‘Repeat and Resist:’
Resignifying Injurious Language and the Gendered Female Subject in Works by Elfriede Jelinek, Caroline Muhr, and Maria Erlenberger

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Abstract

English Abstract

In this dissertation, I analyze injurious language, neglected literary spaces, gender performativity, and the female body in selected texts from the 1970s and 1980s by three German and Austrian women: Elfriede Jelinek, Maria Erlenberger, and Caroline Muhr. As I maintain, the phrase 'repeat and resist' