuster invokes his late brother while weighing up the pros and cons of living in London, Oxford and Vienna:

Wenn *ich* nur in London leben könnte  
hat er immer gesagt  
Oxford ist ja nicht London  
Aber von was lebe *ich* in London  
Doch nicht von der Essigfabrik meiner Frau  
Ehrlich gesagt *ich* bin wegen der Musik  
nach Wien zurückgegangen  
wahrscheinlich nur wegen der Musik  
aber wenn *ich* ehrlich bin  
hat mir nach meiner Rückkehr kein Konzert mehr



gefallen.<sup>27</sup>

Here, as so often with Bernhard, music quickly and decisively establishes itself as a ubiquitous and overdetermined Austrian presence. But amidst music's sounding in the passage a question presents itself: if, at the beginning of the excerpt, Robert Schuster is clearly quoting his late brother, how much of the "hat er immer gesagt" are we entitled to carry over to the rest of the passage? The reference to the wife who owns the vinegar factory establishes the second "ich" as Josef Schuster, but by the time we gain the end of the passage Robert Schuster appears to be talking about his own dissatisfaction with Vienna's concert life. As for the line "Ehrlich gesagt, ich bin wegen der Musik/nach Wien zurückgegangen/wahrscheinlich nur wegen der Musik", the "ich" here is ambiguous: one is unable to make an attribution confidently. In the act of dissolving from one speaker to the other, Bernhard effectively merges the two subjects so that they simultaneously appear to invoke music as their *sole* reason for returning to Vienna. In any case, the stakes for music are high.

This blending of characters seems to support the view, often expressed in the literature, that the Schuster brothers are straightforwardly interchangeable characters, with Robert Schuster speaking for his deceased brother by proxy. As Bernhard Sorg

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<sup>27</sup> "If only *I* could live in London/ he always said/ Of course Oxford is not London/ But what am I supposed to live from in London/ Not of course from my wife's vinegar factory/Truth be told *I* came back to Vienna on account of music/ probably only on account of music/ but if *I* am honest/ no concert has been to my liking since my return." Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988): 110-11 (my italics). All subsequent quotations are taken from this text and will be made in the main body.

puts it, “Der Bruder des Verstorbenen resümiert dessen Weltbild und entwirft sein eigenes, das dem des Bruders sehr ähnelt.”<sup>28</sup> In a timely admonishment, however, Konzett has pointed to the secondary literature’s failure to identify Bernhard’s “idiosyncratic presentation” of the two protagonists, a presentation that informs the sharply contrasting outcomes of the two brothers: Josef’s dramatic suicide versus Robert’s “assimilation and public concealment of his ethnic heritage.” More specifically, Bernhard places the brothers on opposing sides of what Konzett describes as a “cultural impasse.”<sup>29</sup> But whereas Konzett talks about a brotherly impasse in the arena of culture at large, I must once again insist that the ideological distance between the two brothers makes itself known principally and specifically in their diverging attitudes toward *music*. I see this as a divergence that Bernhard is able to throw into sharp relief precisely because he otherwise depicts them as overlapping characters with similar histories, predilections, and tastes.

The passages which concern me here are not those spoken by Robert Schuster – whose monologues are full of the doubt-inducing hyperbole and self-contradiction so common to Bernhard’s protagonists – but rather by his niece Anna, Josef Schuster’s daughter. Here she is summarizing the divergent brotherly response toward the alleged persistence of Nazism in postwar Austria:

Leute wie der Onkel Robert

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<sup>28</sup> “The brother of the deceased summarizes the latter’s worldview and then sketches out his own one – which turns out to be very similar to his late brother’s.” Bernhard Sorg, *Thomas Bernhard* (Munich: Beck, 1992), 169.

<sup>29</sup> Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National Dissent*, 49.

stürzen sich nicht aus dem Fenster  
die werden auch nicht von den Nazis gejagt  
die ignorieren die meiste Zeit was um sie herum ist  
gefährlich ist es nur mit solchen wie dem Vater  
die ununterbrochen alles sehen und alles hören. (68-9)<sup>30</sup>

In the continuation of her comparative account Anna then embraces a musical example.  
Starting with a reference to her uncle Robert, she notes:

Im Musikverein stört es ihn auch nicht  
daß in den Konzerten lauter Nazis sitzen  
der Onkel Robert kann Beethoven hören  
ohne an den Reichsparteitag in Nürnberg zu  
denken  
das konnte der Vater eben nicht. (69)<sup>31</sup>

“Alles sehen und alles hören:” we must pay careful attention here to the relationship  
between seeing and hearing that Bernhard theorizes. The most straightforward

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<sup>30</sup> “People like uncle Robert/ don't throw themselves out the window/ they also aren't  
hounded by the Nazis/ most of the time they ignore what is around them/ it's only  
dangerous for those like my father/who are constantly seeing and hearing everything.”

<sup>31</sup> “It also didn't disturb him that in the Musikverein/ a bunch of Nazis attend the  
concerts/ uncle Robert couldn't hear Beethoven/ without thinking of the Reichsparteitag  
in Nuremberg.”

interpretation of Anna's report is that the *sight* of the purported Nazis in the audience triggered a recollection of the Nuremberg Rally that made it impossible for her late uncle to concentrate on the music being performed. But it is also possible to intuit a deeper relation between what Josef Schuster sees and hears. The purported presence of the Nazis in the concert hall, for example, could have prompted Josef Schuster to reflect on the vehemence with which they set upon music, using it as a cultural resource for underwriting their noxious claims to racial superiority over Jews.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it is precisely this obsessive Nazi "predilection" for music that Bernhard parades so demonstrably in *Vor dem Ruhestand*. We should also note the contributing role played here by the *Musikverein*, the gilded musical space in which this concert takes place. The location of an annual, internationally broadcast New Year's Eve concert, it is a space that aggressively advertises Austria as a "Land der Musik." Consequently, the almost-daily celebration of music and nation that is performed there might be expected to strike a participant – especially a Jewish returnee – as incongruous and hypocritical.

But what if Anna is asserting the impossibility of her father's listening to music or to Beethoven under *any* circumstances without thinking of the Nuremberg Rally? To detach Anna's comments from the specific confines of the *Musikverein* is to entertain the thought that the combination of music *per se* + Austria is sufficient for producing this reaction. An interpretive move in that direction is strongly supported by a further

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<sup>32</sup> See Michael H. Kater and Albrecht Riethmüller, *Music and Nazism: Art under Tyranny, 1933-1945* (Laaber: Laaber Verlag, 2003).

remark of Anna's, offered as a rejoinder to her sister's interjection that their father continued to attend *Musikverein* concerts regularly:

...er [Vater] hat die Musik nur hören können  
indem er zuerst die nationalsozialistische  
Gesinnung  
der Musikvereinbesucher überhört hat  
er hat sozusagen alle Augen und Ohren zudrücken  
müssen  
um Musik hören zu können. (70)<sup>33</sup>

If Anna contends that her father was forced to ignore the National Socialist disposition of the *Musikverein* audience, the word she uses “überhören” (to ignore, but more literally “to overhear”) signals the possibility that the music itself was capable by some kind of associative process of carrying a National Socialist “message” which needed to be overheard. Further support for this conclusion flows from Anna's claim that her father found it necessary not only to block his eyes, thus shielding himself from the objectionable audience members: it was also necessary for him to block his *ears*. We have arrived at the counter-intuitive claim that it was necessary for Josef Schuster to shield his ears from the music in order to hear the music.

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<sup>33</sup> “...he [father] could only hear the music/ by first ignoring the National Socialist mindset/ of the Musikverein patrons/ he had to turn a blind eye and, so to speak, a blind ear/ in order to hear the music.”

Finally, if Anna notes in the passage quoted at the beginning of this sequence that her father had the “dangerous” ability to *hear* everything, she goes on to make a distinction between the dangerous “Denkenden” and the harmless “Arglosen” in the following way:

Die Denkenden waren schon immer die Gefährlichen  
die Arglosen die Beethoven ungestört hören  
können  
die haben die Menschen lieber. (69-70)<sup>34</sup>

The distinction maps onto Anna’s portrayal of her father and uncle as music aficionados who assume a different stance toward Austria. For Josef Schuster, music is dangerous precisely because the musical experience tends to double as an occasion for confronting uncomfortable truths about present-day Austria and its Nazi past, truths that play a decisive role in Schuster’s suicide. Conversely, Robert Schuster, whose utmost desire is to be left in peace (“Ich will meine Ruhe haben” (68), he says at one point), seems to belong to the “Arglosen,” the unsuspecting ones who are capable of listening to Beethoven without experiencing the same historical agitation.

If Josef Schuster’s reaction to music is rather idiosyncratic (though not implausible, as I have been trying to show), Bernhard seems to theorize through Robert

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<sup>34</sup> “The thinkers were always the dangerous ones/ the innocents who could listen to Beethoven/ undisturbed/ those are the kind that people prefer.”

Schuster an alternative response to music, one which encourages a kind of willed paucity of thinking. One way of approaching their diverging musical response is through the trope, integral to Western thought since at least Plato, of the danger of music.<sup>35</sup> By moving from her assertion that her father had the “dangerous” ability to see and hear everything to the claim that he was one of the dangerous ones (“die Gefährlichen”) who was unable to listen to Beethoven and remain unperturbed, Anna lends support to this trope. By remaining docile and compliant, on the other hand, Robert Schuster seems to speak not for the danger but the innocuousness of music.<sup>36</sup> In view of what the characters in *Heldenplatz* have to say about postwar Austria’s lamentable political and historical situation, my reading of this passage is that the

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<sup>35</sup> See Richard Taruskin’s discussion of this trope in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 169.

<sup>36</sup> In fact in his late work Bernhard frequently subverts the “danger of music” trope by offering an alternative account of music as a harmless presence that does nothing but encourage a mindless and self-satisfying repetition supportive of the status quo. On multiple occasions in his novel *Alte Meister*, the music critic Reger (also a Jewish returnee) gives full expression to his dissatisfaction with his fellow Austrians: “Die Österreicher, als die geborenen Opportunisten sind Duckmäuser...leben vom Vertuschen und Vergessen.” (“Austrians, as born opportunists and fearful sneaks... live from covering up and forgetting things.” (146) He also criticises Austria’s current political climate: “Wenn wir die Zeitung aufmachen, haben wir wieder einen politischen Skandal” (148); (“Whenever we open a newspaper we are confronted with yet another political scandal.”); and diagnoses in like fashion Austria’s moral degeneration: “[V]ierzig Jahre nach Kriegsende haben die österreichischen Verhältnisse wieder ihren finsternen moralischen Tiefpunkt erreicht.” (164) “Forty years after war’s end the Austrian circumstances have reached their dark moral nadir.” *Alte Meister. Komödie* (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1985). Even though these fictional statements lack for specificity, they nevertheless mirror the atmosphere of political and personal irresponsibility toward Austria’s Nazi past that reigned during the 1980s, and anticipate the public scandal of the Waldheim affair, which then provided important impulses for *Heldenplatz*.

overblown and celebratory emphasis on music has supported a “Nichtdenkenwollen,” a state of hebetude that has impeded a meaningful engagement with Austria’s past.<sup>37</sup>

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Over the preceding pages we have once again been working toward establishing the centrality of music and musical discourses to Bernhard’s interrogation of his country’s failure to confront its wartime past. But how might monumentality fit into these considerations? To be sure, the outer circumstances of *Heldenplatz* differ

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<sup>37</sup> Hitler seems to have recognised this aspect of art in general: “Nichts ist mehr geeignet, den kleinen Nörgler zum *Schweigen zu bringen* als die ewige Sprache der großen Kunst” (“Nothing is more fitting for silencing the little complainer than the eternal language of great art.” (my emphasis - “zum Schweigen bringen” takes on entirely new connotations in a postwar Austrian context). “Rede auf der Kulturtagung des Reichsparteitages 1935,” *Die Malerei im deutschen Faschismus: Kunst und Konterrevolution*, ed. Berthold Hinz (Munich: Hanser, 1974), 151. As an aside, we might consider transferring this line about the inoculating or stupidity-inducing capacity of music to Bernhard’s unique and much-discussed prose style. Robert Musil provides us with an argumentative opening. Pondering the question (which would later occupy Hans Eisler) of whether there is such a thing as dumb music, Musil reversed the question, asking: “Ist vielleicht die Dummheit musikalisch? Dauernde Wiederholungen, eigensinniges Beharren auf einem Motiv, Breittreten ihrer Einfälle, Bewegung im Kreis, beschränkte Abwandlung des einmal Erfassten, Pathos und Heftigkeit statt geistiger Erleuchtung: ohne unbescheiden zu sein, könnte sich die Dummheit darauf berufen, daß dies auch ihre Lieblingseigenheiten sind.” (“Is stupidity perhaps musical? Ongoing repetitions, monotonous insistence on a motif, banging on about its ideas, moving in a circle, limited deviation from what has been comprehended, pathos and intensity instead of intellectual enlightenment: without being boastful, couldn’t stupidity appeal to the fact that these are also its favorite characteristics?”) Cited in Klaus Großgebauer and Michael Wien, *Dummheit: die heimliche und unheimliche Weltmacht; Ansichten und Einsichten zur Dummheit und ihrer schöneren Schwester die Intelligenz* (Books on Demand: Berlin and Heidelberg, 2005), 418. Musil’s comment has traction when applied to Bernhard’s writing style which, largely for the qualities Musil here, many commentators have approvingly called musical.



markedly from those prevailing in *Vor dem Ruhestand*. It is no longer a case of two incorrigible Nazis reenacting a Nazi celebration with the help of their beloved Beethoven, and the audience cannot directly ascertain an affinity between the cultures of Nazism and musical Austria. Instead, we can only glean the affinity third hand, as it were, by closely heeding what Anna Schuster reports about her late father. But it is clear from her account that Josef Schuster was, under the right circumstances, capable of hearing music as an Austrian-inflected monument to Nazism. And these circumstances depend partially on the monumental proportions that Bernhard lends the music by once again employing Beethoven, the composer Schuster cannot listen to without experiencing agitation about the past. In conjunction with the local setting it is precisely this music that, in a kind of signifying chain, instinctively prompts Josef Schuster to think about the Nuremberg Rally, which conjures images of the masses celebrating Nazism through a festive presentation whose dimensions could hardly be more monumental.

Given that the Jewish Schuster returns to Austria for explicitly musical reasons, does he not make a claim upon music, one that challenges the implicit musical claim made by both the concert audience he imagines to be Nazis, and by the 1988 audience assembled in the revered *Burgtheater* for the play's debut? Gitta Honegger, I think, gestures toward this possibility (although, like Konzett, she sees Bernhard as setting a generalized "Kultur" as his target) by remarking that local audiences were so shocked by *Heldenplatz*, not just because "the invectives were uttered by a Jew... as cantankerous, misanthropic, and authoritarian as Bernhard's previous characters"; but

also – or even especially – because that Jew was “as Austrian as the culture that persecuted him.”<sup>38</sup> Could it be that Schuster once held out the hope that *his* beloved music might form an object – a monument – through which he could potentially commemorate, even work through, the fate of Jewish Austria?

Keeping this possibility in our mind’s eye, let us now turn to Bernhard’s novel *Der Untergeher*, probably his best known and most widely read work. In my view, the secondary literature has not paid enough attention to the novel’s account of the Salzburg years in which the three protagonists – the narrator, Wertheimer, and Gould – studied together at the city’s famous music academy, the *Mozarteum*. These were precisely the “Trümmerjahre” of postwar Austria – in which Bernhard’s difficult and depressing childhood fell.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, my reading attempts to connect Bernhard’s portrayal of music with Austria’s catastrophic compliance with the Nazis, and with the gaping, scantily acknowledged wound of the Holocaust. One way of achieving this is to reinsert the Jewishness of the tragic anti-hero Wertheimer into the narrative.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Honegger, “Heldenplatz,” in *The Columbia Encyclopaedia of Modern Drama*, ed. Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press), 605.

<sup>39</sup> Bernhard writes movingly about his childhood in his autobiographical texts. See *Die Autobiographie: Die Ursache; Der Keller; Der Atem; Die Kälte, Ein Kind* (Salzburg: Residenz, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Though I sharply distinguish our respective ways of approaching music in *Der Untergeher*, my reading benefits a great deal from Gregor Hens’ interpretation of the novel. See his book *Trilogie der Künste* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999). To a large extent, Hens enthusiastically follows Bernhard’s self-ascribing dictum, which I discussed in my introduction, about writing (musically) according to a structural “wie” rather than a content-driven “was”. Hens quotes Martin Esslin to the effect that “nicht *was* dargestellt wird ist wichtig, sondern die Virtuosität der Art *wie* es dargestellt wird,

*Der Untergeher* is Bernhard's most obviously musical novel. An unnamed narrator disembogues an intense one-hundred-and-fifty page musical "Dreieckgeschichte" involving himself, Wertheimer, and a fictionalized Glenn Gould, all three of whom studied together after the war in Salzburg with (an also fictionalized) Vladimir Horowitz.<sup>41</sup> Many years have passed, Gould is recently dead from a heart attack suffered at the piano, and Wertheimer has just committed suicide in circumstances suitably dramatic for a Bernhard story. The narrator sets his mind to writing something – anything – about Gould, and the seemingly unintended result is the

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bis zu dem Grad wo die *Technik* der Darstellung sich verselbständigt und selbst *Gegenstand* der Darstellung wird." (150) ("...not *what* is portrayed is important, but rather the virtuosic manner with which it is portrayed, up to and including the degree to which the technical aspect of the portrayal starts to operate independently and becomes an object of the portrayal.") This quotation, part of which is a virtual restatement of Bernhard's original dictum, is then offered as a definition of "Manierismus," and Hens permits himself to interpret Bernhard as a literary, or more accurately, a literary-musical mannerist. In doing so, Hens follows Bernhard a second time by methodologically supporting Bernhard's well-known view of himself "Geschichtenzerstörer." In his book *Thomas Bernhard: ein Österreichisches Weltexperiment* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 1999) Alfred Pfabigan disputes the claim that Bernhard emancipated his texts from narrative plot, replacing it with a "musikalische Sprachkunst." (21) Just as Pfabigan can claim for *Auslöschung* (1986), Bernhard's last novel, that it is "durchaus eine Geschichte, und zwar eine lehrhafte," (21) ("through and through a story, and an instructive one at that") so too can we claim for *Der Untergeher* that it delivers an intriguing story spanning several decades about three musicians, that it does so by cleverly mixing musical fact with musical fiction, and that it takes place in a historical location concretely identifiable as postwar Austria.

<sup>41</sup> It is commonplace to read in the secondary literature that Bernhard admired Gould, creating in his fictionalized pianist an alternative version of himself. Indeed, Gould's status as a maverick artist, the easy proliferation of his artistic output, his manic fluency in speech, and the self-desired seclusion in which he lived - all of this speaks to the image of Bernhard that has come down to us. However, as will become clear in my reading, Bernhard's motivation for turning to Gould extend far beyond a mere wish to reinforce biographical similarities.

book before us, a stunning and brutal reflection on the narrator and Wertheimer's encounter with Gould and the consequences of that encounter. According to the narrator, Gould's manifest genius at the piano left them with no choice but to quit their artistic careers immediately upon completing their studies. Everything that happened after Salzburg was a tortuous postscript to their musical impotence. While Gould, barricaded in New York, achieves one gleaming international success after the other, the narrator and especially Wertheimer slide into an aimless existence punctuated by unsuccessful dabbling in alternative artistic pursuits, living off the fat of their well-to-do families. His parents dead from a car accident, Wertheimer becomes ever more reliant on his sister, who escapes his mistreatment by marrying a Swiss industrialist. Returning to their village in Switzerland, Wertheimer hangs himself on a tree in front of their house.

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In an enigmatic episode from the novel, whose importance is emphasized by its placement at the midpoint of the text, Gould, Wertheimer, and the narrator take up residence in a Salzburg villa:

Das Haus eines Jahr vorher verstorbenen Nazibildhauers hatten wir für die Dauer des Horowitzkurses gemietet gehabt, die Schöpfungen des Meisters, wie er in der Umgebung bezeichnet worden war, standen noch überall herum, in den

fünf bis sechs Meter hohen Räumen. Diese Zimmerhöhe hatte uns dieses Haus sofort mieten lassen, die herumstehenden Plastiken störten uns nicht, sie waren der Akustik förderlich, diese an die Wände geschobenen Plumpheiten eines, wie uns gesagt worden war, weltberühmten Marmorkünstlers, der jahrzehntelang für Hitler gearbeitet hat. Diese riesigen Marmorauswüchse waren, von den Vermietern für uns tatsächlich an alle Wände geschoben, akustisch ideal, dachte ich. Zuerst waren wir über den Anblick der Plastiken erschrocken gewesen, über diesen stumpfsinnigen Marmor- und Granitmonumentalismus, vor allem Wertheimer war davor zurückgewichen, aber Glenn hatte sofort behauptet, die Zimmer seien die idealen und durch die Monumente *noch viel idealer für unseren Zweck.*”<sup>42</sup>

The villa belonged not just to a sculptor but also to a “Nazibildhauer” whose proximity to the party is underscored by his having worked personally for Hitler “jahrzehntelang.”

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<sup>42</sup> “For the duration of the Horowitz course we had rented the house of a recently deceased Nazi sculptor, the *creations of the master*, as he was called in the area, still stood all over the house, in rooms that were five to six meters high. It was the height of these rooms that had convinced us to rent the house *on the spot*, the sculptures standing around didn’t disturb us, they improved the acoustics, these marble eyesores along the walls that had been created by a *world-famous artist*, as we were told, who had worked for years in the service of Hitler. These giant marble protuberances, which the owners actually pushed against the walls for us, were acoustically ideal, I thought. At first we were shocked by the sight of the sculptures, by this cretinous marble and granite monumentality, Wertheimer especially cowered before them, but Glenn immediately claimed the rooms to be *ideal*, and because of the monuments *even more ideal for our purpose.*” *Der Untergeher* (Frankfurt am Main Suhrkamp, 1983), 70-71 (my italics). All subsequent quotations are taken from this text and will be made in the main body. The English translations are Jack Dawson’s, see Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser* (Vintage: New York, 1991), 77-78.

That the sculptor is still referred to in the community as a master of world-famous repute indicates local acceptance, if not wholesale endorsement, of his work. Bernhard is likely reworking facts from the life and work of Josef Thorak, one of Hitler's favorite and most-commissioned artists. In the late thirties Hitler had an atelier built for Thorak, big enough to accommodate those of Thorak's statues that approached a height of twenty meters. After the war Thorak, who in every way had proven himself an enthusiastic and compliant Nazi, was cleared in a Munich denazification trial of Nazi collaboration. Returning to live in the vicinity of Salzburg, his "Heimatstadt," he was received warmly by the public and continued to exhibit his work to high local acclaim.<sup>43</sup> Unflatteringly described by the narrator as "riesige Auswüchse" that reflect a "stumpfsinniger Marmor- und Granitmonumentalismus," the statues correspond to a Nazi aesthetic calculated to awe through sheer bulk and gravity.<sup>44</sup> After the recent

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<sup>43</sup> To this day, two of his Nazi-commissioned statues stand in the garden of Salzburg's Mirabell Palace, "Zeugen demokratischer legitimierter Wiederbetätigung" as Gert Kerschbaumer has put it. *Begnadet für das Schöne: Der rot-weiß-rote Kulturkampf gegen die Moderne* (with Karl Müller) (Wien: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1992), 108. See also Susanne Rolinek's "...mit ganzer Kraft für die deutsche Kunst." *Der Bildhauer Josef Thorak als NS-Karrierist*," in *Politische Skulptur: Barlach/Kasper/Thorak/Wotruba*, ed. Martin Hochleitner and Inga Kleinknecht (Linz: Bibliothek der Provinz, 2009), which is the companion volume to an exhibition at the *Landesgalerie Linz*, one of the events staged by Linz in 2009, the year that city was officially recognized by the European Union as a "Kulturhauptstadt Europas." See also Oliver Rathkolb, "Ganz groß und monumental: Die Bildhauer des Führers: Arno Breker und Josef Thorak," in *Kunst und Diktatur: Architektur, Bildhauerei und Malerei in Österreich, Deutschland, Italien und der Sowjetunion 1922-1956*, Ed. Jan Tabor (Baden: Grasl, 1994).

<sup>44</sup> In his book on Hitler and aesthetics, Frederic Spotts discusses Breker and Thorak in the same breath. What he has to say about Breker's aesthetic can easily be carried over to Thorak. Spotts writes that Breker "perverted the classical ideal of sculpture to produce caricatures of virility. Ignoring Greek principles of moderation in structure,

downfall of Nazism, though, the function of the monuments in respect of Nazism is uncertain, hovering, like Beethoven in *Vor dem Ruhestand*, somewhere between a celebration of a triumphant Nazism and a melancholy commemoration of a recently sunk empire.

In the above passage the narrator claims that the villa's acoustics were particularly favorable. Contrary to what the reader might expect, the basis for this claim does not lie in the generous ceiling height of the rooms, a circumstance otherwise cited as the decisive inducement to rent the property. Instead, the narrator ties his acoustical claim to the presence of the statues. In doing so, he offers an explanation for Gould's puzzling remark (italicized in the text) about the monuments rendering the villa even more ideal for their purpose. Gould's statement breaks the shock all three experience upon first encountering the statues; but it is by no means clear that Gould is thinking only, or even principally, of acoustics. That the narrator twice interprets him as referring to such (one time in the past tense and one time in the present tense) comes across not as a sign of certainty, but rather as an attempt to allay his doubt that Gould's comment might aim at something more sinister, the more so as the narrator contradicts his assertion that the dispersed statues didn't disturb anyone by then disclosing their initial shock value. Unsurprisingly, the Jewish Wertheimer, who initially cowers in the corner, is especially afflicted. I submit that Gould's remark, with its ambiguous culmination in the word "Zweck," is the key to the passage if not the entire book.

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simplicity in expression and proportion in the parts, he produced works that owed everything to size and exaggeration...Such torsos, crowned with faces that were grim, arrogant and ruthless, were icons of brutality and perhaps sexual fantasy." Frederic Spotts, *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* (London: Hutchinson, 2001), 185.

In our attempt to cast light on its dark shading, we must take stock of a nearby passage in which the narrator picks up where he had left off:

Als uns gesagt worden war, daß wir das Haus eines berühmten Nazibildhauers bezogen hätten, war Glenn in ein schallendes Gelächter ausgebrochen. Wertheimer hat sich diesem schallenden Gelächter angeschlossen, dachte ich, die beiden hatten ihr Gelächter bis zur totalen Erschöpfung in die Länge gezogen und am Ende eine Flasche Champagner aus dem Keller geholt. Glenn ließ den Pfropfen genau in das Gesicht eines sechs Meter hohen Engels aus Carrara platzen und verspritzte den Champagner auf den Gesichtern der anderen herumstehenden Ungeheuer bis auf einen kleinen Rest, den wir aus der Flasche tranken. Am Ende schleuderte Glenn die Flasche auf den Imperatorkopf in der Ecke mit solcher Wucht, daß wir in Deckung gehen mußten. (72-3)<sup>45</sup>

Just as Gould first shapes the group response to the statues by a comment that deflects the incipient unease, so too does his intervention in the above passage set the tone for what follows. In light of what we already know about Wertheimer's first reaction to the

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<sup>45</sup> "When we learned that we had moved into the house of a famous Nazi sculptor Glenn burst out laughing. Wertheimer joined in this resounding laughter, I thought, the two of them laughed to the point of total exhaustion and in the end they went down to the cellar to get a bottle of champagne. Glenn popped the cork right in the face of a six-meter high Carrara angel and squirted the champagne at the faces of the other monsters standing about, leaving only a little bit which we drank from the bottle. Finally Glenn hurled the bottle at the emperor head in the corner with such fury that we had to duck for cover." *The Loser*, 80.



statues, the fusing of his manic and exaggerated laughter to Gould's reads like a schoolboy trying to align himself with a bully by imitating the latter's wanton aggression. After fetching a champagne bottle, Gould then sprays its contents into the faces of the statues after smiting the cork into a six-meter high angel, rounding off this truly Dionysian performance by hurling the bottle into the head of the emperor. J.J. Long rightly says of the champagne spraying – though his comment applies to the entire sequence of Gould's actions – that it is a “highly ambiguous gesture of both desecration and celebration.”<sup>46</sup>

I detect a transfer from the crude and violent material monumentality of the Nazi statues into the musical sphere – the sphere Gould has in mind by pronouncing the word “Zweck.” The image, common to early German Romanticism, of architecture as form of music – whether petrified, frozen, even silenced – helps us to think through this connection.<sup>47</sup> I submit that what Gould means by “our purpose” amounts to his “fanatical and inhuman”<sup>48</sup> dedication to music, a dedication that is revealed to the narrator and Wertheimer in 1953, when Gould plays the Goldberg Variations for them in the same sculptor's house in which Gould enacts his champagne-fuelled

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<sup>46</sup> J.J. Long, *The Novels of Thomas Bernhard*, 116.

<sup>47</sup> Günter Bader has provides an excellent summary of the trajectory of the architecture-music comparison in the Frühromantik. *Psalterspiel: Skizze einer Theologie des Psalters* (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2009), see his section "Versteinerte Psalmen und die Verwandtschaft der Künste," 94-106

<sup>48</sup> Mark Anderson, “Afterword,” Thomas Bernhard, *The Loser*, trans. Jack Dawson (Vintage: New York, 1991), 188.

celebration.<sup>49</sup> As the narrator then puts it, this was the moment in which Glenn Gould destroyed (“hat vernichtet”) Wertheimer.<sup>50</sup> In *Der Untergeher* Gould establishes the all-or-nothing terms for engaging music, and the narrator and Wertheimer submit and ultimately succumb to those terms. We read in retrospect that the narrator and Wertheimer confidently predicted that the completion of Gould’s musical studies in Salzburg would herald his own demise: “wir hätten immer nur den einzigen Gedanken gehabt, Glenn würde nach seiner Rückkehr aus Salzburg in Kanada rasch zugrunde gehen an seiner *Kunstbesessenheit*, an seinem *Klavierradikalismus*.” (9)<sup>51</sup>

Although they are mistaken about the immediacy of Gould’s death, when it eventually does arrive, the narrator considers it a natural albeit delayed consequence of the “Ausweglosigkeit...in welche er sich in beinahe vierzig Jahren *hineingespielt* hat,” and the “Ungeheuerlichkeit” from which he was unable to extract himself. (9)<sup>52</sup>

*Besessenheit, Ruhmsucht, Klavierradikalismus, Kunstbesessenheit, Ausweglosigkeit:*

Gould’s total commitment to the piano and ensuing perfection as a performer are embedded in a series of unsettling catchwords, a lexicon of disturbing extremes.

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<sup>49</sup> (See Pfabigan, 303: *no coincidence that Wertheimer’s musical “Vernichtung” occurs in Nazi sculptor’s house*).

<sup>50</sup> “1953 hat Glenn Gould in Leopoldskron die *Goldbergvariationen* in unserem Bildhauerhaus für niemanden anderen als für Wertheimer und mich gespielt...1953 hat Glenn Gould Wertheimer vernichtet, dachte ich.” (144)

<sup>51</sup> “We were constantly plagued by the thought that Glenn would destroy himself after returning to Canada from Salzburg, destroy himself with his *music obsession*, with his *piano radicalism*.” *The Loser*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> “He was killed by the impasse he had *played* himself into for almost forty years, I thought.” *The Loser*, 5.

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Critics of the novel have attempted to neutralize, even reverse, the significance of Wertheimer's Jewishness for the narrative. In a review of *Der Untergeher*, for example, Peter Demetz maintains that

Bernhards Juden sind metaphysisch verwöhnt; die Familie Wertheimer überlebte die Nazis in England, kehrte dann nach Wien zurück, und fand dort alles unversehrt vor, auch die große Wohnung auf dem Kohlmarkt, mit allen Kunstschätzen.<sup>53</sup>

The word "metaphysical" is impenetrable here. Remove it and we are left with the brazen claim that Wertheimer and his family were spoiled simply because they were spared the Nazi death camps and were able to return to Austria with their material wealth intact. More recently – and far less objectionably – Alfred Pfabigan states that Wertheimer's Jewishness exerts "keinerlei Einfluß auf die Handlung."<sup>54</sup> Pfabigan

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<sup>53</sup> "Bernhard's Jews are metaphysically spoiled; the Wertheimer family survived the Nazis in England, thereupon returned to Vienna and found everything there undisturbed, including the large apartment on the Kohlmarkt complete with its art treasures." "Der Anti-Jedermann". *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (September 17, 1983).

<sup>54</sup> "...doesn't exert any influence on the plot." Pfabigan, *Ein österreichisches Weltexperiment*, 343. See also Konzett: in response to Sigrid Löffler's faulting of Claus Peymann (the director of the 1988 Burgtheater production of *Heldenplatz*) for having

seemingly contradicts himself, however, by raising the possibility of transferring the more overtly depicted circumstances of the Schuster brothers' expulsion onto Wertheimer's own exile, such that those circumstances might present an "unstated constellation" that the reader might be capable of detecting.<sup>55</sup>

The position of this chapter is not only that the Jewishness of all the Schuster brothers and Wertheimer makes itself available as an interpretative resource, but that Bernhard makes their Jewish background productive for his critique of music. Support is forthcoming from Mireille Tabah, who has recently claimed that Wertheimer's "Untergang lässt sich ohne jeden Zweifel auf seine von ihm selbst verdrängte jüdische Herkunft zurückführen."/"demise can without doubt be traced back to his repressed Jewish heritage."<sup>56</sup> For this claim she relies on information provided to the narrator at the end of the novel by an employee at Wertheimer's hunting lodge. Speaking in the wake of his master's suicide, the woodsman Franz notes that Wertheimer and his sister, "noch fröhlich[e] ..., lustige Kinder" (231) before 1938, spent the Nazi years with their parents in English exile.<sup>57</sup> Upon their return to Austria the family shunned all outside

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erased all signs of the Jewishness among the Jewish characters, who are otherwise unrecognizable as Jews in Bernhard's text, Konzett counters that this criticism says more about Löffler and "Austria's lingering racial stereotyping of Jewish culture than Bernhard's purportedly deficient representation of Jews." *The Rhetoric of National Dissent*, 50.

<sup>55</sup> *Ein österreichisches Weltexperiment*, 425.

<sup>56</sup> Mireille Tabah, "Thomas Bernhard und die Juden: *Heldenplatz* als "Korrektur" der *Auslöschung*," *Thomas Bernhard: Gesellschaftliche und politische Bedeutung der Literatur*, ed. Johann Georg Lughofer (Böhlau: Vienna, 2012), 163-172.

<sup>57</sup> "...fun-loving children, ready for anything," *The Loser*, 162.

contact and withdrew completely into itself, “wohl aufgrund der sie dort umgebenen Judenfeindlichkeit”/“most probably on account of the anti-Semitism in the environs” as Tabah puts it.<sup>58</sup>

Franz also relates to the narrator a crucial story concerning Wertheimer’s mental unraveling in the weeks leading up to his terminal departure for Switzerland. These final weeks pivot around a grotesque return to music. He arranges the delivery of a derelict piano from Salzburg, and invites a large group of guests to his lodge, apparently former conservatory colleagues whom Wertheimer had always despised. Over the next two weeks – only bribery can explain a stay of such protraction – Wertheimer assails his guests with endless hours of Bach and Handel played upon his faulty instrument:

Wertheimer habe, so Franz, pausenlos Bach auf dem Klavier gespielt...Vielleicht hat er sie mit dem Klavierspiel alle wahnsinnig machen wollen, sagte der Franz, denn kaum waren sie da, hat er ihnen Bach und Händel vorgespielt, solange bis sie davongelaufen sind, ins Freie und wenn sie zurückgekommen waren, hatten sie wieder sein Klavierspiel in Kauf nehmen müssen...Immer nur Bach und Händel, sagte der Franz, ununterbrochen, *bis zur Bewußtlosigkeit*. (238-40).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Tabah, *Thomas Bernhard und die Juden*, 168.

<sup>59</sup> “Wertheimer, said Franz, played Bach on the piano without stopping...Perhaps he wanted to drive them all crazy with his piano playing, for barely had they arrived and he started playing Bach and Handel for them, until they escaped into the open; but as soon as they were back they were once again confronted with his piano playing... always again Bach and Handel, Franz said, continuously, to the point of insensibility.” *The Loser*, 167.

His guests respond by trashing the lodge and harassing the local community. After then sending them abruptly on their way, Wertheimer retires to his bed for two whole days while Franz attempts to restore order to the lodge. These details, together with the narrator's supplemental observations, move toward but fail to deliver a narrative denouement that might help us fully understand Wertheimer's suicide. The narrator does not follow up on Franz's offer, conveyed in the novel's penultimate sentence, to give a complete account of what occurred in the days following Wertheimer's party. Instead, he closes the novel with what appears to be an important detail. Requesting to be left alone, the narrator sets the needle on a LP record that still lies in Wertheimer's unclosed gramophone. The recording is of Gould playing the Goldberg Variations.

Gregor Hens, it seems to me, is right to juxtapose the villa scene in which the three pianists are confronted by the Nazi-inspired statues, with Wertheimer's final, musically inflected unraveling. In both cases, "Der Holocaust," as he puts it, "ist der heiße Brei, um den der Erzähler herumredet." / "the Holocaust is the bush around which the narrator is beating."<sup>60</sup> But I disagree with Hens' assertion that the narrator and Wertheimer, by dint of a mutual retreat into art (once again there is a missing acknowledgment of Bernhard's special investment in music) fail to confront the "reality" whose ultimate marker is the Holocaust itself.<sup>61</sup> Wertheimer, as Hens sees it,

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<sup>60</sup> Hens, *Thomas Bernhards Trilogie der Künste*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> According to Hens, the narrator not only continually obsesses about Gould and his artistic genius, his narrative is said to exhibit a compulsion with formally "contrapuntalizing" his relationship to his two colleagues.

remains open to using music as a form of expression toward or coming to terms with the past. But he eventually concedes that he would need Gould's artistic genius in order to achieve either. This bitter recognition leads him to set about "die systematische Zerstörung der Musik"/ "the systematic destruction of music."<sup>62</sup> His bizarre "Hauskonzert" is nothing less than an attempt at turning music violent upon itself.<sup>63</sup>

My contrasting reading of the narrator and Wertheimer's position toward the Holocaust depends on finally clarifying Gould's own stance toward Austria's wartime past. Curiously, Hens downplays this stance despite perceptively noting in an aside that Gould is "ein Pianist aus der neuen, von Geschichtsbewußtsein und Vergangenheitsbewältigung unberührten Welt."<sup>64</sup> In Gould, Bernhard creates a character who is spontaneous and outgoing," a genius, but also confident, resolute,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>63</sup> "Als Davongekommener hat Bernhards Wertheimer wohl das Recht, die Kunst als Ausdrucksmittel zu bemühen, doch macht er sich statt dessen an ihre Zerstörung. Er scheitert an der Monstrosität der Geschichte wie an der Perfektion der Kunst." ("As a survivor, Wertheimer probably has the right to use art as a means of expression, but instead he sets about its destruction. He comes to grips on the monstrosity of history and on the perfection of art.") Hens' remarks about Bernhard's characters also lead him to charge Bernhard with aesthetic escapism: "Man wird das Gefühl nicht los, daß die direkte Auseinandersetzung mit der Tragik der Opfer, vermieden wird zugunsten einer ins Groteske ausweichenden Behandlung des Stoffs." ("One cannot escape the feeling that a direct confrontation with the victim's tragedy is being avoided in favor of a treatment of the material that swerves evasively toward the grotesque."), Ibid, 75.

<sup>64</sup> "...a pianist from the new world, from the world unburdened by the need for a historical consciousness, or for any coming to terms with the past." Ibid., 78.

individual, totally free of doubts and uncertainties.”<sup>65</sup> However it is precisely in his brash failure to reflect on Austria’s recent past and on how Wertheimer might figure into it that Gould exhibits a bullish historical insensitivity to that past. This insensitivity is clearly on show during the villa scene discussed above, and it surely also manifests itself in Gould’s christening of Wertheimer as “Der Untergeher.” The novel’s English translator turns the eponymous neologism into the rather infelicitous “the loser;” but the sobriquet’s more literal translation as “the one who goes under” calls to mind “The Drowned and the Saved,” Primo Levi’s famous account of his incarceration in Auschwitz.<sup>66</sup> Bernhard, I submit, fashions in Gould a musical personality who trumps the narrator and Wertheimer by insisting on a musical identification that is absolute.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Charles Martin, *The Nihilism of Thomas Bernhard: The Portrayal of Existential and Social Problems in his Prose Works* (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1995), 125. Ultimately, I’m trying to argue that Gould gives Bernhard the freedom to portray music in a conflicted light. Gould is rude in both senses of the word, “der typische Amerikaner” (75) as the narrator puts it in a convenient slip of the tongue that momentarily overlooks Gould’s Canadian provenance.

<sup>66</sup> Tellingly, its German translation is titled “Die Untergegangenen und die Geretteten.”

<sup>67</sup> To the extent that the best Austrian music students can hope for is to become a “Gulda” or a “Brendel”. These are two of Austria’s most famous postwar pianists, but the narrator equates reaching their level with becoming “nothing” (“...werden von ihren unqualifizierten Lehren zugrunde gerichtet... Werden Gulda oder Brendel und sind doch nichts (“...are destroyed by their unqualified teachers... become a Gulda or a Brendel and remain nothing.” (21)). Interestingly, the continuation of sentence reads: “Werden Gilels und sind doch nichts.” Since Gilels was a Russian piano virtuoso, this would seem to neutralize the argument I am trying to make. Nevertheless Bernhard seems to construct the sentence in such a way as to lend prominence to the two Austrian pianists Gulda and Brendel. One might deduct this from the reception of this passage in the secondary literature. Pfabigan, in *österreichisches Weltexperiment*, quotes from the “Werden Gulda oder Brendel” passage five times! (301, 303, 307, 345, 351n), initially as a demonstration of the “apollinische Wahn” permeating the novel (301). However, he



I have argued in this chapter that Bernhard employs sound, more specifically the sound of music, as a monumental link to Austria's National Socialist past. In *Vor dem Ruhestand* Bernhard confronts his audience with a nominally private party staged by two unrepentant former Nazis who use music to first celebrate and commemorate National Socialist achievements, and then to express optimism about the possible public reanimation of National Socialist sentiment. If my position has been that the deliberately exaggerated musical presentation that Bernhard employs in that play can help us understand Robert Schuster's perception of music in the *Musikverein* as a monumental Nazi presence, then Schuster's investment in music suggests his desire, as Jewish returnee, to make of music a competing monument.

Earlier I quoted the Nazi-era musicologist Arnold Schering, who fashioned an elaborate ideological program for Beethoven's Fifth, the symphony the Höller siblings play at their party. In 1935 Schering penned an essay on musical monumentalism, one of the only such treatments ever provided. There he named not Beethoven, Bruckner, nor even Wagner as the most monumental of composers but rather Bach and Handel, whose music he considered timeless and, in this sense, indestructable and befitting the cultural aspirations of the Third Reich.<sup>68</sup> It is interesting that Bach and Handel are the

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never cites the additional reference to Gilels. His uses of the quote emphasizes its character as an affront against Austria's musical prowess.

<sup>68</sup> Fusing a form of historical (remembering that which has persisted) and aesthetic (awe) monumentality, Schering defined musical monumentality as follows: "Was würdig ist, dauernd in der Erinnerung der Nachwelt festgehalten zu werden, dem setzt man ein Denkmal, ein Monument. Das kann immer nur ein Großes, Bedeutendes sein, von dem sich annehmen läßt, daß die Kraft seiner Inhalte auch in fernsten Zeiten noch lebendig zu wirken und Augenblicke der Erhebung, des Stolzes, des Selbstbewußtseins

very two composers whose music Wertheimer plays repeatedly and obsessively during his final performance. Likely this is a coincidence, but it is the curious historical affinity their presence here creates, together with my wider reading of the Jewish Wertheimer as a musically defeated man, that leads me to hear Wertheimer's final concert as a grotesque anti-monument, already constructed as musical ruin that prefigures the bodily ruin Wertheimer will soon perpetrate against himself.<sup>69</sup>

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zu schaffen vermag." ("That which is worthy of perpetually taking hold of posterity's memory is what you set a memorial or a monument to. It can only be something grand, significant, of which one can assume that the force of its contents will still be able in the most removed times to appear alive and capable of creating moments of elation, of pride, of self-confidence.") "Über den Begriff des Monumentalen in der Musik," *Von Großen Meistern der Musik* (Leipzig: Koehler und Amelang, 1940), 7.

<sup>69</sup> For a theoretical introduction to ruins as a master trope of modernity, see Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle's Introduction to *Ruins of Modernity* (Durham and London: 2010), 1-9. Despite the fact that their focus is on visual ruins, their account, emphasizing as it does the ruin's confrontation with memory and the past, its inevitable aestheticization, and its semantic instability, speaks to the kind of ruin in sound that Wertheimer appears to construct. For a recent attempt to write about ruins in respect to music see Abby Anderton, *Music among the Ruins: Classical Music, Propaganda, and the American Agenda in West Berlin (1945-1949)* PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan 2012.

### Chapter Three

#### “Gebote, Vernetzungen, Vorschriften”: Music, Gender, and Austria in Elfriede

#### Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*

In 1983, the same year in which her best-known novel *Die Klavierspielerin* appeared, Elfriede Jelinek published a short article for the Austrian magazine *Profil*.<sup>1</sup> Carrying the title “Im Namen des Vaters (“In the Name of the Father”)” the piece was occasioned by an incident in Switzerland involving the Austrian-Swiss composer, Patricia Jünger. As Jelinek tells the story, Jünger was hurt in an altercation with two German businessmen, both of whom came away unharmed. A Swiss court found the composer guilty of the antique-sounding transgression of “Raufhandel” or causing an affray, and fined her. For Jelinek, it was symbolically fitting that Jünger should sustain bodily injury. Men, says Jelinek, have traditionally objectified the female body – especially its lower, sexual half – as a target of denigration and abuse. By equating women with their bodies, men have concomitantly succeeded in retaining the mind – that would-be catalyst of female agency and emancipation – as their exclusive domain. “Die Geschichte der Frau,” says Jelinek, “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.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Elfriede Jelinek, “Im Namen des Vaters,” *Profil* 50 (1983), 149-153.

<sup>2</sup> “The history of the woman is a history of suppression, and the history of humankind as rational creatures is a history of an endless operation excluding women as manufacturers of meaning.” *Ibid.*, 153

Jelinek's stated concern is with the exclusion of the woman as a corporeally circumscribed subject from the "male" sphere of the intellectual and the rational. This is a concern she has addressed over and over again in her literary works, albeit in a more differentiated and subtle way that her *Profil* remarks would suggest, premised as they appear to be on an all-encompassing patriarchy.<sup>3</sup> What additionally interests me about the above critique is the specific significance Jelinek appears to attach to Jünger as a *musician*. As a composer Jünger arguably stakes a claim as an exemplary "manufacturer of meaning," especially in the arch-musical milieu of contemporary Austria. Given the logic of Jelinek's argument, to assume that position as a female is to court the risk – symbolically realized here – of being (bodily) silenced and excluded. Jelinek goes on to describe musical composition as "ein Gebiet, aus dem die Männer der Kunst bisher am konsequentesten die Frauen hinauskatapultiert haben."<sup>4</sup> The comment might well apply

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<sup>3</sup> Jelinek's essayistic remarks carry the shape of an undifferentiated and monocausal feminism that Lennox, in her reading of the critical reception of Jelinek's literary predecessor Ingeborg Bachmann, has described under the catchphrase "all women always only victims of men" as prevalent in the 1980s. *Cemetery of the Murdered Daughters: Feminism, History, and Ingeborg Bachmann* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 81. As I try to show in this chapter, the account Jelinek furnishes in *Die Klavierspielerin* is far more ambivalent than her essayistic statements would suggest. I maintain that Jelinek's novel is feminist insofar as it confirms to Alcoff's litmus test for a feminist text, namely affirming rather than denying "our right and our ability to construct, and take responsibility for, our gendered identity, our politics, and our choices." Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities, Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 147. Jelinek's position, however, is sharply at odds with the drive toward self-awareness and authenticity espoused by many cultural feminists at the time.

<sup>4</sup> "...an arena from which the men of Art have most consistently expelled women." Jelinek, "Im Namen des Vaters," 153.

to the sphere of public performance as well – in an Austrian context we need only think of the Vienna Philharmonic’s refusal to accept women as permanent members until 1997.<sup>5</sup>

What would it mean to read Jelinek’s best-known and most musical book *Die Klavierspielerin*, a portion of which Jünger would later set to music<sup>6</sup> – under the rubric of music and gender? Is it possible that Jelinek marshals musical resources in order to deliver a feminist critique? Surprisingly enough, the Jelinek scholarship has hitherto neglected music as a serious object of analysis not just for the novel, but also for Jelinek’s work at large.<sup>7</sup> Claiming that Jelinek is primarily concerned with topics other

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Perlez, “Vienna Philharmonic Lets Women Join in Harmony,” *New York Times*, February 28 1997. <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/02/28/world/vienna-philharmonic-lets-women-join-in-harmony.html> (accessed February 18, 2011) Indeed, from the perspective of its controlling figures, by which I mean leading and influential composers, conductors, pedagogues, performers, and writers on music, it seems hard to uphold the notion, in wide circulation since at least the eighteenth century, of music as the most feminine of the arts.

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Junger, “Die Klavierspielerin, Hörstück auf Texte von Elfriede Jelinek” (Südwestfunk 1988). For a full list of musical adaptations of Jelinek’s work, see Marlies Janz’ list, available at : <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/v/jelinek/primaerliteratur/vertonungen/>

<sup>7</sup> Larson Powell and Brenda Bethman note at the beginning of their recent essay that “It may be surprising that the work of Elfriede Jelinek has been so little discussed with reference to music.” ““One must have tradition in oneself to hate it properly”: Elfriede Jelinek’s Musicality,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 32 (2008), 164. Janke, whom Powell and Bethman point to in support of their claim, notes something similar: “*Elfriede Jelinek und die Musik* – dieses Thema birgt eine Fülle von Aspekten und Bezügen, die bislang weder aufgearbeitet und systematisiert noch dargelegt wurden.” “*Elfriede Jelinek and music* – this theme contains a variety of aspects and relations, which up till now have neither been worked through or expounded” “Elfriede Jelinek und die Musik: Versuch einer ersten Bestandsaufnahme,” *Sprachmusik: Grenzgänge der Literatur*, ed. Gerhard Melzer & Paul Pechmann (Graz: Sonderzahl, 2003), 189-211.

than music (such as “das Verhältnis von Mann und Frau, kleinbürgerliche pathologische Beziehungen in der Familie, Erotik und Sexualität”<sup>8</sup>), Munzar has recently accounted for the author’s stubborn musical preoccupation as follows: “Musik aber gehört untrennbar zum Leben der Jelinek, und es ist nur natürlich, dass die Musik für sie ein Reservoir von Stoffen, Zitaten und Metaphern ist.”<sup>9</sup> This remark is accompanied by an inventory of the instruments Jelinek studied in her childhood and youth.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, much as in the secondary literature on Bernhard and Jonke (see my introduction), the inclusion of a biographical note outlining Jelinek’s musical training, most notably on the organ, has become de rigueur in the Jelinek scholarship. However, in declaring it “only natural” that music should find its way into Jelinek’s work, one senses Munzar ultimately invoking, as a hidden explanatory hand, the familiar notion of Austria as “Land der Musik” – as if Jelinek’s Austrian provenance renders her musical engagement obvious and in no further need of theorizing. The underlying message in any case remains clear: we should take stock of music in Jelinek’s oeuvre while being cautious not to

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<sup>8</sup> “...interactions between men and women, small-minded pathological familial relationships, eroticism and sexuality.”

<sup>9</sup> “Music, however, belongs inseparably to Jelinek’s life and it is only natural that music should, for her, form a reservoir of materials, quotations and metaphors.” Jiří Munzar, “Elfriede Jelineks Musikerinnen und die Bürger-Künstler-Problematik,” *Kunst und Musik in der Literatur: Ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen in der österreichischen Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Roman Kopriva & Jaroslav Kovar (Vienna: Praesens, 2003), 166.

<sup>10</sup> “Elfriede Jelinek hat Musik studiert. Konkret Klavier, Gitarre, Blockflöte, Geige und Bratsche, später vor allem Orgel, und diese intensive Beschäftigung merkt man in vielen Werken von ihr.” (“Elfriede Jelinek studied music. Concretely: piano, guitar, recorder, violin and viola, and later and above all, organ, and one notices this intensive musical engagement in many of her works.”) *Ibid.*, 165.

overestimate music's importance as an analytic object.

In this chapter I read *Die Klavierspielerin* in a way that thoroughly problematizes Jelinek's engagement with music. Rather than taking music for granted as a matter of biographical or geographical inevitability, I propose that her manipulation of musical Austria in *Die Klavierspielerin* allows us to perceive music as a vehicle for the examination of gender the novel otherwise articulates. If the novel also recounts the failure of a female pianist to make it to the top of the musical world, I argue here that Jelinek provides us much more than just a commentary on patterns of exclusion in the musical world.<sup>11</sup> More precisely, my reading is guided by the following questions, which I adapt from the musicologist Suzanne Cusick: How is gender *produced* in the way the narrator and the characters in the novel discuss and describe music? Or in the way they perform and hear music? In what sense is gender produced in the historiography of music that weaves its way through the narrative? Moreover – and this might be my most crucial question of all – to what extent does music produce the

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<sup>11</sup> Each of Gürtler, Bethman, and Doll have made note of *Die Klavierspielerin*'s portrayal and critique of the marginalized social position of the female artist. See Christa Gürtler, "Elfriede Jelinek und die Musikerinnen," *Kunst und Musik in der Literatur: Ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen in der österreichischen Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Roman Kopriva and Jaroslav Kovar (Vienna: Praesens, 2005), 171. Brenda Bethman, *Obscene Fantasies: Elfriede Jelinek's Generic Perversions* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), chapter three "Portrait of the Artist as a (Not-So) Young Pervert: Pianos, Perversion and Sublimation in *Die Klavierspielerin*," 74-113. Annette Doll, *Mythos, Natur und Geschichte bei Elfriede Jelinek: Eine Untersuchung ihrer literarischen Intentionen* (M&P: Stuttgart, 1994), chapter three "Die Klavierspielerinnen: Die Frau als Kunst-Interpretin," 69-78.

subject position assumed by the eponymous female pianist Erika Kohut?<sup>12</sup> The reference to Cusick is otherwise significant, as it signals my intent to work with a feminist musicology to develop my argument.<sup>13</sup>

Ultimately, we must address these questions against the backdrop of Vienna, the city in which *Die Klavierspielerin* is set.<sup>14</sup> Keeping in mind Konzett's observation that Jelinek's "portrayal of Austria is at once faithful and playfully exaggerated,"<sup>15</sup> we can observe that musical activity is geographically overdetermined in the novel. Music, in Vienna, is a prime piece of cultural real estate, a "heißumkämpfter Ort" that everyone wants a piece of, if only in the hope of attaining a view of the "große Musikschröpfer,"

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<sup>12</sup> Discussing Joan Scott's well-known essay, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Suzanne Cusick states that "If gender metaphors actually do circulate throughout a society's discourse, it seems logical that gender metaphors are circulating in a society's music, in the sounds composers choose, in the way people hear those sounds, and in the associations they make with them." "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem." *Perspectives of New Music*, 32 (1), 14.

<sup>13</sup> After noting that the different forms of feminism (unsurprisingly) cannot deliver a uniform account of the social construction of gender, Alistair Williams states: "It is generally agreed that the oppression and marginalization of women is embedded in music, its discourses and institutions. By studying how these attitudes are constructed, we can reorient the reception histories on which such traditions are built and by doing so contribute to a reconstruction of gender, thereby widening the scope of both musicology and feminism." *Constructing Musicology* (Burlington, VT: 2001), 69. There is a sense in which *Die Klavierspielerin*, as I hope to show, undertakes such a project.

<sup>14</sup> For a succinct account of the history of gender relations in Austria's Second Republic see Johanna Gehmacher and Maria Mesner, *Land der Söhne: Geschlechterverhältnisse in der Zweiten Republik* (Innsbruck: Studien-Verlag, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> *The Rhetoric of National Dissent in Thomas Bernhard, Peter Handke, and Elfriede Jelinek* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2000), 7.



the master creators of music.<sup>16</sup> And Vienna, described in familiar terms as the “Stadt der Musik,” proves itself enormously invested in protecting and preserving the legacy of its famous musical past. As Jelinek puts it: “Nur was sich bisher bewährt hat, wird sich in dieser Stadt auch hinkünftig bewähren.” (15)<sup>17</sup> At the end of this chapter, I will take up the question of whether Jelinek’s portrayal of her female pianist in Vienna reflects the persistence of a latent fascism in postwar Austria.

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*Die Klavierspielerin* is set in 1980s Vienna.<sup>18</sup> The thirty-something year old pianist Erika Kohut not only shares an apartment, but also a bed, with her overbearing, coercive and voraciously supportive mother. The father is long off the scene, having

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<sup>16</sup> Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Klavierspielerin* (Rowohlt: Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1983), 18. All subsequent citations from the novel will be made in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> “Only the things that have proven their worth will continue to do so in this city.” The English translation is Joachim Neugroschel’s, see *The Piano Teacher* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson: New York, 1988), 12. In the German original, “Hinkünftig” adds local flavor as the Austrian word for “zukünftig.”

<sup>18</sup> The cover of a recent paperback edition of the novel bears a painted female body, sloping naked from right to left across the entire page. In place of the genitals are five conspicuously protruding piano keys, their relative size much bigger than the body they superimpose. We can assume that it is a visual depiction of Erika, although the simultaneously occluding and attracting presence of the keys both heightens and weakens our sense that this is a woman. The ambiguous image ably distills the fraught relationship between music and gender portrayed by the novel. The piano keys both seem to occlude or mute Erika’s body *and* to form a strikingly aggressive musical phallus that replaces the female genitals. To look at the image this way is to entertain the notion that music, as an art form explicitly coded masculine, is capable of doing violence to the female body.

landed in a mental institution en route to an early death. We read that Erika grew up isolated from the outside world as she worked single-mindedly toward a career as a concert pianist. A failed concert performance when it mattered most put paid to those aspirations, and Erika had to settle for the consolation prize of a professorship at the prestigious Vienna Conservatory. Though she dutifully fulfills her teaching obligations and involves herself in the wider musical life of the conservatory, Erika has little respect for her students – many of whom have come to her for instruction at the insistence of their “gutbürgerliche” families. She reckons herself to be occupying an artistic station high above them, let alone the “uncultured” masses; this is a viewpoint she shares with her most talented student, the aggressively chauvinistic Walter Klemmer. Long unable to imagine a life independent from her mother, who has systematically killed off any chance Erika might have had of developing a conventional romantic or sexual attachment to another person, Erika secretly indulges in various acts of (genital) self-harm coupled with trips by night to peep shows and public parks where she engages in voyeurism. When Klemmer confronts Erika with his crudely sexual desires thinly veiled as conventionally romantic ones, she is unable to respond in a way stipulated by social orthodoxy. Klemmer is repelled and affronted to receive instructions in writing detailing various forms of masochistic mistreatment that Erika (half-heartedly) orders him to inflict upon her; and his disgust turns to outright rage when he fails to “perform” during a hastily arranged meeting in a janitor’s closet that leaves Erika vomiting in the corner. In one of the final scenes, Klemmer barges into Erika’s apartment, locks Frau Kohut into her room, and rapes the protesting Erika. She

goes in search of him the next day, stabs herself in the shoulder, and begins the familiar journey back to her apartment, where her mother is waiting for her. The novel ends without any sense of resolution.

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It is the novel's opening scene. Frau Kohut impertinently searches Erika's bag for something that might explain her unpunctual homecoming. She finds "[v]ier Bände Beethoven-sonaten" that "...teilen sich indigniert den kargen Raum mit einem neuen Kleid." (7)<sup>19</sup> The sonatas, or perhaps even Beethoven himself, sternly object(s) to sharing such an intimate space with a dress. Frau Kohut smartly determines that it is not possible for the two objects to coexist; one must be quarantined from the other. Her most acute fear is that the dress will bring a man into Erika's life, thus destabilizing the cozy domestic arrangement the mother has worked manically to preserve. The dress is also a reminder of the kind of externalities or "Äußerlichkeiten" which attracted men to Erika when she was younger, and which were also ultimately responsible for her failure to make it as a concert pianist. If the dress, so "verlockend...bunt und geschmeidig" is coded feminine,<sup>20</sup> the arch-canonical piano sonatas of Beethoven clearly register an outwardly masculine domain.

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<sup>19</sup> "Four volumes of Beethoven sonatas indignantly sharing cramped quarters with an obviously brand-new dress." *The Piano Teacher*, 4.

<sup>20</sup> "...so seductive...so soft and colorful," *The Piano Teacher*, 4.

The passage appears to establish a dual musical authority, firstly in the figure of the composer, in this case Beethoven, and secondly in his scores. Beethoven, who has served musical scholarship as the “Inbegriff des Männlichen”<sup>21</sup> (“epitome of the masculine”) serves as an exemplary representative of the many “Häupter der Musikgeschichte” (11) or chiefs of music history, whose collective presence will continue to hover over Erika throughout the narrative. His musical will is enshrined in the scores – all four volumes of them! They signify the valorization of the musical text as an abstracted mode of controlling musical objects, a way of capturing music in what Richard Taruskin describes as an “autonomous, eternally fixed” form.<sup>22</sup> The scores speak to a nominal conception that circulates in the novel of music as a “totale Abstraktion,” as the authorial voice at one point puts it.

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This opening scene might be productively read with the first appearance in the novel of Klemmer, Erika’s sporty, virile, aggressive, and most talented pupil. We are at a “Hauskonzert” hosted by a wealthy Viennese family of musical enthusiasts. The musical score is prominent here as well: arriving guests are greeted by a

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<sup>21</sup> Eva Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft: Zum Ausschluß der Frau aus der deutschen Musikpädagogik, Musikwissenschaft und Musikausbildung* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1981), 126. Rieger discusses the androgenous vocabulary that music scholars have often used to discuss Beethoven’s music.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 185.

“Partiturenammlung,” a library of presumably historically important scores that are laid out next to the piano for inspection. The anachronistic setting is a suitable one for the contained exhibition of female musicality that ensues, taking place as it does within the domestic sphere, the space in which women musicians have traditionally been confined.<sup>23</sup> The soiree begins with a performance by Erika and a decrepit, sexless male colleague, of a Bach concerto for two keyboards. The narrator would have us believe that Erika is undergoing a transformation: she “schwebt mittels Kunst in höheren Luftkorridoren und beinahe durch den Äther davon.” (66)<sup>24</sup> There doesn’t seem to be anything sexy about this performance; but Klemmer has other ideas. Standing at the back of the room, he “mustert mit von selbst erwachendem Hunger den unter dem Sitzteil abgeschnittenen Leib seiner Klavierlehrerin von hinten,”(66)<sup>25</sup> and, sloughing off his disparaging thoughts about the assembled audience, he tries to keep his attention

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<sup>23</sup> The concert’s domestic setting coupled with the presence of Erika’s mother leads Brenda Bethman to conclude that “we can safely place Klemmer’s desire for Erika within the literary and historical traditions of domestic piano playing as a source of visual pleasure for men. “*Obscene Fantasies: Elfriede Jelinek’s Generic Perversions*, 87. Richard Leppert has explored (visual) representations of gender in domestic musical spaces in Northern Europe (mostly England) between 1600 and 1900. *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), esp. chpt. 4 “Social Order and the Domestic Consumption of Music (*The Politics of Sound in the Policing of Gender Construction*), 63-91. See also Katharina Herwig. "Die Frau am Klavier: Untersuchung zum Weiterwirken eines bürgerlichen Ideals." *Geschlechtsspezifische Aspekte des Musiklernens*, ed. Hermann J. Kaiser (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1996), 145-59.

<sup>24</sup> “...gliding through higher air corridors, almost off into the ether.” *The Piano Teacher*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> “...with a spontaneous hunger, scrutinizes the back of his piano teacher, whose body is cut off from the stool...” *Ibid.*, 62.

there. Klemmer admires Erika's technique, spontaneously associating it with the attendant play of her body. Soon he is spinning a full blown sexual fantasy with Erika as his submissive focal point: "Klemmer fleht, daß seine Lehrerin dereinst ihm gehorchen möge. Er wetzt im Sitz. Eine seiner Hände zuckt unwillkürlich an die gräßliche Waffe seines Geschlechts."(67)<sup>26</sup> Klemmer's mental assessment of Erika's "Gesamtausmaße" (67) – a designation suggestive of the musical "Gesamtausgabe" – is peppered with musically evocative terms. Her bottom-heaviness, he volunteers, could be resolved either by upwardly transferring some of the weight or by planing away ("weghobeln") the excess: if she did the former, then everything would agree or "stimmen" (a derivative of the German word for "voice" but also the term for the tuning of a musical instrument); if the latter were accomplished, one half would then harmonize ("harmonieren") with the other. In the end Klemmer decides that Erika's physical imperfections make her more vulnerable and therefore more accessible.

The trajectory of Klemmer's thoughts begins to follow a new curve, prompted by the idea that "Fräulein Erika besteht ganz aus Musik" ("Fräulein Erika consists solely of music.") This fact does not evoke admiration: instead, he concludes that Erika has severely neglected her desires. By confronting her with his animal instincts, his "tierischen Instinkten," (68) he aims to teach Erika, his "Versuchsmodell" or "test model" to love, or at least accept her body. Klemmer's accompanying perception of Erika's body as a "formlose Kadaver" (69) or "shapeless cadaver" is consistent with

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<sup>26</sup> "The flesh obeys an inner motion that has been triggered by the music, and Klemmer beseeches his teacher to obey him some day. He masturbates in his seat. One of his hands involuntarily twitches on the dreadful weapon of his genital." Ibid., 63.

what we learn about her practicing her instrument as a child, namely that it is sufficient that she produce even the most rudimentary of sounds, “denn das ist das Zeichen dafür daß das Kind über die Tonleiter in höhere Sphären aufgestiegen und der Körper als tote Hülle untengeblieben ist.” (38)<sup>27</sup> Erika, he thinks, could facilitate the process by dressing with more appeal: “Jung und bunt soll sie sich bekleiden.” (69)<sup>28</sup> Klemmer would approve of Erika making use of the closet of clothes to which she, in the opening scene, adds her newly acquired dress. But, motherly fears notwithstanding, she has no intention of wearing any of these items: the closet remains a kind of “Wunschschrank,” a darkened recess to which she periodically and clandestinely returns in the middle of the night.

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The above image – a co-construction of Klemmer and the narrator – is of a bodiless Erika fusing with her art. In the language of Jelinek’s *Profil* article, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, Erika forgoes the body, as traditionally female domain, for music conceived as the domain of the mind. Suzanne Cusick has elaborated the point that an understanding of music as a product of the male mind – to be received and interpreted by the male mind – has exerted a historical dominance over music scholars. As she puts it, the “composer has come to be understood to be *mind – mind* that creates

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<sup>27</sup> “...for the sounds indicate that the child has ascended the scale, to reach loftier spheres, while leaving her body down below as a dead frame.” Ibid., 35.

<sup>28</sup> “Her clothes should be youthful and colorful.” Ibid., 65.

patterns of sounds to which other *minds* assign meanings.”<sup>29</sup> The patterns of sounds, conjured up by the musical masters of the past, are nominally granted an ethereal presence in the novel: they provide an occasion for spiritual elevation and want nothing to do with the messy materiality of the body. The only materiality allowed in this configuration is the musical score, the sanctioned physical substrate of this metaphysical presence. Erika’s investment in an identification with this official conception of music is nearly total, to the point where she has renounced her body. It remains behind, as the narrator sarcastically informs us, as a dead shell and has nothing to contribute to her musical performance.<sup>30</sup>

Things are very different for Klemmer, however, insofar as he appears in this scene as a musical subject. Nominally, Erika and Klemmer are musical “Kenner,” whose musical knowledge and skill distinguishes them from the mere “Musikfreunde” (66) comprising the audience.<sup>31</sup> The *recherche* tone of Erika and Klemmer’s conversation during the interval – where, among other things, they cite Adorno on an abstruse point (74) – can only reinforce this distinction. As a musical recipient, Klemmer would seem to belong to Adorno’s idealized listener, the musical expert who

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<sup>29</sup> Cusick, “Feminist Theory,” 18.

<sup>30</sup> In a like way, the logic of Frau Kohut’s concerns about the dress in the novel’s opening scene is that they will draw bodily attention to Erika, which is an outcome incompatible with her musical persona.

<sup>31</sup> The distinction between two types of musical perception is an eighteenth-century one. The influential music theorist Johann Nikolaus Forkel gave voice to it in *Über die Theorie der Musik, insofern sie Liebhabern und Kennern nothwendig und nützlich ist* (Göttingen: Verlag der Wittve Vandenhöck, 1777). See also Yonatan Bar-Yoshafat. “Kenner und Liebhaber - Yet Another Look.” *IRASM* 44 (2013), 19-47.



takes pleasure in the unfolding of musical structures.<sup>32</sup> To that end, we might expect Klemmer to partake of music at the level of mind. Jelinek, however, reports a vastly different musical experience. To read that Klemmer “hat eine Nebensicht, nebst Musik, die er jetzt zuende denkt and that his “Fleisch gehorcht der inneren Bewegung durch Musik” (67)<sup>33</sup> is to realize that Bach’s music, far from being separate from or repelling Klemmer’s mental meanderings and corporeal excess, acts as a facilitator, a conduit through which his sexual objectification of Erika is possible. Ria Endres appears to recognize this when she comments that “Klemmer scheint Schwingungen aus der Musik herauszuhören, die ihm seine Lehrerin begehrenswert macht.”<sup>34</sup> That it has to do here with something more sinister than a general erotics of music is a point to which we will return.

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<sup>32</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1984). Adorno unfolds this typology in his first chapter.

<sup>33</sup> “The flesh obeys the innerer movement through music... Klemmer has a second goal, along with music; and he now thinks it through.” *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> “Klemmer appears, contrary to the other listeners, to hear vibrations out of the music that make his teacher desirable to him.” Ria Endres, “Ein Musikalisches Opfer.” *Der Spiegel*, 23 (1983), 174.

Erika, it is frequently claimed, assumes the (phallic) role that her father relinquishes.<sup>35</sup> He is written off the stage in the opening sentence of the novel – removed, we soon discover, to a mental institution immediately following Erika’s birth: “Sofort gab der Vater den Stab an seine Tochter weiter und trat ab. Erika trat auf, der Vater ab.” (7)<sup>36</sup> My above reading of the scene in which this observation is embedded suggests, however, that music, under the authority of Beethoven and his sonatas, supplies an alternative paternal instance that Erika has long subsumed to her identity. The interpretation I am working toward, then, is that Erika’s “musicalization,” by which I mean her fanatical absorption of an abstract musical persona, becomes crucial to her identifying as a male sexual subject.

We can examine this idea further with reference to a visit Erika makes to a peep show – she travels there by tram one evening after work. The district which houses the show lies on an impoverished edge of the city where Turkish competes with German for

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<sup>35</sup> “Erikas Aktionen richten... darauf, sich den väterlichen Phallus symbolisch anzueignen. Erika wird nicht zur “Frau”, sondern zu “Herrin.” Es gelingt ihr nicht, sich “weiblich” zu identifizieren, sondern aufgrund... ihrer eigenen Versuche, sich selbst den fehlenden Vater zu ersetzen, muß sie auf dem Weg zur psychischen “Weiblichkeit” immer auf halber Strecke scheitern,” (“Erika’s actions aim at symbolically incorporating the paternal phallus. Erika doesn’t become a woman but rather a mistress. She doesn’t succeed in identifying as a female, rather through her own attempts to replace the missing father with herself, she remains stuck at the halfway point to developing a psychological femininity.”) Marlies Janz, *Elfriede Jelinek* (Metzler: Stuttgart, 1995,) 75. See also Karl Ivan Solibakke, who notes that Erika “is fitted with his phallus, and the expectation is that she should substitute for her mentally unstable father within the political unit of the family,” “Musical Discourse in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*,” *Elfriede Jelinek: Writing Woman, Nation, and Identity*, ed. Matthias Piccolruaz Konzett and Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 259.

<sup>36</sup> “Her father promptly left, passing the torch to his daughter.” *The Piano Teacher*, 3.

predominance. When Erika departs from the conservatory we read that her "unauffälliger Abgang wird *begleitet* von Horn- und Posaunenstößen sowie einem vereinzelt Geigentirili, die allgemein aus den Fenstern dringen. *Zur Begleitung*. (48, my emphasis)<sup>37</sup> Making significant the otherwise arbitrary circumstance of her departing from the conservatory, the passage initially reinforces the artistic contrast: music – *Erika's* culturally privileged music – accompanies and fortifies her on her journey. This is necessary because the area is as musically distant from the center of Vienna as the literal distance separating the splendid conservatory from the dingy peep show: "Keine Musik hält sich hier länger, als eine Platte in der Musicbox braucht"/Music doesn't hang around any longer than is necessary for a jukebox record to be played ." (49)

At the same time, the image of Erika's musical accompaniment heralds a descriptive slippage in the narrative; the first sign is the detail of a quotidian street quarrel involving a "Diskant" winning out over a "Bariton."<sup>38</sup> Musical discourse, first employed to effect a gap between Erika's exalted musical concerns and the baser sexual preoccupations of the peep show customers, is now employed to close that gap. Thus, when Erika reaches the building, nestled in a viaduct under the elevated curve of the train tracks, it is likened to the Venusberg. By contrast, an approaching male client is

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<sup>37</sup> "Her inconspicuous departure is accompanied by blasting horns and trumpets and the wail of a single violin; everything bursts through the windows at the same time." *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>38</sup> A descant usually signifies not just the highest voice but one that, like an obbligato in instrumental music, is meant to stand out and draw some attention to itself.

styled as Tannhäuser, seeking entry by knocking at the door with his “Stab.”<sup>39</sup> Inside the building a composed employee ushers Erika, her briefcase “voll Noten,” – note once again the obtrusion of the sheet music into the scene – into a private booth from which she feeds coins, held “griffbereit wie die linke Hand beim Geigenspiel,” (67) into a slot.<sup>40</sup> In exchange she is permitted a view of female performers carrying out lurid acts on stage. Here, the previously deployed (and latently aggressive) image of the isolated violin buffeted from either side by the loud brass maps smoothly onto the scene of the erotic dancer (violin) encircled by a male clientele (trombones and horns) busily masturbating in their booths.

On the surface, the sequence just described seems, in every sense of the term, profoundly unmusical. Yet as we have just read, music remains a vital discursive resource throughout Erika’s visit to the peep show. By detaching musical terminology from its usual referents, Jelinek invites us to link Erika’s sexual deviancy to the dogged persistence of her musical subjectivity. And it is precisely that absorbed and transported musical persona which guides Erika in effectively assuming the part of Klemmer the (musically) titillated audience member. (Though behaviourally inconspicuous, Erika’s participation as a female is entirely conspicuous: the other onlookers are all men). I suggest reading the peep show episode as a grotesque (in)version of Erika’s chamber music concert. To say this is to simultaneously recognize that the female erotic

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<sup>39</sup> Rieger discusses the “Frauenbilder” Wagner produces in *Tannhäuser. Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, 160-169. Tannhäuser’s intense erotic longing for Venus is tempered by his fear of becoming enslaved to her – in both cases she constitutes a kind of enemy.

<sup>40</sup> “She holds her money ready the way her left hand clutches a violin.” *The Piano Teacher*, 52.

performer is Erika's stage analog who – having been placed in an environment more conducive to the performance of “femininity” – is free from the institutional inhibitions bearing down upon Erika. In this transformed setting, Erika is no longer the soloist. Rather, she must yield the stage – in this case a rotating one described at one point as a “Drehscheibe” (“Drehscheibe” being the German word for, among other things, a turntable) – to the naked and gyrating women. They supply music to the men's eyes, demonstrating what she might have achieved as a pianist: what “Erika auf dem Konzertpodium nicht erbracht hat, das erbringen jetzt andere Damen an ihrer Stelle.” (68)<sup>41</sup> Her attempt to assume a male subjectivity is infelicitous, though: she watches on, wholly unaroused.

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The reading I am providing here suggests that *Die Klavierspielerin* concerns itself foremost with musical elaborations of gender. It is important to note, though, that Jelinek widens the scope of that concern by also allowing the Land of Music discourse to circulate proactively with class and race, thereby allowing them to emerge, like gender, as musically mediated categories of identity.<sup>42</sup> The case of class is more readily

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<sup>41</sup> “Erika never made it on the concert stage, and so other women make it in her stead.” Ibid., 53.

<sup>42</sup> Myra Jehlen has put it this way: “...gender is both an embedded assumption and functions as a touchstone for others. It is logically impossible to interrogate gender – to transform it from axiom to object of scrutiny and critical term – without also interrogating race and class.” “Gender,” *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank

apparent in the novel. Realizing the symbolic value of music, Frau Kohut – who otherwise takes little aesthetic pleasure in music – seizes every opportunity to impart musical aspirations on the young Erika. She does this in the recognition that the successful performance of music in Austria – I’m using performance here in both a narrow and a broad sense – will impel mother and child along a path of least cultural resistance whose end point is a position of higher social standing.

Erika’s visit to the periphery of town – the Turkish district – likewise places musical power along an axis of race. The district’s status as a musical part of the city is correspondingly low: it has nothing more to offer than the passing sonic explosions of a jukebox. Elsewhere in the novel a particularly uncomplimentary account is given of the musical abilities of two Korean students, representatives of the ever more “Ausländer” or foreigners turning up at Erika’s studio door. Instructing them in English (their German abilities are wanting) while Klemmer arrogantly watches on, Erika admonishes the students – they are playing Schubert – for unthinkingly imitating the celebrated Austrian pianist Alfred Brendel. The conversation reveals the exclusionary dimensions of the Land of Music discourse. Austria upholds its musical claims, in part, by producing musical Others.

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Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 272.

*Die Klavierspielerin*'s narrator is a virtuosic manipulator of language who disposes over a considerable arsenal of linguistic weaponry (Beatrice Hanssen speaks of a wholesale deployment of "metathesis, homonyms, puns, neologisms, lexical sliding, and parataxis,"<sup>43</sup>). The narrator's "performance" constitutes a linguistic event which, in its own right, rivals the most virtuosic of musical performances, and it might be asked whether this linguistic virtuosity poses a covert challenge to music's role as a primary discourse. (This is a question we could easily extend to Bernhard and Jonke.) It is of course the narrator who, in the peep show passage, is working overtime to ensure the unremitting presence of musical discourse. As I see it the narrator's strategy – here and elsewhere – is to take otherwise innocent phrases about music and to break them down, often into individual lexical pieces. These pieces are then reinserted into highly incongruous settings – thus releasing an "ungewohntes Assoziationspotential."<sup>44</sup> Jelinek

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<sup>43</sup> Beatrice Hanssen, *Critique of Violence: Between Poststructuralism and Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 227. Hanssen also notes the following: "Jelinek's pornographic language likewise is put to the service of a higher function: ideology critique. Yet her work goes at least one step further when it exposes the metalanguage that informs the sexually explicit, licentious and scandalous rhetoric it parades, to the point where philosophical and cultural traditions – whether it be the institutions of church and family, Austria's venerable music culture, or Germany's philosophy of *Geist* – turn out to be the very accomplices of pornography," 220.

<sup>44</sup> "...an unfamiliar associative potential." Pia Janke "Elfriede Jelinek und die Musik," 197. I submit that Jelinek's reconstituted and redistributed musical references function as semi-acoustic "Stolpersteine," that arrest the reader's attention. This is the German word for "stumbling block," but the term has also come to refer to the small brass memorials for victims of Nazism designed by the German artist Gunter Demnig, who has placed thousands of them in vacated pavement cobblestones in Germany, Austria and throughout Europe. In the case of *Die Klavierspielerin*, I take the reference to National Socialism to be far more latent (although not entirely absent). The concept of "Stolpersteine" is mentioned in connection with Jelinek by Gerhard Fuchs. "Musik

facilitates this process further by having the authorial view shift rapidly between a limited first-person perspective (where the authorial voice often blends with that of a given protagonist) and that of the omniscient onlooker. From this dual position the narrator can nonchalantly convey what Erika, Klemmer, and the other characters think, say, and feel about music while also borrowing freely herself from their inflated musical vocabulary. Although there is much artifice involved in this narrative strategy, I do not see the narrator's musical interventions as wholly artificial. Rather, the narrator draws from an entrenched cultural vocabulary in contemporary Austria for describing musical activity. Mayer and Koberg, for example, are among those critics who have noted Jelinek's proclivity for siphoning quotations from the musical realia of postwar Austria into her text: "Ansatzlos fließen Zitate aus der Musikphilosophie oder aus Programmtexten von philharmonischen Konzerten in die Handlung ein, dazwischen das Pausengeplapper der Opernfoyers."<sup>45</sup>

In a chapter on Michael Hanecke's film adaptation of Jelinek's novel, Brigitte Peucker discusses a scene in which a performance of Schubert's B-flat trio is heard non-diegetically in the ensuing scene, where Erika is viewing a pornographic film in a video

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ist jar der allergrößte Un-Sinn". Zu Elfriede Jelineks musikalischer Verwandtschaft," 173.

<sup>45</sup> "Quotations from music philosophy or from philharmonic concert program notes flow smoothly into the storyline; here and there also the intermission chatter from the opera foyer." Gürtler puts it this way: "Die ironischen Paraphrasen auf Zitate aus Programmheften und Booklets zählen zu den komischen Passagen im Roman. Wie immer bei Jelinek werden sie sprachlich einer Verfahrensweise unterworfen, die den ökonomischen und sexuellen Gehalt bloßstellt. ("The ironic paraphrases of quotations from program booklets belong to the most amusing passages in the novel.") *Elfriede Jelinek und die Musikerinnen*, 176-7.



store. Peucker implies that the disjunctive effect Hanecke creates is an innovation of his, but the technique, as I have showed above, is clearly of Jelinek's devising. Peucker, however, accurately identifies the concealed connection the narrator is looking to uncover between music "identified with the world of "spirit," purified of sexuality" and the "barely representable real of pornography."<sup>46</sup> Below I offer an interpretation of what Jelinek might be aiming at with this juxtaposition, I want to consider the theme of musical genius that runs through the novel.

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Jelinek notes in an interview that "Das Genie hat ein männliches Geschlecht."<sup>47</sup> In *Clara S. Musikalische Tragödie*, a play she published a year before *Die Klavierspielerin*, Jelinek manipulates time and space to transport Clara and Robert Schumann to Mussolini's Italy of 1929. They are staying at a tastelessly furnished villa in *Vittoriale degli italiani*, guests of the Fascist writer Gabriele d'Annunzio, from whom they hope to secure financial support for a symphony that Robert has begun to

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<sup>46</sup> Brigitte Peucker, *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, 157. Incidentally, Peucker is one of many commentators to note that Hanecke omits the novel's, that is to say Jelinek's "feminist thrust and, notably, its critique of high culture," *The Material Image*, 149.

<sup>47</sup> "The sex of a genius is male" *Elfriede Jelinek und die Musikerinnen*, 173. On the importance of the genius discourse for Nazi Germany, see Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, 108-111.

compose.<sup>48</sup> In Jelinek's play, the forcing house for Robert Schumann's musical production is not found within some ethereal arena of inspiration, but rather within a realm of messy and unsavory domesticity striated by inequality and sexual subjugation. Jelinek's portrayal of Robert Schumann is calculated to severely undermine the notion of the godlike composer-genius, a notion common to German musical discourse since at least the early nineteenth-century.<sup>49</sup>

The non-fictional Schumann once wrote of Bach that "Bach war ein Mann – durch und durch; bei ihm gibt's nichts Halbes, Krankes, ist alles für ewige Zeiten

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<sup>48</sup> Much of the first act is given over to Clara resisting the sexual advances of d'Annunzio (who goes by the pompous name "*Commandante*"). She largely achieves this by reminding him of the artistic gap that exists between him and her "genius" husband. At the same time, Clara's deification of Robert is continually undercut by her resentment at having been required to cloister her own artistic abilities in deference to his musical career: Robert, we learn, refused to review Clara's piano concerto in his esteemed journal "*Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*," and with her compositional activities now reduced to a bare minimum, Clara is not even allowed to practice on a second piano when Robert is composing – for fear of disturbing him. Clara's resentment escalates in part two of the play, when Robert appears on stage for the first time, clearly in the final throes of the mental illness that led to his early death. The end of the play comes with Clara suffocating Robert on stage. Thus the play can also be read as a clear commentary on the historical exclusion of women from the material sphere of musical production.

<sup>49</sup> Observing that music in some respects came to replace religion in the eighteenth century as a solemn event, Rieger apprehends a transfer – completed in the nineteenth century – of the "kirchlich-religiöser Habitus," into the musical domain. In a like way, the composer came to be seen as Godlike in his creative powers. See also Lydia Goehr, who, in her chapter "After 1800: The Beethoven Paradigm," describes the God-like terms in which composers were often described – sometimes by and among themselves. *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1992), 205-242. See also Scott Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

geschrieben.”<sup>50</sup> That quotation is a fitting epithet for a passage in the novel in which Jelinek targets Bach as a way of applying further deconstructive pressure to the notion of the composer-genius. Bach is the object of a piano lesson in which Erika confronts a mediocre student whom she has just caught on the street gawking at still shots of naked women, film teasers posted outside an adult cinema. This setup once again nominally signals the unwelcome encroachment of the pornographic onto the musical; but an adjustment is made so that the intrusion occurs, not at considerable distance from the conservatory – as in Erika’s visit to the peep show – but in its very proximity. “Das Kino spielt derzeit einen Softporno, obwohl Kinder in seinem engeren Umkreis Richtung Musik unterwegs sind,” (103) is how the narrator introduces the passage.<sup>51</sup> The description once again concretizes, even enfleshes music, allowing us to imagine it anthropomorphically as a friend the children are on their way to.

Following an initial, albeit silent, glare on the street, Erika humiliates her student during the lesson by implying that his prurience directly informs his inability to muster an adequate performance of Bach. He needs to understand that Bach’s “intrikate Mischgewebe verträgt nur die sichere Hand des Herrenspielers, der sacht an den Zügeln zieht.” (104)<sup>52</sup> This remark is from the narrator, who now withdraws, allowing Erika to

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<sup>50</sup>“Bach was a man – through and through; with him there are no half measures, nothing sickly, everything is written for eternity.” Cited in Rieger, *Frau, Musik und Männerherrschaft*, 127.

<sup>51</sup> “The movie house is featuring a soft-core porno flick, even though children pass by closely on the way to their music.” *The Piano Teacher*, 99.

<sup>52</sup> “...intricate musical texture can endure only the master hand of the pianist, who draws the reins gently.” *The Piano Teacher*, 100.

integrate this sexual imagery into her equally lofty and mealy-mouthed description of Bach. His work, says Erika, “ist ein Zyklopenbau, was die Passionen, und ein Fuchsbau, was das Wohltemperierte und die anderen kontrapunktischen Sachen fürs Tasteninstrument betrifft.”(104)<sup>53</sup> Erika’s paean to Bach produces otherwise dormant sexual stirrings in her, she becomes aware of a tingling sensation between her legs while reporting that Bach builds anew “...die Kathedralen der Gotik musikalisch dort, wo er jeweils erklinge...”( 104)<sup>54</sup> Bach's mastery (“können), summarizes Erika, represents a “Triumph des Handwerklichen” (105) – a triumph of manual labor. Crucially, having set this musical eulogy in motion, the narrator then promptly returns to inform us that “das Lehrbuch der hierorts gebräuchlichen Musikgeschichte, Teil 1, österr. Bundesverlag, übertrumpft Erika noch, indem es lobhudelt, Bachs Werk sei Bekenntnis zum nordischen Spezialmenschen, der um die Gnade dieses Gottes ringt.” (105)<sup>55</sup> The reference is an important one, for it confirms that Erika’s account is not deviant or idiosyncratic, but might have been easily drawn – and even then in attenuated form! – from the sort of description one would expect to find in Austria in an official state-published music history.

Erika’s description of Bach undercuts the criticism of her student she is trying to

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<sup>53</sup> “Its passion is a cyclopean structure. It is also a well-tempered foxhole with regard to the other contrapuntal business for keyboard instruments.” Ibid., 100.

<sup>54</sup> “...gothic cathedrals whenever his music is played.” Ibid., 101. This description challenges Schlipphacke’s claim that “Erika’s conception is represented as the only moment of sexual desire in the text.” *Nostalgia after Nazism*, 88.

<sup>55</sup> “... the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia of Music*, vol. I, published by the Austrian State, even trumps Erika by crowing that Bach’s works are a commitment to the special Nordic man struggling for God’s grace.” *The Piano Teacher*, 101.

make – which depends for its import on separating sex from music in a way that would figuratively duplicate the spatial separation the narrator implies is necessary between the porn cinema and the music conservatory. Erika's emphasis on the mechanism of manual labor (“das Handwerkliche” as Gürtler calls it) as a key to Bach’s works, and therefore to their successful realization, not only maps descriptively onto Klemmer’s illicit masturbation during Erika’s performance of Bach. Her comments also unwittingly invite comparisons between how Bach is said to craft his material and how the male pornographic actors manipulate their submissive and compliant female partners: Bach and the actors are united through the common factor of their industriousness.

If the overflow of Jelinek's language – here and in the “Hauskonzert” scene – suggests an erotic, hand-on-skin dimension to Bach’s music, Jelinek also allows for (encourages?) an interpretation whereby this language of sexual violence is capable of breaking forth from the order of Bach’s music. The possibility that this can happen in music more generally has been examined most thoroughly by Susan McClary, not least in *Feminine Endings*. There, for example, she traces narratives of violence, power and sexual difference in sonata forms by transferring the gendered terminology used by theorists to describe these forms onto pieces which appear to enact or resist these constructions.<sup>56</sup> For McClary, Bach is not exempt from the practice of having composed discomfiting socially-grounded codes into his music. Rather it is the case that “within what we frequently like to perceive as the pure order of eighteenth-century

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<sup>56</sup> Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), particularly chapters 1 and 4.

music itself, the tension between order...and deviation – if not outright violence – is readily apparent if we permit ourselves to hear it.”<sup>57</sup>

Erika's comments on Bach prepare the way for the critique of another composer in *Die Klavierspielerin*, namely Franz Schubert, who is at the center of a terse exchange that takes place between Erika and Klemmer just prior to the tragic climax of their amorous engagement. Actually, we are doubly prepared for this passage. Earlier in the novel, Jelinek redistributes shards of a dismantled Schubert lied into the narrative. Schubert's (and Müller's) restless and lovelorn wanderer from the famous (and famously gloomy) *Winterreise* song cycle (“Was vermeid' ich denn die Wege,/Wo die andern Wanderer gehn,/ Suche mir versteckte Stege (...)/Habe ja doch nichts begangen,/Daß ich Menschen sollte scheun”) is transposed into a voyeur, namely Erika, who creeps through the disreputable prater park on a winter night, spying on copulating couples with her father's field glasses: “Sie vermeidet die Stege, wo die anderen Wanderer gehen. Sie sucht die Punkte, wo die anderen Wanderer sich vergnügen – immer zu zweit. Sie hat ja doch nichts begangen, daß sie Menschen scheuen sollte. Sie

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<sup>57</sup> McClary adds: “This is the case even with the great, universal Bach, whose music is so widely thought to transcend the conditions of his time, place, career, and personality.” “The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During the Bach Year,” *Music and Society: The Politics of Composition, Performance and Reception*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19. In that essay McClary describes how Bach was often able to give the impression in his music of having reconciled styles (such as the “on-rushing goal orientation of the Italian opera or concerto with the more sober, static, contrapuntal ideal of the German Lutheran repertory and the motion-arresting graces of French dance,” 20) that were often highly conflicting and therefore potentially charged when amalgamated.

späht unter Zuhilfenahme des Sehgeräts nach Paaren aus, vor denen andere Menschen zurückscheuen würden.” (140)<sup>58</sup> If the passage once again demonstrates the persistent influence of Erika’s musical subjectivity on her inverted/perverted behavior, the narrator accomplishes this continuity of musical discourse more subtly here than in the passage relating Erika’s trip to the peep show, where the musical terms are conspicuous to the reader.

During Klemmer’s piano lesson, Erika upbraids Klemmer for his uncharacteristically shoddy performance of Schubert’s A-Minor Sonata. On the verge of handing over the all-or-nothing letter which demands of Klemmer that he inflict upon her (irrespective of any protests she may raise) a series of gruesome sexual acts, Erika turns to her student and "fühlt...jene Unvereinbarkeit besonders heftig: Schubert und die Frauen. Ein düsteres Kapitel im Pornoheft der Kunst." (190)<sup>59</sup> Klemmer soon picks up the thread of Erika's thought by venturing the opinion that "Die Frauen haben...[Schubert]...mittels Syphilis umgebracht, adding that "Die Frauen werden uns noch ins Grab bringen." (190)<sup>60</sup> The conversation under the conversation here is that Schubert led a dissolute lifestyle and slept with prostitutes from whom he contracted a sexually-transmitted disease and died. Both Erika and Klemmer, however, deflect

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<sup>58</sup> “She avoids the paths taken by other wanderers. She seeks the spots where other wanderers take their pleasures – always in twosomes. After all, she’s done nothing wrong, nothing that would make others shrink away from her. Using the binoculars, she scours the area for couples, from whom others shrink.” *The Piano Teacher*, 141.

<sup>59</sup> ”When she looks at Klemmer she very keenly feels that incompatibility: between Schubert and Women. A dark chapter in the porno mag of art.” *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>60</sup> “Women killed him with syphilis... Women will drive you to the grave.” *Ibid.*, 187.

responsibility for his conduct away from Schubert: he was ugly and unloved, thinks Erika, and didn't have it easy in the world of romance as the slickly smooth Klemmer does. Klemmer proceeds a step further by saying out loud that women killed Schubert by means of syphilis.<sup>61</sup> Following the conclusion of the lesson, Erika seems to regret having considered Schubert in a sexual context in the first place, for it is really the case, as she now recalls, that "Die Gipfel der Kunst" has zero to do with "...die Niederungen des Geschlechts." (199)<sup>62</sup> It is therefore unfortunate, concludes Erika, that composer biographies are often full of details about the sexual lives of their protagonists, thereby producing the erroneous impression, "als entwüchse erst dem Komposthaufen der Geschlechtlichkeit das Gurkenbeet des reinen Wohllauts." (200)<sup>63</sup> In view of what has just occurred, the self-correction does not come across as very convincing, the more so when one considers that these amended ideas were placed in Erika's head by her mother.

What seems to be clear about this scene is that, catalyzed by the circumstances of her own relationship with Klemmer – a relationship guided by the two poles of sexual submission/gratification and music, Erika begins to entertain biographical, "extra-musical" thoughts about Schubert of the kind she would ordinarily shun. The contours of this critique are more subtle, and it is arguably calculated to cut closer to the

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<sup>61</sup> See Elizabeth Norman McKay, *Franz Schubert: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 129, 319.

<sup>62</sup> "Better the peak of art than the slough of sex," *The Piano Teacher*, 197.

<sup>63</sup> "They inveigle the reader into thinking that the cucumber bed of pure harmony grows upon the compost heap of sex." *Ibid.*, 197.



Austrian bone, for its chief target is the national composer par excellence Franz Schubert. Unlike Beethoven or Brahms, Schubert was not a “Wahlwiener” who ventured southward from the German north, but instead was born in Vienna; and unlike Mozart, he was not widely-traveled or cosmopolitan. The dimensions of Schubert’s musical fame were profoundly local, which today makes him — though not without irony — the perfect candidate for those proudly wishing to make international currency out of Austria as a musical nation.

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According to the reading I have presented in this chapter, *Die Klavierspielerin* shows Vienna's music culture to be sustained by an abstract conception of music. This conception, which reveals itself in the way that music is spoken of and otherwise perceived in the novel, insists that music is an elevated and metaphysical product of the mind, a de-materialized form that distances itself from the body. Drawing on a historically and culturally entrenched distinction that Jelinek apprehends in her *Profil* article, published the same year as *Die Klavierspielerin*, we can recognize this musical conception as heavily gendered: both in the sense that the mind – as the locus of influence in the world – has traditionally been accorded privilege as a male domain; and in the sense that women have traditionally been associated, often exclusively so, with their bodies.

If music functions in the novel as a nominally pure and metaphysical medium, Jelinek undercuts this pervasive musical delineation by drawing our attention to the unacknowledged corporeal circumstances under which musical production and reception takes place. She does this from the top down, as it were, by showing us that the musical geniuses, from whom the works so venerated in Austria are presumed to have sprung forth, in fact had bodies, and that they were bodies marked by sexual desire, even violence. Moreover, the text implies that some of this messy materiality makes itself available to the listener, a recognition that seems to have seeped into the very language used to account for music in Vienna – which, in Jelinek’s hands, becomes a musically aggressive city. Music, then, is entirely deprived of any “Hintergrund” or background role (to once again quote from Munzar); rather, it is rendered conspicuous and vulnerable to scrutiny as one of postwar Austria’s most pervasive myths.

Crucially, these ambiguities and contradictions make themselves known in the novel's protagonist, the eponymous pianist Erika Kohut. “Her female body,” as Konzett puts it, “becomes in consequence the transferred site of social contradictions surrounding high culture and its presumed purity.”<sup>64</sup> On the one hand, there is a strong sense in which Erika's identification with music is so complete that she, as a female musician, must renounce her body completely. But this implicit renouncement does not prevent Erika from seeking bodily fulfillment as a sexual subject; rather, she uses music as a patriarchal form to engage in a number of 'perverted' sexual practices. There

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<sup>64</sup> Matthias Konzett, *The Rhetoric of National Dissent*, 120.

remains a sense, then, in which her ambiguous musical identification functions as both the cause and the result of her perversion. At the same time, if music disembodies Erika, depriving her of her capacities as a desiring subject, it is arguable that Jelinek creates in Erika a character who also channels music in order to resist the stereotypical and narrow form of femininity that is otherwise available to her as an alternative. In other words, we get a glimpse here – but never more than a glimpse – that music holds out promise as a medium through which Erika might free herself from a crude and constrained femininity.

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Jelinek has more than once admitted to a fixation, one that plays out over and over in her literary works, with writing about Austria's National Socialist past. As she has put it: "Mann nimmt Erde, und sie zerfällt zu Asche in der Hand. Das ist ja mein ewiges Thema...also ich habe das Gefühl, ich muß immer eigentlich darüber sprechen."<sup>65</sup> As Konzett has correctly noted, however, this is an obsession that plays out indirectly, as it were, through a focus on the circulation of latent fascist ideologies in present-day Austrian society: "For Jelinek, the Shoah has not yet come to an end but has simply displaced its violent discourses into more acceptable forms of social, economic, and

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<sup>65</sup> "One takes soil and it crumbles to ashes in the hand. That is my eternal theme...I therefore have the feeling that I have to bear witness to it." Cited in Schlipphacke, *Nostalgia after Nazism*, 252-253.

cultural discrimination, thereby domesticating it so as to escape the radar of critical scrutiny.”<sup>66</sup>

This chapter has argued that music, as one of postwar Austria’s most forceful and androgenous discourses, comes to exert a paternal domination over Erika, a domination that might be said to destroy her. From this perspective, it is entirely possible to recuperate a latent fascist emphasis in the novel’s musical presentation, the more so given the sense in which the musical purity and the cult of genius that undergirds Austria’s musical discourses overlaps with the emphasis on racial purity and artistic genius so favored by the Nazis. It is from this perspective, I think, that Karl Ivan Solibakke can speak plausibly of Erika’s “totalitarian” identification with music according to which Erika’s subjectivity, engulfed as it is with “musical artifacts,” submits to a “complete cessation in the flow of time or progress.”<sup>67</sup> Music, then, in every way an everyday phenomenon in *Die Klavierspielerin*’s Vienna, might be said to mimic destructive habits of male behavior towards women that Jelinek, in deference to her literary predecessor Ingeborg Bachmann, reads as a form of everyday fascism.<sup>68</sup> The

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<sup>66</sup> Matthias Konzett, “Preface: The Many Faces of Elfriede Jelinek,” *Elfriede Jelinek: Writing Woman, Nation, and Identity: A Critical Anthology* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007), 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Karl Ivan Solibakke, “Musical Discourse in Elfriede Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*.” *Elfriede Jelinek: Writing Woman, Nation, and Identity*. Ed. Matthias Piccolruaz Konzett and Margarete Lamb-Faffelberger. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007, 250.

<sup>68</sup> In an 1984 essay tellingly titled *Der Krieg mit anderen Mitteln*, Jelinek, facsimileing formulations from her Jünger *Profil* piece, proclaimed Bachmann “die erste Frau der Nachkriegsliteratur des deutschsprachigen Raumes, die mit radikal poetischen Mitteln das Weiterwirken des Krieges, der Folter, der Vernichtung in der Gesellschaft, in den

novel, in other words, might be seen to posit a structural parallel between the relationship obtaining between Erika and her musical masters with relationships that Jelinek saw as obtaining more generally between men and women in postwar Austria.

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Beziehungen zwischen Männern und Frauen beschrieben hat.”<sup>68</sup> “Der Krieg mit anderen Mitteln,” *Kein objektives Urteil – nur ein lebendiges: Texte zum Werk von Ingeborg Bachmann*, eds. Christine Koschel and Inge von Weidenbaum (Munich: Piper, 1983), 314.

## Chapter Four

### Kein Land der Neuen Musik: Gert Jonke and Postwar Austria's Sounds and Silences

In his sprawling novella *Geblandeter Augenblick. Anton Weberns Tod*, Gert Jonke imaginatively interweaves the story of Anton Webern's unfortunate death – thanks to a misidentification he was shot and killed shortly after the war in Mittersil, not far from Salzburg – with a counter-story recounting the slow alcohol-aided demise of the U.S. Army cook who accidentally shot him. At one point in the novella, Jonke refers to an uncharacteristically optimistic line that Webern was once said to have uttered in Vienna, namely that there would come a day when his melodies would be whistled by the postman. Referring to the anecdote in his recent appraisal of Jonke, Ulrich Schönherr – one of Jonke's most astute readers – uses his present-day vantage point to wryly conclude that Webern's wish “ist weder von der österreichischen Post noch von einer breiteren Öffentlichkeit eingelöst worden.”<sup>1</sup> Schönherr ascribes a similar fate to Jonke, whom he designates as Webern's literary relative by choice, his “literarischer Wahlverwandter.” Like his colleagues Bernhard and Jelinek, Jonke parlayed an initial contract with a prominent German publisher into subsequent success, as attested by the

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<sup>1</sup> “...fulfilled neither from the Austrian postal service nor from a wider public.” Ulrich Schönherr, “Zum Ort der Musik im Erzählwerk Gert Jonkes,” *Sprachmusik: Grenzgänger der Literatur*, ed. Gerhard Melzer and Paul Pechmann (Graz: Sonderzahl, 2003), 119.

string of literary awards he has won, starting with the inaugural Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 1977. However, if today he indubitably enjoys a reputation as one of contemporary Austria's leading authors, his work remains – five years since his premature death – undervalued beyond a coterie of dedicated critics. With the discrepancy between “wide repute and narrow actual readership” in mind, Vincent Kling suggests that a phrase once used by Mark Twain in another context – universally respected but seldom read – might well apply to many of Jonke's works.<sup>2</sup>

Jonke is a mouthful. His prose is dense and paratactic. His idiom is comic. He takes pleasure, to the point of indulgence, in digression and neologism, heaping compound noun upon compound noun. One of his translators prefaces an English translation of a Jonke text with a defense of Jonke's apparent inaccessibility, claiming that German language readers expect as much.<sup>3</sup> The strange and fantastical scenarios he invents – one from *Der Ferne Klang*, for example, recounts a party hosted by the composer Diabelli at which giant pictures that exactly portray what they are placed in front of are erected in the garden; while another, from *Schule der Geläufigkeit*, involves a music institute that houses 111 deteriorating, never-used pianos in its attic – owe something to magical realism. Jonke often “indulges” in vivid and rapturous description; the reader of German is put in mind of the word “schwärmerisch,” with its combined connotations of the enthusiastic, the lyrical and the rhapsodic. All of this has

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<sup>2</sup> Vincent Kling, “Gert Jonke,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 25 (2005), 23-4.

<sup>3</sup> Snook adds that a little readerly effort goes a long way: same point made by Vince Jean Snook “Translator's Introduction,” Gert Jonke, *The Distant Sound*, trans. Jean Snook (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press) v-vii.

gained him a reputation as a writer whose work is so turned in upon itself as to brook little or no traffic with the outside world. In the words of one observer, Jonke is a “Sprachartist, dem es weniger darum geht, Wirklichkeit zu schildern, als mit dem Wortmaterial selbst zu spielen.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “... a language artist who is less interested in portraying reality than he is in playing around with the material of words.” Music as something Jonke thematizes as out there operating in the world has been neglected in the Jonke scholarship at the expense of narrower and more philosophical concerns with music and language. In the final chapter of his book on Jonke – to my knowledge the only monograph written in English or German on Jonke to date – Schönherr carefully constructs a detailed argument about the relationship between music and language in Jonke, focussing initially on Jonke’s remarks on the topic in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit*. See *Das Unendliche Altern der Moderne. Untersuchungen zur Romantrilogie Gert Jonkes* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1994) For Schönherr, the best way to approach Jonke’s literary-musical reflections is to compare them to the influential account of music (and language) developed by the German Romantics. According to Schönherr, Jonke does not join the Romantics in privileging music above language. Rather he proclaims both music and language capable of producing an aesthetic surplus that can exert an influence on the recipient. Jonke advances a technical explanation for this subjective aesthetic experience. As Schönherr sees it, Jonke’s aesthetics of language, both as far as ordinary and musical language are concerned, is a negative one proceeding from their presumed mutual deficiency to fully carry meaning, although Jonke is careful to distinguish between the semantic meaning of ordinary language and musical meaning. As regards the latter, Schönherr sees Jonke distinguishing further between two types of musical meaning which stand in tension to one another: the acoustic representation of “des schriftlich Notierten” and the immanent motivic-functional logic of the sound material carried by the notation. This is a discrepancy that can’t be overcome: Schönherr here cites Jonke’s claim that every form of musical reproduction (Musikwiedergabe) is a form of musical description (Musikbeschreibung) that always fails to carry the meaning carried in the notation. In what Schönherr calls an “aporetische Argumentationsspirale,” Jonke takes this a step further by claiming that no composer has ever succeeded in producing the musical score that “he” worked on in his imagination (Vorstellung). At the end of this account, we are left with pure musical unintelligibility that removes itself from all attempts at representation but which, at the same time, forms the finality of all exertions at linguistic articulation. Schönherr concludes this initial reading by claiming that both musical and ordinary language are in the end only capable of gesturing toward “eine eine immaterielle, transzendente Dimension verweist, die nur mehr als „Stille“ und „Schweigen“ namhaft gemacht werden kann.” Note that Schönherr’s purpose in providing this background is to prepare the way for a consideration of the function of



Jonke's pen almost always finds its way to music. A kind of musical excess attaches itself to his work, alone discernable in his apparent compulsion to relate each and every of his titles to music. Kling is not alone in suggesting that Jonke, despite some serious competition, may well be the most musically obsessed of all contemporary Austrian authors.<sup>5</sup> If the critical temptation to make a musical pass at Jonke's work is therefore extremely high, Jonke's apparent verbalism has led commentators to assume that his musical interests are displaced from the world to the word. Predictably, then, and driven by the assumption that the sound and rhythm of Jonke's words are equally, if not more important, as their meaning, Jonke scholars have been very keen to impute a native musicality to his literary language, whether in the form of Jonke's "mouth music" (to borrow a phrase from Seamus Heaney) or in the form of musical structures that Jonke is said to apply to his prose. In both cases critics have tended to assume that Jonke's apparent "Abneigung gegen realistische Erzählweisen" – as one critic puts it – "begünstigt die Anwendung von musikalischen Kompositionsprinzipien in seinen Texten."<sup>6</sup>

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music in Jonke's trilogy, which is to say that he remains wholly uninterested in Jonke's critique of musical Austria in which Jonke embeds his account of New Music. It is in this public realm where I ultimately located the stillness and silence of Jonke's account.

<sup>5</sup> Kling, "Gert Jonke," 23.

<sup>6</sup> "...disinclination toward realistic modes of narrative facilitates the use of musical composition principles in his texts." Zdeněk Mareček, "'...kein Grund, die Zügel locker zu lassen': zur *Chorphantasie* von Gert Jonke und ihrem Ort im Kontext seines Werkes, *Kunst und Musik in der Literatur: Ästhetische Wechselbeziehungen in der österreichischen Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed., Roman Kopriva and Jaroslav Kovar (Vienna: Praesens, 2005), 23. Mareček, however, adds a warning about overestimating the extent to which Jonke's prose is actually structured by music.

In my introduction I noted that Austrian literature had by the decade central to this dissertation, the 1980s, finally loosened itself conclusively from the grip of ahistoricity, and that Bernhard and Jelinek were among those writers most willing to engage issues relating to Austria's wartime past. For many, Jonke places himself outside of this historical turn and even thumbs his nose at it. Bored and disillusioned with his hometown Klagenfurt – the city that would give rise to the arch-conservative Jörg Haider, and correspondingly known for its “provincial restrictiveness, lock-step social traditionalism, [and] reactionary politics” – Jonke moved to Graz in the 1960s.<sup>7</sup> The capital of Styria was rapidly developing a reputation as a center of experimental, avant-garde writing: Jonke was active in the arts center Forum Stadtpark, which had attracted a new generation of younger writers, and was later a charter member of the Grazer Autorenversammlung, founded in 1973.<sup>8</sup> The works he produced during this period, starting with his debut novel *Geometrischer Heimatroman* were, as Kling has put it, “uncompromisingly hermetic in structure and self-referential in development,” and quite deliberately so.<sup>9</sup> Jonke later distanced himself from them, however, rejecting the pieces as “language doodling.” Speaking on behalf of literary scholars who, by the

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<sup>7</sup> Kling, “Gert Jonke,” 8.

<sup>8</sup> Roland Innerhofer, “Avant-garde als Institution? Am Beispiel der ‘Grazer Autorenversammlung,’” *Schluß mit dem Abendland!: Der lange Atem der österreichischen Avantgarde*. Ed. Thomas Eder and Klaus Kastberger. *Profile* 3.5 (2000): 81-96.

<sup>9</sup> But see Kling's contextualized reading of *Geometrischer Heimatroman*. “Circling The Village: Contexts for Reading Gert Jonke's Geometric Regional Novel.”

early 90s, were attuned to reading contemporary Austrian literature through the lens of recent history, Światłowski likely had Jonke's early phase foremost in his mind when declaring (in an ironically convoluted formulation) that "die große Stunde der ihre Wortspiele selbstgenügsam entwerfenden Sprach- und Formvirtuosen *von der Art eines Gert Jonke...ist vorbei*."<sup>10</sup>

This chapter, however, attempts to liberate Jonke from the charge of excessive and world-shy formalism, and it does so by meeting him where he has often been seen at his most hermetic, namely at the level of his musical production. More specifically – and here we can return to the Webern passage from *Geblendeter Augenblick* with which this chapter opened – I concentrate in the following on Jonke's special concern with what I will refer to throughout the chapter as New Music. My initial focus is on two essays, *verheimlichte Kontinente* and *Überschallgeschwindigkeit der Musik*, which Jonke wrote in the late 80s and published alongside *Geblendeter Augenblick* in his 1996 volume *Stoffgewitter*. Later in the chapter I will turn to the portrayal of music in Jonke's play *Chorphantasie* (2003), which I propose reading with the assistance of the *Stoffgewitter* essays. The particular, historically-informed way in which Jonke operationalizes the term New Music will emerge as the chapter proceeds; but it is already helpful to observe that the Second Viennese School, which we associate with the music of Arnold Schoenberg and his two students, Alban Berg and Anton Webern,

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<sup>10</sup> "the glory days of the language virtuosos (who are happy to create material out of their own language games) in the manner of Gert Jone are past." Zbigniew Światłowski, "Das Identische und das Nichtidentische. Zum Wesen der österreichischen Literatur (und des Österreichischen)." *Nationale Identität: Aspekte, Probleme und Kontroversen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, eds. Joanna Jabłkowska and Małgorzata Półtola. (Wydaw: Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 1998), 315.

forms the centrifugal point around which Jonke's remarks in the above two essays revolve. As Jonke himself puts it in *Verheimlichte Kontinente*, Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern were among those early twentieth-century composers who "es als notwendig erachtet und erkannt [haben], die bis dahin herrschenden herkömmlichen und allzu bekömmlich gewordenen musikalischen Gesetze umzubauen, umzuwerfen, teilweise auszuschalten, um neue zu suchen, finden und anwenden zu können."<sup>11</sup> It is today well known that these three composers adopted the so-called twelve-tone method developed by Schoenberg at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Schoenberg's method, to which he famously attached the phrase "Emanzipation der Dissonanz,"<sup>12</sup> the composer abandons tonality by first organizing all twelve notes of the tempered scale into a row or series, which pervades the whole piece, the direction of which is determined by the initial row intervals. The aesthetic impulse here is one of control or calculation, though it should be emphasized that Schoenberg granted himself considerable freedom within the basic outlines of his method.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "...who deemed and recognized the necessity of modifying, overturning and partly discarding entirely the reigning musical laws which had become too easily digestible, doing this in order to be able to seek, find and apply what was new." Jonke, *Stoffgewitter*, 83.

<sup>12</sup> See Schoenberg's essay "Komposition mit zwölf Tönen." whose material reaches back to a lecture he gave in California in 1935. *Still und Gedanke: Aufsätze zur Musik*, ed. Ivan Vojtech (München: Fischer, 1976), 72-97.

<sup>13</sup> Schoenberg, for example, was not necessarily committed to doing away with "beauty" per se. "Was Dissonanzen und Konsonanzen unterscheidet, ist nicht ein größerer oder geringerer Grad an Schönheit, sondern ein größerer oder geringerer Grad an Faßlichkeit." ("What distinguishes dissonance and consonance is not the greater or the lesser degree of beauty but rather the greater or the lesser degree of graspability.") "Komposition mit zwölf Tönen," 73. Berg, in particular, remained interested in

The reading that follows locates Jonke’s reflections on New Music in light of postwar Austria’s wartime past. In Jonke’s essays a sharp criticism of musical Austria – which we can readily identify as the “Land of Music” – emerges. Jonke leverages his criticism through a distinction he draws between music and New Music. Jonke’s criticism of musical Austria is, in a double sense, historically informed. First, Jonke is sensitized to the historical dimensions of New Music’s reception in twentieth-century Austria (the Nazi period, in which New Music was dismissed as a degenerate Jewish form is the lowest and most significant point of that reception); and second, he suggests that New Music, the practitioners of which were aware of the distinctly historical conditions under which it arose, was partially calibrated as an aesthetic critique of (musical) Austria. To appreciate that Jonke’s critique is about far more than a trivial matter of taste, however, I propose we must ultimately historicize the aesthetic account of New Music upon which the critique is based.

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Part discursive, part poetic, part inspired musicology, Jonke’s essays *verheimlichte Kontinente* and *Überschallgeschwindigkeit der Musik* defy easy categorization. Commending them as “unsurpassed for lucid emotion and profound empathy, ranging with great originality over areas of discourse not usually connected,”

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developing the expressive potential that Schoenberg’s twelve-tone method appeared to grant him

Vincent Kling has usefully suggested approaching both pieces as “prose essays.” One benefit of concentrating on these essays as opposed to, say, Jonke’s loose trilogy of novels published between 1979 and 1983<sup>14</sup> is that the essays articulate a more direct form of social engagement, one that is more clearly grounded in Jonke’s concerns with postwar Austria’s musical culture.<sup>15</sup> In *Verheimlichte Kontinente* Jonke offers a wide-ranging and eclectic appreciation of Alban Berg. In that essay, Jonke recalls being told by Elias Canetti (it was the 1970s and both were both living in London) that Berg had planned to turn Canetti’s drama *Hochzeit* into an opera.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not the story is apocryphal, Berg, who died in freakish circumstances at age fifty, never wrote any such

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<sup>14</sup> Gert Jonke, *Schule der Geläufigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), *Der Ferne Klang* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1979), *Erwachen zum großen Schlafkrieg* (Salzburg: Residenz, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Pichler claims that the “gesellschaftskritisches Moment” or “social-critical moment” that he spies in all of Jonke’s texts – although admittedly more on linguistic grounds – is particularly noticeable in Jonke’s “essayistische Texte, bei denen der Autor selbst stärker präsent ist.” (“...essayistic texts, where the author is more acutely present”). Georg Pichler, “Politische Elemente im Werk Gert Jonkes,” *Die Aufhebung der Schwerkraft: Zu Gert Jonkes Poesie*, ed. Klaus Amann (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1988, 94). In locating Jonke firmly within postwar Austria’s cultural sphere, I write against scholars such as Schönherr or Ulrich Gamper, who – as the former has put it – views attempts to write about Jonke in national, that is to say Austrian contexts as “kein adäquates Beschreibungsmodell.” (“...not an adequate model of description.”) *Das Unendliche Altern der Moderne. Untersuchungen zur Romantrilogie Gert Jonkes*. Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 1994, 19. As I try to show, placing Jonke in an specifically “Austrian” context will allow social material to defacto emerge, although Jonke’s account is itself demonstrably rich in direct social content.

<sup>16</sup> Canetti claims in his autobiographical work *Das Augenspiel* that Büchner’s *Woyzeck* had likewise inspired him to write *Die Hochzeit*, although there is no direct connection between the two works. Canetti reports that he was taken by the self-denunciatory qualities of Büchner’s characters, who only exist through their attacks on *Woyzeck* *The Memoirs of Elias Canetti* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 599.

opera. Taking full advantage of these circumstances, Jonke ruminates rhapsodically on how the opera might have sounded. He imagines a key moment in which the piece, by sliding into a kind of self-ironic, paradoxical sentimentality, articulated a stance at odds with what Jonke elaborately terms the

“Operettenkitschgroßhandelsbetriebssentimentalitätsgehabe-verlogenheit” (78) of the society in which Berg lived.<sup>17</sup> For Jonke, moreover, the music he is imagining had the capacity to unmask and denounce that society’s degeneration into a “Walzerunseligkeitsbanalisierungssentimentalitätenverhamlosung.” (78)<sup>18</sup>

In confecting these extraordinary neologisms, and in suggesting that they are the product of Berg’s music, Jonke hears Berg articulating a social critique.

Moreover, it is a musical critique of society that is self-reflexive, since it makes its point by taking music itself as its own object. The waltz and the operetta, the two lead metaphors of Jonke’s neologisms, are also two musical forms that are particularly associated with Austria. In his Webern novella, Jonke portrays both as enemies of the Second Viennese School, aligning them with a society that was preoccupied with the superficial, the easily digestible and the complacently-self affirming.<sup>19</sup> The narrator of

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<sup>17</sup> “operettakitschwholesalebusinesssentimentalismwallowingemo-tionalfraudulence.” The translation is Vincent Kling’s, see Gert Jonke, “Continents Kept Hidden.” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 28 (3) 2008, 83.

<sup>18</sup> “waltzaccursedbanalizingssentimentalcutesy-everythingsniceprettyprettyizing,” “Contents Kept Hidden,” 83.

<sup>19</sup> In a grotesque biographical twist, Webern was constantly forced by the ever-present specter of poverty to travel through Austria and Europe conducting operettas, thus putting his activities as a composer on hold. For a more nuanced view of the function of

the Webern novella further remarks that when the Viennese of Webern's time referred to their city as the "Welthauptstadt der Musik" they usually only meant "den sogenannten Wiener Walzer,"<sup>20</sup> which the narrator then castigates as a "Metternich-Musik." Metternich was a notorious foreign minister of the Austrian Empire whose lengthy period of office during the nineteenth century is associated with excessive conservatism and repressive censorship.<sup>21</sup> In that respect, the coupling in Jonke's metaphor is a particularly jarring one that strips the waltz of its light and breezy connotations.

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This Metternich reference also demonstrates Jonke's ability to move fluidly between historical epochs and helps underscore a crucial point about his Berg essay: although it is directed toward the first half of the century, Jonke is clear that his claim about Berg's fictive piece still obtains *today*: "vermochte und vermag" is how Jonke describes the piece's abilities to expose and denounce (musical) Austria, a coupling his English translator renders "had this [capacity] *and still has today*."<sup>22</sup> For Jonke, then, a

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the Viennese operetta see Stefan M. Schmidl, "Die vielen Identitäten: Untersuchungen zur Funktion der Wiener Operette," *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 55 (2009): 319-336.

<sup>20</sup> "World capital of music...so-called Vienna Waltz."

<sup>21</sup> And the narrator then goes on to sarcastically claim that being in possession of artifacts such as Schubert's spittoon and chamber point, which are duly pressed into service as a herbal tea mug or salad bowl respectively, is enough (in Austria) to qualify its owner as "musical."

<sup>22</sup> Jonke, "Continents Kept Hidden," 83.



relationship seems to obtain between social and musical organization, and it is indeed possible to extract from his essays a critique of Austria as the “Land of Music.”

Note that this criticism is already latent in some of his earlier work. The passage from *Schule der Geläufigkeit* about deteriorating pianos that I mentioned above is a case in point.<sup>23</sup> There, two musically-trained brothers decide to visit their former professor at the Vienna music conservatory. Without quite knowing how they got there, the brothers find themselves trapped in the building’s attic, which contains 111 never-used grand pianos. Falling apart through disuse and neglect, their wood rotting and strings rusting (we are reminded here of the destroyed piano on which Wertheimer performs at the conclusion of *Der Untergeher*) the instruments were a donation to the music school. At the end of the story it becomes known that a donor has bequeathed a fresh batch of 111 grand pianos, the implication being that the sequence of storage and decay is set to be repeated. It is difficult, says Vincent Kling, *not* to see the music conservatory’s attic as a metaphor for contemporary Austria: here is a “country of earlier greatness,” he writes, “now dissipated, boasting about its musical and cultural “tradition”, a draw for tourists but a misnomer because this false tradition only fosters laziness and mindless repetition of the past through kitsch and sentimentalism.”<sup>24</sup> I endorse this interpretation but would also like to place special emphasis on the musical weighting in Jonke’s story. The 111 pianos are almost certainly a reference to Beethoven’s final piano sonata, his opus 111, a piece that is generally regarded as representing one of the pinnacles of the classical

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<sup>23</sup> Jonke – as was typical for him – later worked this material into a piece for the theater. See *Opus 111: Ein Klavierstück* (Verlag der Autoren, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Kling, “Gert Jonke,” 42.

cannon (we only need to think of the importance that Thomas Mann, writing through Adorno, attaches to the sonata in *Dr. Faustus*). The image of ascending to the musical heights, literalized by the location of the pianos in the attic of the music conservatory, is carried by the section title, *gradus ad parnassum*, in which the story is recounted.<sup>25</sup> If Jonke, then, is inflating Austria's image of itself as a profoundly musical nation, then he goes some way to deconstructing that same image by unlocking its underlying moribundity.

Jonke initiates a direct critique of the present-day Land of Music in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit*, an essay which contains his most detailed description of the aesthetic qualities he values in New Music (more on this below). Jonke rebukes contemporary conductors who, "je älter und verklärter sie werden, desto intensiver arbeiten sie in den diversen Tonstudios und Konzertsälen an nichts anderem als ihren jeweiligen endgültigen Fertigstellungen ihrer diversen bis zur Erschöpfung vollendeten akustischen Mausoleen."<sup>26</sup> The aspect of solemn and stately monumentality implied in the reference to acoustical mausoleums suggests a fixation on masterpieces of the distant past, which dovetails with a nearby reference to Vienna's *Zentralfriedhof*, where the composers responsible for these masterpieces – presumably Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert etc. – are buried under large and decorative gravestones with elaborate inscriptions. Indeed, if we step back to consider the matter from the broader

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<sup>25</sup> The title was used for a number of seminal pedagogical works by composers such as Fux, Clementi and – most famously – Czerny

<sup>26</sup> "The older and more transfigured they become, the more intensively they work in their different sound studios and concert halls on nothing else than their acoustic mausoleums, whose completion they pursue to the point of exhaustion."

argumentative perspective of this study, a form of monumentality would appear aptly descriptive of postwar Austria's overdetermined musical discourse. Stuck as it has been in the eternal loop of the past masters, contemporary Austria, the self-appointed "Land der Musik," has moved to a soundtrack wholly biased toward what Andreas Huyssen describes as "tradition and the museal."<sup>27</sup>

That Jonke is canvassing in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit* on behalf of twentieth-century music becomes clearer when, in a kind of imaginative plea, he envisions the Austrian conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt, whose work he admires, advancing beyond his current repertoire to conduct performances of Berg's Violin Concerto and his opera *Wozzeck*. Further, Jonke fantasizes about these public intercourses yielding to an "ohrenbetäubender Zeitungsblätterwaldgeräusch" (90)<sup>28</sup> produced by music critics responding to the performances as if they were hearing or noticing both for the first time. According to the scenario Jonke constructs, the music of the "Schönbergkreis" is yet to receive an adequate reception in Austria, tainted as it still is by the "Konzertsaalbestuhlungszertrümmerungsorgien (concert hall seat-trampling orgies) with which it was first greeted by the Vienna musical public.(90) It is in this sense that such music can still plausibly be referred to as "new."

For the time being, says Jonke, the obsessive orientation toward canonical pieces of the distant past is killing their very appeal. If we are to remain attached to the

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<sup>27</sup> Andreas Huyssen, "Monumental Seduction," 190.

<sup>28</sup> "...ear-deafening turning of newspaper pages."

“Tropfinfusionen der vergeblichen Anfangsinitialzündungen”<sup>29</sup> – by which I take him to mean the pathologizing practice of hooking ourselves to the drip feed of past musical masterpieces – “wird uns bald nämlich auch der Zauber Mozarts endgültig flöten gegangen sein, und zwar spätestens anlässlich des Jubiläums der laut Statistischem Zentralamt genau gezählten einmillionsten Neuinszenierung.” (92)<sup>30</sup> Jonke is not just being exuberantly clever here (in rearranging the name of Mozart’s opera *Zauberflöte* into the formulation “Zauber flöten gehen”); by gesturing toward the bureaucratic monitoring of Austria’s music culture, the impulse behind which appears to be celebratory and self-serving, he is simultaneously remarking (as he did with his reference to Metternich) on the close proximity in Austria of music and politics.<sup>31</sup>

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We have begun to perceive that Jonke’s (emerging) critique of Austria as the Land of Music is leveraged by a distinction he draws between music of different eras. As an aside we might note that Jonke is due some credit for proposing an intriguing musical-sociological position according to which the music of the vaunted past can only mean something to the extent that it continues to reveal and refresh itself in the music of the present. But I submit that Jonke aims at more than merely endorsing a naïve musical

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<sup>29</sup> “...drip feeds of futile initial sparks.”

<sup>30</sup> “...the magic of Mozart will soon have fluted away from us, and namely at the latest on the occasion of the anniversary of what the bureau of statistics tells us is exactly the millionth new production.”

eclecticism. In trying to be more precise about what he meant by music, the musicologist Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht once suggested working with the following terminological triad: Alte Musik – Musik – Neue Musik.<sup>32</sup> The middle term “music,” which Eggebrecht was roughly using to refer to the music of the long nineteenth century (namely from Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven all the way to Brahms, Mahler and Strauss), has normative value as the only designation that gets by entirely without a qualifier. Jonke, it seems to me, draws these categories “music” and “new music” into a critical relationship, by which I mean that his criticism of contemporary Austria’s fixation on past and proven musical masterpieces goes hand in hand with his decrying the neglect of the music of Berg and his colleagues.

It is implicit in Jonke’s critical account of contemporary Austria that its loud musical proclamations paradoxically announce it as “kein Land der neuen Musik.” The Austrian musicologist Gertraud Cerha (herself the wife of Austria’s most well-known postwar composer, Friedrich Cerha) has lamented the lack of any meaningful engagement with new music in postwar Austria. She remarked in a 1989 assessment of musical Austria that “it is clear that, for many, the task of national “reconstruction” engaged energies and emotions only insofar as they related to restoring the “greatness” of the past, and thus strengthened the dominance of traditional forces in Viennese

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<sup>32</sup> Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Was ist Musik?* (Wilhemshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1987), 108

musical life.”<sup>33</sup> This is a view that has been confirmed more recently by other commentators.<sup>34</sup>

From one perspective, the neglect of New Music is surprising: if New Music could be said to have a cultural home, then that home was Austria. Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern played an instrumental role in the 1922 founding in Salzburg of the *Internationale Gesellschaft für neuen Musik* (International Society for Contemporary Music,) the first ever society of its kind; and the influence of the Second Viennese School on musical developments over the past century can hardly be overstated. For a country wishing to promote itself as a musical nation, the music of Schoenberg and his colleagues provided a ready, accessible and internationally recognized arena of cultural achievement.<sup>35</sup>

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It could be claimed, however, that New Music brought this reception upon itself. As Alex Ross reports in *The Rest is Noise*, Schoenberg especially was not very

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<sup>33</sup> Gertraud Cerha, “New Music in Austria Since 1945,” *Tempo* 161/162 (1987), 36.

<sup>34</sup> Manfred Permoser “Zuviel des Neuen? Zur Rezeption zeitgenössische Musik im Nachkriegs-Österreich.” *Anklaenge 2006: Österreichische Musikgeschichte der Nachkriegszeit*, ed. Markus Grassl, Reinhard Kapp, Cornelia Szabo-Knotik (Vienna: Mille Tre, 2006) Eickhoff, Thomas. ““Mit Sozialismus und Sachertorte...” – Entnazifizierung und musikpolitische Verhaltensmuster nach 1945 in Österreich,” *Deutsche Leitkultur Musik?*, 85-101.

<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault and Pierre Boulez, “Contemporary Music and the Public.” *Perspectives of New Music* 24 (Fall 1985), 6

interested in cultivating an audience, and seemed to take a kind of dark pleasure in composing music that would be perceived as discomforting.<sup>36</sup> But in the context of postwar Austria (as the self-proclaimed Land of Music), the standard audience complaint that New Music just sounded bad can only, at most, be partially valid. In a conversation on contemporary music in which they circled around the Second Viennese School, Michel Foucault and Pierre Boulez suggested that the problem really lay with the unwillingness of the musical listener to vary their “mode of being” by entering the “difficult mode of attention” demanded by contemporary music. Those observations call to mind an essay Theodor Adorno wrote in 1960, a response to the publisher Peter Suhrkamp’s question about why people were still clinging to the term “neue Musik,” despite the fact that many of its representatives were long dead.<sup>37</sup> Adorno’s answer demonstrates his insistence on hearing music through the filter of recent (German) history. As he saw it, New Music – by which he meant the music of the Second Viennese School and its postwar serialist successors – had an obligation to sound in stark opposition to what he calls bourgeois music (we can think here again of the middle term – Musik – of Eggebrecht’s triad). Adorno considers bourgeois music incongruent with the present moment in history – it’s language is wrong – and its wrongness also has to do with a failure of society to recognize that wrongness as something *self-evident*. Worse, as Adorno further points out, most people immediately

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<sup>36</sup> Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 63.

<sup>37</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*. Verso, trans R. Livingstone (London & New York), 2011.

disqualify New Music, experiencing it as something that departs from their fixed notions of what constitutes music.

If we transfer these thoughts to the Land of Music discourse, postwar Austria's exclusion of New Music less surprising. Here was a musical school that had been written off by the Nazis as Jewish and degenerate – as having produced “atonale Klangfäkalien und Kakophonie” as Jonke's narrator colorfully puts it in *Geblendeter Augenblick*.<sup>38</sup> To engage New Music post-45 meant potentially and uncomfortably confronting the recent past, which many in Austria were not interested in doing. The music sociologist Cornelia Szabó-Knotik has argued along these lines:

Der mit dem Topos der Opferrolle Österreichs und seiner Wiederauferstehung behauptete Bruch mit der unmittelbaren, traumatisierten Vergangenheit wird in den folgenden Jahren und Jahrzehnten allgemein mit der Anspielung auf die besondere Tradition österreichischer Kunstmusik sowohl in der Produktion bedeutsamer Werke als auch in deren besonders sachgerechter Aufführung (Wiener Klangstil) unterstützt, die auf eine zurückliegende glorreiche Vergangenheit verweisen soll.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> “...atonal sound faeces and cacophonie.” Gert Jonke, *Stoffgewitter*, 111. All subsequent references to Jonke's three *Stoffgewitter* pieces will be made in the main body of the text.

<sup>39</sup> “The break with the recent past, maintained in conjunction with the the topos of victim myth and the resurrection of Austria, was supported in the years and decades that followed with reference to a particular tradition of Austrian art music and in the production of significant works which supposedly pointed to a glorious tradition lying



The emphasis on a particular musical tradition supported, if not enabled a habitual way of thinking that wanted nothing to do with the recent past. Writing in a different context about postwar Austria's Jewish community, Matti Bunzl has pointed out that

Jews disturbed the ongoing articulation of Austria's victim myth. As the actual victims of Nazi oppression, they not only functioned as embodied signs of the country's co-responsibility for the Holocaust, but undermined the conceptual stability of Austria's postwar arrangements.<sup>40</sup>

In my second chapter I argued that Bernhard, in his late works *Heldenplatz* and *Der Untergeher* styles Austrian Jewish characters who make competing claims against postwar Austria's musical tradition, and that this has the effect of drawing attention to the Jewish Other implicitly excluded by the Land of Music discourse. Transferring Bunzl's remark to the concerns of the present chapter, I submit that the music of the Second Viennese School functioned as a sonic equivalent to postwar Austria's "embodied" Jewish citizens, reminding Austrians wherever its music sounded of

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far in the past." Cornelia Szabó-Knotik, "Mythos Musik in Österreich: die Zweite Republik," 248. The preoccupation (fetish?) with a distinct Viennese "Klangstil" is a contemporary one, emerging as it did after WWII. The term became particularly associated with a series of performances of Mozart symphonies in the 1950s under Josef Kripps.

<sup>40</sup> Matti Bunzl, *Symptoms of Modernity: Jews and Queers in Late-Twentieth-Century Vienna*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 33.

Austria's wartime complicity. From this perspective, Jonke's intervention on behalf of New Music signals his willingness to engage the recent past.

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We saw that when Jonke discussed his fictive Berg piece he seemed to invest it with a kind of agency, an ability to operate productively on those listeners receptive to its "message." Returning now to that essay, *verheimlichte Kontinente*, we can note that Jonke's conspicuously optimistic starting point is that "jeder von uns...trägt den gesamten Kosmos in unendlich vielen Variationen und in komprimierter Form in sich verschlossen mit sich herum."<sup>41</sup> If the gesture behind this image is toward limitless human potential waiting to be set free, Jonke is quick to add that a combination of externally prevailing circumstances (that is, "äußerlich herrschenden Umstände," 73) and a fear of the unknown (both in ourselves and in other people) has, for the time being, rendered us incapable of cosmic exploration.

How to win back or develop this vital exploratory capacity? "Eines der Mittel dazu," writes Jonke in a key sentence, "besteht in der sinnlichen Hingabe an uns

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<sup>41</sup> "Each of us constitutes a self-enclosed world, carrying inside ourselves wherever we go the entire cosmos in infinitely many variations and in compressed form," *Continents Kept Hidden*, 81. What Jonke diagnoses as the contemporary human condition at the beginning of *Überschallgeschwindigkeit*, namely that humans have an expansive potential in hyper-condensed form that is waiting to be liberated, corresponds structurally to Jonke's later description of vertical music.

unbekannt gebliebene, überhörte oder “verhörte” (unerhörte) Musik.”(73)<sup>42</sup> Jonke has precisely in mind here early twentieth-century composers such as Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, who, as he puts it in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit* in a quote we encountered earlier, dared to change, modify, throw out, or even cancel the musical laws that had been handed down to them. In any case, one way of reading the above chain of Jonkerian adjectives - unbekannt – überhört – verhört – unerhört – is as a critical commentary on the receptive fate of the Second Viennese School in postwar Austria. To account for their music as unheard of, overheard, or misheard is to charge postwar Austria’s music culture with having paid scarce attention to Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern.

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Jonke’s chief insight into contemporary music lies in his suggestion that the twentieth century saw the rise of what he dubs “vertical music.” Until the beginning of the last century, music was primarily a linear affair, a matter of “die Ausbreitung von Klangsystemen in Zeiteinheiten.” (84)<sup>43</sup> This is the kind of music that, according to Jonke, proceeds at the speed of sound or “Schallgeschwindigkeit,” and the attentive listener is able to perceive most everything. But as a vertical as opposed to linear

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<sup>42</sup> “One of the means to this end consists of a sensuous yielding to music we have not yet really come to know, that we have not heard or have “misheard” (because it’s unheard-of.” Ibid., 81.

<sup>43</sup> “...the distribution of sound systems in units of time.”

phenomenon, music, Jonke maintains, starts to move beyond the speed of sound, at “Überschallgeschwindigkeit.” The effect of this music is not necessarily directly available to the ear, but given the right conditions it is capable of being registered all the same. Although he singles out Schönberg’s *Fünf Orchesterstücke* as one of the first ever pieces that was “beinah zwangsläufig vor allem vertikal zu hören.”<sup>44</sup> for Jonke it is Webern who was the most vertical of composers: his blink-and-you-will-miss-them pieces are “musikalisch mikroskopisch akustische Keimzellen gefrorene Zeit.” (87)<sup>45</sup> There’s so much compression in them – Jonke mentions at one point Webern’s capacity to fulfill the musical requirement of a “Durchführung“ or musical development in an instant through the use of overlaid chordal fragments –that the listener often has the experience that Webern’s pieces are continuing to unfold long after they are over. A complimentary impression is of sounds sparsely constructed merely for the purpose of drawing our attention to the silence or stillness between them. For Jonke, the resulting “eingekreistes Schweigen” (encircled silence) or “umrahmte Stille” (framed stillness) registers an arena of the inaudible, “das Unhörbare,” which starts to become “erahnbare,” to assume contours almost visible to our ears. (87)<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> “...perceivable almost perforce vertically.”

<sup>45</sup> “...musical microscopic acoustical wellsprings of frozen time.”

<sup>46</sup> Jonke’s remarks on New Music, coalescing as they do around Anton Webern, are idiosyncratic but not musicologically deviant. The American music critic Alex Ross, for example, has made note of the “impulse to go to the brink of nothingness” that is central to Webern’s aesthetic, and described his music as one that “hangs in the limbo between the noise of life and the stillness of death.” Ross also aligns Webern’s fixation on silence with a wider, linguistically-driven need for “communicative silence” in fin-de-siecle Vienna – such as was espoused by Wittgenstein and others. *The Rest is Noise*, 63.

The musical aesthetic that Jonke endorses here is one that eschewed monumentality and permanence, favoring instead shorter forms that tended – sometimes acutely – toward compression. Crucially, the kind of music on which Jonke fastens his ears is preoccupied with stillness and silence, even to the point where musical sound might paradoxically qualify as silence. At the same time Jonke promotes sound – musical sound – as a tool for drawing our sensible attention toward that which, strictly speaking, remains soundless. It has to do here with the paradoxical ability of music to model a form of silence for us. More specifically, musical sound is said to somehow form a tissue of silence and stillness that envelops the realm of the unhearable or the inaudible, making it perceptible to the ear. In its most extreme moments it threatens to become a kind of non-music. From the perspective of this articulated aesthetic, then, it is understandable that Jonke would so highly evaluate a piece by Berg that the composer never wrote. The imagined piece is a music without music, balancing on the edge dividing silence from sound. And it leads us to the music at the center of Jonke’s 2003 play *Chorphantasie*, which I think can be read productively in conjunction with Jonke’s two *Stoffgewitter* essays.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Gert Jonke, *Chorphantasie: Konzert für Dirigent auf der Suche nach dem Orchester* (Literaturverlag Droschl, 2003). The title refers to Beethoven’s Choral Fantasy, a showpiece for piano, orchestra and choir that Beethoven wrote for the 1808 benefit concert at which his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were premiered. All subsequent quotations will be made in the main body of the text.

*Chorphantasie's* subtitle – *Konzert für Dirigent auf der Suche nach dem Orchester* – startles out of us an initial orientation. A conductor walks onto a stage arranged for an orchestra whose members are absent. An encroaching flood has delayed them. Unruffled, he turns to the audience (who are assembled for Jonke's play) and instructs them to focus their full attention on his conducting baton. He proceeds to lead them in an impromptu performance of a symphony that they "play" without the assistance of musical instruments. Thus, the play's outer circumstances immediately announce a paradox: it will have to do here with a kind of music without music. At a stroke, Jonke's occupation with *silence*, mediated through his essayistic encounter with New Music, is projected even more radically.

The eponymous conductor, the play's central character, does the bulk of the talking. But by no means are his remarks restricted to the piece at hand: rather, they develop one (admittedly important) narrative strand among several others. As these sub-narratives appear and disappear, only to sometimes reemerge, so too does Jonke call on a small cast of appearing, disappearing, and sometimes reappearing secondary characters. The conductor relays one of the most unusual and certainly the most prominent of these sub-narratives. It involves a characteristically fantastic and circuitous tale about a wave of citizens who, at some unspecified time in the past, purchased, as a matter of urgency, special ear bud headphones. These transmitted to the listener a continuous stream of music broadcast from a central, government-run radio station. When the headphones precipitate a debilitating virus (which, moving from its origin in the ear drum to the spinal cord, strikes the afflicted listener paraplegic) the

government intervenes to forbid their use. In anticipation of the nasty withdrawal symptoms this prohibition is expected to cause, the government reacts by implementing an “öffentliche Beschallung aller Räume und Landschaften” (28)<sup>48</sup> – according to which the musical narcotic is eventually fed into every conceivable public space.

What the conductor describes, then, is a two-stage musical inundation moving from the personal to the public. In creating a scenario whereby occupying public space equates to an inability to escape music, Jonke fashions an absurdly faithful realization of postwar Austria’s musical claims, radicalizing his essayistic occupation with the excessive *sound* of contemporary Austria’s musical landscape. Austria, criticized by Jonke in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit* for its fixation with acoustic mausoleums, emerges here as a literal Land of Music. Moreover, the notion of state involvement in matters musical is conceptualized more aggressively than the charting by a “statistischer Zentralamt” of performances of *Zauberflöte* – as occurs in *Überschallgeschwindigkeit*. In *Chorphantasie* the government directly administers the musical inundation, transforming transforming Austria into a state of “totale Musik,” as Bernhard puts it in a passage from *Alte Meister*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “...public sonication of all spaces and landscapes.”

<sup>49</sup> Jonke appears in dialogue with Thomas Bernhard, who in *Alte Meister* allows the embittered music critic Reger to remark: “Das Musikhören ist nichts Außergewöhnliches mehr, überall hören Sie heute Musik, gleich wo Sie sich aufhalten, Sie sind geradezu gezwungen, Musik zu hören, in jedem Kaufhaus, in jeder Arztordination, auf jeder Straße, Sie können heute der Musik gar nicht mehr entkommen, Sie wollen ihr entfliehen, aber Sie können ihr nicht entfliehen, dieses Zeitalter ist total von Musik untermalt, das ist die Katastrophe. In unserer Zeit ist die totale Musik ausgebrochen, überall zwischen Nordpol und Südpol müssen Sie sie hören...” *Alte Meister* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt am Main, 1985), 73.

Importantly, Jonke links the progressive musical flooding with various mental distortions. When, in the first stage of the musical inundation, the transmission occurs through the headphones, the music is said to encourage a smallness of thinking and to lull the listener into a grotesquely misleading sense of self-importance. Moreover, the crippling virus that follows is not the fault of the headphones; rather the virus is said to lurk “in dieser sogenannten Musik selbst, in ihrem verdreckten Klang und ihrem virusinfizierten Schall.” (29)<sup>50</sup> Later, following the implementation of the public “Beschallung,” the conductor extends this pathological conception of music by making it responsible for an alarming series of cognitive deficits, to wit: “Verblödung der Gefühle”, “Vertreibung der Empfindungsintelligenz”, “Ausbreitung der Stumpsinnigkeit”, and “allgemeines Verkürzungsdenken.” (29-30)<sup>51</sup> I read these metaphors as cognitive variations on the “Stumpsinnigkeit” caused by musical excess that Bernhard appears to postulate in *Heldenplatz*. In the context of postwar Austria’s historical moment, then, these sonically produced mental deficits map onto a populace who have used music to enable a cognitive avoidance of the past.

In a jolting twist, however, the conductor likens the musical omnipresence to nothing less than a “Musikgenozid” or “musikalischer Massenmord.” (47) These unusual nominal forms not only refer us to the Holocaust, thus wrenching music into the purview of Austria’s National Socialist past: they also carve out a role for music as a “totalitäre Macht.” (72) Having been ascribed genocidal qualities, music becomes

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<sup>50</sup> “...in this so-called music itself, in its soiled sound and virus-carrying sounding.”

<sup>51</sup> “...enfeeblement of feelings, banishment of sensitivity-intelligence, dissemination of dull-wittedness, and a universal reductive thinking.”



invested with murderous agency. But the designations are also ambiguous. Insofar as one can determine a concrete victim, it seems to be music itself. Jonke's solution to this sonic overload is not to abandon music but rather to call upon it as a kind of acoustical antidote. The piece in question has to do with a music, or non-music, that radically insists upon silence. Jonke, it seems to me, postulates a musical silence that – in the face of the musical inundation he otherwise portrays – demarcates a space for the listener. In this space the listener is able to exercise a “Grundrecht auf Stille” (20) as the conductor puts it.

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A series of potent metaphors emerge from the silence-sound dichotomy of Jonke's musical presentation. I mentioned above that the adjectives Jonke places in front of the music of the Second Viennese School in *Verheimlichte Kontinente*, when historicized, double as a commentary on the continued non-reception of New Music in postwar Austria, a state of affairs that Jonke criticizes by constrating it with the excessive sound of the Land of Music. But I also think that Jonke is also working with an aesthetic distinction between sound and silence which, when historicized another way, emerge as a commentary on the postwar Austrian subject. If Jonke constructs the sonic density of postwar Austria's musical soundtrack as having impeded the listener's capacity for thought and reflection, New Music, Jonke seems to be suggesting, offered a silent space

or a cognitive resource in and through which the kind of historical reflection that did not take place in postwar Austria might have occurred.

However, if we are to make productively available the metaphor of postwar Austria's musically mediated silence, we must also recognize that the negative musical correlate of this productive silence is also embedded in Jonke's account, which is to say that he remains sensitive to the possibility that New Music, by articulating the uncompromising musical stance that it did, had effectively sounded itself out of history altogether – a form of empty noise or silence amounting to the same thing.<sup>52</sup> To argue this is to extend Jonke's exchange with the historiography of music beyond 1945 so as to take into account the development of a postwar musical serialism, the aesthetic heir to the Second Viennese School in postwar Europe whose aesthetic program was based, in part, on a radical and ahistorical autonomy already nascent in Schoenberg's music.<sup>53</sup>

Ultimately, these paradoxes don't admit of any solution, or at least not any straightforward solution. Jonke, it seems to me, can only partially resolve the issue by constructing what Trabert has identified as a "radikale Rezeptionsästhetik/radical

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<sup>52</sup> In his afterword to *Chorphantasie*, Ulrich Schönherr also notes this possibility by referring to micro-stories in the play which „mit Ironie, Witz und Sarkasmus, aber auch mit gebrochenem Pathos und Melancholie den Zustand der (avancierten) Musik am Ende der Moderne reflektieren.“ „Abzugeben in der Welt, dicht an der großen Dornenhecke, der Grenze der Vernunft.“ Anmerkungen zu Gert Jonkes *Chorphantasie*,“ Gert Jonke, *Chorphantasie*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> The scenario that Jonke fashions in *Chorphantasie* likewise seems to bring him in contact with the American composer John Cage, whose preoccupation with silence was consecrated most fully in his so-called silent piece 4'33,“ in which a pianist, for the eponymous duration of the piece, sits silently at the piano and plays nothing.

aesthetics of reception.”<sup>54</sup> Jonke agitates for a model of reception according to which the passive listener is rendered active. What emerges is not Adorno’s rarefied active listener anticipating and following the already composed musical event. Rather, this is a listener who seeks out musical silence and builds upon it with imagined musical material, such that they simultaneously assume the role of performer. Within this basic framework Jonke engages a number of different receptive scenarios from the uncomposed Berg piece, which requires an act of imaginative intervention on behalf of the listener – in this case Jonke himself – to the ersatz musicians in *Chorphantasie* who, as the conductor puts it, constitute “reine Schalldenker, die musizieren, ohne Instrumente zu benötigen.” The musical audience, usually cast in a passive role, is here assigned an active one.

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Finally, the line of argument I have pursued leads me to propose a reevaluation of Jonke’s oft-noted silence not just toward the outside world, but to postwar Austria’s past. In one of his seldom interviews, W.G. Sebald spoke about the importance of approaching Germany’s WWII legacy obliquely, as it were, guided by the recognition that direct confrontation courted the risk of alienating listeners and blocking receptivity. The novelist, says Sebald, needs to “find ways of convincing the reader that it [namely,

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<sup>54</sup> Florian Trabert, “Kein Lied an die Freude.” *Die Neue Musik des 20. Jahrhunderts in der deutschsprachigen Erzählliteratur von Thomas Manns Doktor Faustus bis zur Gegenwart.*“ (Würzburg: Ergon, 2011), 417.

the history of persecution] is something on your mind, but you don't necessarily roll out on every other page...the reader needs to be prompted that the narrator has a conscience and that he is and has been for a long time engaged with these questions."<sup>55</sup> Sebald's quote, I think, speaks to the indirect – and in his case musically-inflected confrontation with the Austrian past that Jonke engineers.

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<sup>55</sup> W.G. Sebald, Interview with Michael Silverblat, KCRW Radio, December 6, 2001.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Examining the portrayal of music in selected works of Thomas Bernhard, Elfriede Jelinek and Gert Jonke, this dissertation has made a sustained case for approaching postwar Austrian literature, especially as it manifested itself around the crucial decade of the 1980s, as a *musically* inflected site of critical reflection concerning contemporary Austria's troubled postwar trajectory. More specifically, I have argued that Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke identify and critically engage as instrumental the role played by postwar Austria's ongoing musical appeals – operationalized here as the Land of Music discourse – in the shaping of a postwar Austrian identity founded on a myth of Austrian wartime victimhood. The plausibility of this argument has pivoted on the overarching attempt this dissertation has made at expanding music as an object for literary investigation. These three authors, as I have shown, do not recruit music into their work so that it might serve exclusively or even primarily as an abstract phenomenon turned in upon itself; rather, they allow music to circulate as contested tool that can be taken up in order to accomplish specific types of social and cultural work.

Throughout this study, I have drawn on contemporary musicological thought as conceptual support for identifying and clarifying this expansion, but I have also endeavored to show that such a treatment is prefigured in the collective musical account that Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke furnish. If each of them portray a version of Austria as the land of music, they equally show that musical production in postwar Austria was not merely an innocent, benign or strictly private matter, but that it was embedded in and

contributed to surrounding and highly contentious discourses concerning postwar Austria's National Socialist past. For Bernhard, then, Austria's musical pronouncements often merge with Nazi ideology, and musical activity becomes an occasion, sometimes overt and sometimes covert, for reinforcing, even celebrating Austria's Nazi past. For Jonke, who diagnoses a kind of musical saturation in postwar Austria, musical activity becomes a metaphor for the self-congratulatory and historically insensitive collective headspace of his fellow citizens. And for Jelinek, the androcentric conception of music sustaining postwar Austria's privileged and dominant musical discourses is a key albeit covert ingredient in contemporary Austria's ongoing gender politics of everyday fascism.

Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke manipulate *literary* resources in order to communicate the above accounts, which is to say that, in their hands, literature becomes a creative, imaginative and potent mode for casting a penetrating light on the conjuncture between Austria as the musically mediated Second Republic and its National Socialist past. Another way of saying this is that these three authors were able to leverage literary techniques (such as satire, irony, exaggeration and verbal inundation) to manufacture and sustain a way of writing about music that speaks to, if not outright anticipates, new musicology's conceptual trajectory. Indeed, when Susan McClary speaks about the stylistic resources she recruited in *Feminine Endings* as a way of radically decentering music – “my writing style relies heavily on the juxtaposing of radically different registers of speech: colloquialisms continually arise to deflate the high tone of complex theoretical formulations, slightly veiled allusions to biblical

scripture or pop tunes proliferate, and puns become crucial to the rhetorical structure of individual essays”<sup>1</sup> – her statement reads as if it were lifted from an account of the prose style of Jelinek’s *Die Klavierspielerin*. My purpose in quoting McClary is not to entirely elide literary modes into musicological ones (although her comment does suggest that the boundary between musicological and literary inquiry is porous): it is rather to suggest on the basis of my findings that literary inquiry might, in the future, be explicitly drawn upon by musicologists and music historians as a legitimate and complimentary source of musical inquiry.

The above observations are cast in general terms, but we might narrow our discussion by returning briefly to the question I raised in my introduction about whether Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke’s collective literary account of musical Austria might be viewed as a contribution – hitherto unacknowledged – to the project of a late literary modernism. Although I cannot hope to give a definitive answer to this question here – not least because the secondary question of where to place Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke in respect to modernism, postmodernism and the avant-garde is a vexed and complicated one (as even a quick glance at the secondary literature attests<sup>2</sup>), it seems to

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<sup>1</sup> “Feminine Endings in Retrospect,” *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 2002), xii.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Allyson Fiddler, “There goes that Word again, or Elfriede Jelinek and Postmodernism,” *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*, ed. Jorun B. Johns and Katherine Arens (Riverside: CA, Ariadne Press, 1994), 129-49. Although postmodern techniques (such as a blurring of the distinction between high art and mass culture, a stylistic eclecticism, and a questioning of the originality or genius of the artist) are clearly present in Jelinek’s work, for Fiddler Jelinek’s “postmodernism” is strongly diluted by her Marxist feminist allegiances. Elsewhere, Andrea Kunne has identified postmodern techniques in each of Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke as part of her wider

me that Richard Langston's recent account of the postwar German avant-garde(s) offers us a potentially useful frame for coming at the above question. Pointing out that its chief orientation was toward the violent postwar resonances of Nazism, he defines the German avant-garde as "that extreme faction of aesthetic modernity intent on bulldozing affirmative culture."<sup>3</sup> In Langston's account, then, the German avant-garde distinguishes itself by its unyieldingly critical stance toward the affirmative present, and by trying to find ways of using the wartime past to navigate the present toward a better future. Given that the tension between an affirmative culture and a compromised and unacknowledged history was also present in postwar Austria – and even then in an intensified form – it seems possible to tentatively place Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke under the aspect of a wider postwar avant-garde that defined itself via the stance it took against a lingering fascism. In the case of these three authors, though, it is a form of avant-gardism, overlooked until now, that distinguishes itself through its relentless willingness to engage *musical* discourse as a way of confronting postwar Austria's unresolved Nazi legacy.

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examination of postmodernism in postwar Austrian literature: *Postmoderne contre coeur: Stationen des Experimentellen in der österreichischen Literatur* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2005). Konzett has attempted to come at Bernhard's much-discussed iconoclasm by locating his ongoing literary critique of all things Austrian within the broader ambit of the postwar Austrian avant-garde. See "National Iconoclasm: Thomas Bernhard and the Austrian Avant-garde," *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002, 1-23).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Langston, *Visions of Violence: German Avant-Gardes After Fascism* (Northwestern University Press, 2007), 10.



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The weighty musical fixation that manifests itself in their collective work, coupled with the fact that they reflect almost exclusively on classical music, suggests that Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke may have remained partially beholden to the narrow, homogenous and privileged tradition of “Kunstmusik” or “ernste Musik” (the German terms, with their adjectival references to “art” or “serious” music, are revealing) that underwrote the Land of Music discourse. I submit that their narratives occasionally lack a sustained reflection on the exclusionary aspects of postwar Austria’s musical discourses. This is far from a trivial point: in failing to move outside of this narrow tradition, these authors risked reinscribing the politicized discourse of Austria as the Land of Music toward which they were otherwise so critical.<sup>4</sup>

In order to address this limitation I would like turn briefly to the work of Lilian Faschinger, more specifically to her 1999 novel *Wiener Passion*. Although only four years older than Jonke and Jelinek, Faschinger did not see her literary career flourish until the early 1990s (her debut novel *Die neue Scheherazade* appeared in 1986). Perhaps as a result of the more recent vintage of her work, Faschinger’s literary project has not been as directly concerned with postwar Austria’s wartime past as Bernhard or

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<sup>4</sup> Given that all three authors made a name for themselves on the German literary market, which provided the bulk of their readers, their musical preoccupation may have also had the effect of reinscribing postwar Austria’s musically mediated attempt to distance itself from (Nazi) Germany.

Jelinek's. That said, her critical engagement with Austria as the Land of Music makes her a literary heir to the three authors I have examined in this study.

*Wiener Passion* recounts the story of Magnolia Brown, an out-of-work American actor and singer who is sent to Austria, her mother's country of birth, to train for a role in a Broadway musical about Freud that has somewhat recklessly been promised her. Her teacher in Vienna is the sickly but renowned Josef Horvath, a former student in the Vienna Boys' Choir. In the Vienna apartment belonging to the conservative aunt who is hosting her, Brown happens across a handwritten manuscript which turns out to be an autobiography written by an ancestor of hers, Rosa Havelka, a Bohemian servant who escaped to Vienna at the end of the nineteenth century in search of a better life. The manuscript, which details the few highs and many lows of Rosa's path through Habsburg Vienna, constitutes the second narrative of the novel.

Like Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke, Faschinger strives to establish a version of contemporary Austria as the Land of Music. It is not only that in the first fifty or so pages of the novel Faschinger adumbrates a virtual who's who of Austria's great composers (given that only Austrian composers are named, this proliferation evokes an initial and intense musical parochialism).<sup>5</sup> It is also the case that the residents of Faschinger's Vienna are preoccupied with asserting and maintaining its reputation as the city of music. From the taxi driver who declares himself deeply moved by Mozart's late works to the café waiter who reacts similarly to Mozart's masses, everyone and anyone

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<sup>5</sup> Namely, Gluck, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Wolf, Mahler, Schoenberg, and Berg — each of whom is worked meaningfully into the narrative.

in the city might be expected to initiate or participate in a discussion involving music. Members of the musical establishment such as Brown's singing instructor Horvath and the latter's former prefect at the Vienna Boy's Choir, but also not especially musical locals such as Aunt Pia, project a sense of cultural superiority borne of the knowledge that they are the rightful inheritors of a cultural vocabulary, from which they borrow freely, for describing and discussing music.

In three key scenes, Faschinger shows how Austria's musical discourses circulate perniciously with a racist ideology motivated by an underlying hyper-nationalist appeal. Driven by his pathological identification with Schubert and his music, and enticed by the "prospect of living in Schubert's own aura" (13), Horvath tries to convince the local authorities to grant him community housing in Schubert's *Sterbehaus*, the building in which he died.<sup>6</sup> The path to securing the apartment is a bureaucratically circuitous one that requires Horvath to induce a decline in his already fragile health by temporarily moving into an apartment badly afflicted by rising damp. But some remarks by the cashier at the *Sterbehaus* suggest that Horvath's plan has excellent prospects for fulfillment. She responds to Horvath's initial inquiry by informing him that the "tenants' association" has already "unanimously spoken out against the affront of having members of a foreign ethnic group constantly present in Schubert's Death House, in view of the fact that Schubert wrote music that was so very

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<sup>6</sup> "Andererseits war die Aussicht, in seiner Aura zu leben, verlockend." (26)

German, so profoundly German.” (12)<sup>7</sup> Horvath accepts the news of the group protest without any kind of objection, and he presently gains occupancy of the room.

Soon afterwards, the former prefect of the Vienna Boys’ Choir informs Horvath that Vienna’s reputation as the “Weltstadt der Musik” (136) or “world capital of music” (106) is endangered by the slipping standards of its music teachers. He lends explicitly racist contours to this statement by parenthetically adding that this deficiency is not recognized by the “troops of ignorant little Japanese girls” (101) who come to the city wishing to be turned into Queens of the Night<sup>8</sup> — a pointed reference to the character from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, who is charged with singing the notoriously challenging “der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen”, one of the most famous, identifiable, and popular operatic arias of all time. As a result, he diagnoses a figurative crumbling of Vienna’s leading musical institutions such as the Golden Hall of the *Musikverein*, the *Konzerthaus*, and the *Wiener Kammeroper*.<sup>9</sup> The implication is that the Japanese women are themselves, by dint of their aesthetic incapacity to discern good from bad, combined with the sheer volume of their presence in Vienna, responsible for the proliferation of ill-qualified teachers and the attendant drop in teaching standards. If the granting of musical instruction had hitherto been confined to our Austrian own, the prefect’s unstated argument seems to run, we would never have arrived at the current

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<sup>7</sup> “der doch eine zutiefst deutsche Musik komponiert habe, eine zutiefst deutsche Musik.” (24)

<sup>8</sup> “die großteils ungenügend ausgebildeten Musikpädagogen, deren mangelhafte Kenntnisse den Heerscharen hilfloser Japanerinnen, die zu Königinnen der Nacht ausgebildet zu werden wünschten, nicht auffielen” (136).

state of affairs.

Accompanying Magnolia on a visit to Vienna's *Zentralfriedhof* or Central Cemetery, Tante Pia approvingly quotes her late husband's opinion about the Jewish section of the cemetery: Its neglected condition, he used to complain, is "a disgrace to German-speaking Austrians with patriotic and Catholic feelings" (49).<sup>10</sup> The part of the cemetery containing the composers' tombs, Aunt Pia is relieved to note, forms a "corrective" or "Gegengewicht" to the Jewish section. In place of the standard German word for composer, "Komponist," Aunt Pia uses the word "Tonschöpfer," which translates literally as "sound creator." Its antiquated Germanic etymology delivers a formulation laden with emotion, one that provides ballast to her blatantly nationalist appeal. In a further verbal maneuver, which inductively reinforces the importance of music for Vienna, Pia opines that the graves of the composers are among some of the best and most beautiful of what Viennese cemeteries have to offer, just as the cemeteries themselves are among the best and most beautiful of Vienna's many attractions.

In these three scenes the speakers in question raise music to the level of an absolute: Schubert's compositions are "so profoundly German," Vienna is the "world capital of music" and the section of the cemetery housing the famous composers is included on the shortlist of Vienna's most outstanding attractions. The speakers also engage the image of Austria as the land of music; they invest music with a particular

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<sup>10</sup> "eine Schande für national und katholisch empfindende Österreicher deutscher Muttersprache" (69).

geographical or national allegiance, whether as something specifically German, something that allows Vienna to proclaim itself a world capital, or as an art form that is likely to secure approval from German-speaking Austrians with nationalist (and Catholic) leanings. In each example, Faschinger places music into conflict with something explicitly foreign, as if to suggest that the two are fundamentally incompatible: The proud music tradition that Schubert represents conflicts with what is “ethnically foreign”; the Japanese singing students are proclaimed indirectly responsible for a deficiency in musical pedagogy, which ultimately threatens Vienna’s musical reputation (and hence they are themselves opposed to that tradition); and the venerable plot of land, in which the great composers are buried, exerts an influence that might be used aesthetically to offset the highly undesirable Jewish influence lurking nearby.

The reader may have tripped over the double use of the adjective “German” by the cashier at Schubert’s *Sterbehaus* to account for Schubert’s music. Standing in front of Mozart’s cenotaph at the Central Cemetery, Aunt Pia uses a complimentary formulation: “What an inspired artist, such very German music” (49). Given the overtly racist (and in Aunt Pia’s case, anti-Semitic) context in which the ascription occurs, it is no stretch to identify its use with the “deutschnational Gesinnter” (388) who, later in the novel, and in a declared attempt to rid the city of its purportedly foreign elements, publicly and violently attacks women of visibly different ethnic backgrounds before broadcasting his deeds to the city’s slew of conservative newspapers. The novel’s English translator uses “right-wing nationalist” (301), which, though capturing well the ideology of the person concerned, leaves out the appeal to something specifically

German (“a person who is German-national minded” is an inelegant though more literal translation of the original). From this perspective “German” acts a kind of code for the rampant pro-German sentiment that impelled Austria to join forces with Nazi Germany in 1938. Faschinger is subtly drawing our attention to the ease of ideological traffic between a (neo-)Nazi mentality and talk about music. The idea that the “arch-Austrian” composers Schubert and Mozart wrote particularly German music is also a reminder of the artificiality, touched upon earlier, with which many Austrians differentiated their own cultural heritage from that of Germany after 1945.

If Faschinger deftly shows how the discourse of Austria as a land of music is self-invalidating in the way I describe above, the deliberately complicated character she creates in Magnolia Brown also poses a threat to the discourse. The child of a white mother and black father, Magnolia at one point recounts the meeting of her parents in 1960s New York. Her mother, who had moved to that city from Minnesota to study political science, was at a demonstration for the rights of Black Americans, “in the course of which she collided with a young black jazz musician, more precisely a saxophonist, indeed even more precisely an alto saxophonist, in fact my future father” (150).<sup>11</sup> The verbal gesture of specificity increasing through repetition produces an initial description of Magnolia’s father that emphasizes his identity as a jazz musician and alto saxophonist. By constructing the scene the way she does, Faschinger evokes an

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<sup>11</sup> “Im Laufe derer sie in einen jungen schwarzen Jazzmusiker, genauer gesagt, in einen Saxophonisten, noch genauer gesagt, in einen Altsaxophonisten, nämlich in meinen zukünftigen Vater...hineingelaufen sei” (196).

alliance between jazz as an identifiably black American musical form with the vibrant and progressive politics of the 1960s.

Note also that the type of saxophone Magnolia's father plays — the alto — is the form of that instrument most often used in serious music compositions.<sup>12</sup> It is possible, then, to view the deployment of the instrument in the above scene as a blurring of the boundaries between the musical categories of “jazz” and “serious” music.

Viewed in isolation this stretches the point. But consider that Faschinger seems to more generally revel in this blurring — such as when she has Magnolia honoring the two sides of her heritage by pairing Schubert's *Die Forelle* with the Negro spiritual *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*; or when she sends Magnolia to Vienna to train for the role as Anna Freud in a musical, a genre that Horvath and Aunt Pia try desperately to integrate to their pre-existing musical schema<sup>13</sup>; or indeed, when in her second narrative she transforms Rosa into a street-performing zither player whose repertoire encompasses not only Schubert and Dvořák, but also the de facto Tyrolean national anthem known as the “Andreas Hofer Lied.”

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<sup>12</sup> Alexander Glazunov, for example, wrote his Concerto in E flat Major for alto saxophone. The instrument also features prominently in Ravel's orchestral arrangement of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

<sup>13</sup> Aunt Pia, for example, responds to Magnolia's letter of inquiry from New York (in which she presumably talks about her wish to come to Vienna to train for a singing role in a Broadway musical) by saying that Magnolia “obviously hoped for a career in opera or operetta” (26)/ “Es war ihr ein Vergnügen, Floras Tochter, die offenbar das Opernbeziehungszeise Operettenfach anstrebe” (43). And, in conversation with his former tutor at the Vienna Boys' Choir, Horvath glosses the Freud musical as “a very modern work” (103)/ “ein sehr modernes Werk” (138), almost as if he were assigning it to the category “neue Musik” or contemporary music.



By repeatedly diluting what would otherwise be registered as high-music scenes with musical pieces, genres, and instruments that do not traditionally fall within the ambit of serious music, Faschinger effectively questions the right it implicitly claims for itself to stand, head and shoulders above the musical crowd, as a homogenous tradition. This dilution, in turn, weakens the exclusionary mandate that the tradition otherwise arrogates to itself, irrespective of whether the exclusion cuts across lines of race, gender, or class. This brief reading of *Wiener Passion* allows us to see how in Faschinger's account Austria's musical others – whether cast at the level of race, nation, region, genre, or even instrument – are brought to the narrative fore. The alternative musical voices she brings out oppose the monologic and hegemonic character of postwar Austria's musical discourse. Faschinger, we can conclude, is more attentive to the exclusionary aspects of postwar Austria's musical discourses than any of Bernhard, Jelinek or Jonke, who have trouble stepping outside of the homogenous and exclusionary musical tradition at the heart of the Land of Music discourse – upon which they otherwise place considerable pressure. Their critique of the cult of serious music in Austria appears at times compromised by their own musical allegiances.

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Commenting on Thomas Bernhard's portrayal of music and musical Austria in *Der Untergeher*, Gernot Gruber claimed that the author "kritisiert den Kontext dieser

Musikszene radikal und lässt die Musik als Lebenshalt doch zugleich gelten.”<sup>14</sup>

Restated in terms of musical autonomy, I take this proposition to mean that music, according to Bernhard’s presentation in the above novel, was able to disburden itself from its questionable cultural context and to make itself available as positive and countervailing resource. Broadening this point, we lean on Adorno to observe that music, to the degree that it refused to have anything to do with postwar Austrian society’s compromised historical subjectivity, was capable of articulating a radical critique of that society, a critique that, in turn, made itself available to the music recipient as a cognitive resource.

When viewed through the lens of the present study, the notion of music having provided a “life foothold” has some argumentative traction. Despite the strong critique they provide of musical Austria, the three authors I have called upon in this study seem unable to stop themselves from writing about music. This inability to let go of music – A mental habit these authors share with their protagonists – suggests that music, for Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke as much as for Robert Schuster, Erika Kohut or the conductor from *Chorphantasie*, continued to play some kind of redemptive or rehabilitative, that is to say utopian, role.

Ultimately, however, Gruber’s statement posits too clean a separation between musical autonomy and musical context. It is rather the case, I think, that Bernhard,

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<sup>14</sup> “radically criticizes the context of this music scene while allowing music to remain valid as a life foothold.” Gernot Gruber, “Die Metaphern von Musik und musikalischem Virtuositum in Der Untergeher und Der Ignorant und der Wahnsinnige,” *Die Musik, das Leben und der Irrtum. Thomas Bernhard und die Musik*, ed. Otto Kolleritsch (Universal Edition: Graz 2000), 188.

Jelinek and Jonke's collective portrayal speaks to an important distinction the music sociologist Lucy Green has articulated between two types of musical meaning, inherent and delineated. Inherent meaning denotes the materiality of what we hear, the sound of music itself, which we may or may not perceive as a relationship obtaining between and among musical "bits." Although, as Green notes, it is commonplace to view serious music as if it were a wholly enclosed, autonomous, art form that was only capable of producing inherent meanings, she insists that musical meaning also includes the contextual associations that music, as a social sign, is always metaphorically sketching out or *delineating*. As she puts it: "When we listen to music, we cannot separate our experience of its inherent meaning entirely from a greater or lesser awareness of the social context that accompanies its production, distribution or reception."<sup>15</sup>

As that description suggests, these two types of meaning are interdependent logical moments whose operation can only be separated conceptually, not in practice. Transferred to the account of musical Austria that has emerged in the literary texts I have examined, what results is the kind of dialectical tension between "autonomous works and the social relations of their production and reception" that also ultimately

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<sup>15</sup> *Music, Gender, Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7. As an example of musical delineation Green cites the identification with or repudiation of the sub-cultural values that we might believe are shared among members of a concert audience. The beliefs and thoughts that constitute those values seem to merge so completely with the music itself and to be so socially accepted, that it starts to look as if the music has come to delineate or even mean those values.

prevailed in Adorno's musicological approach.<sup>16</sup> If Bernhard, Jelinek and Jonke apprehended a need for postwar Austrians to recuperate a form of musical autonomy – a need that was directly proportional to the degree with which Austria's musical inundation became imbricated in its failure to confront its past – then their shared historical sensibility made it doubly necessary for them to hear and reflect on music through the filter of postwar Austria's National Socialist past.

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<sup>16</sup> Max Paddison, *Adorno's Aesthetics of Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2. Note, however, that Adorno's concept of "social relations," unfolding as it did on the level of musical material, is narrower than the approach I advocate in this dissertation. As Tia DeNora has put it, Adorno paid relatively scant attention to how "music's own discourse comes to have meaning...in relation...to other types of discourse and practice" outside of the formal properties of the works themselves. See *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27.

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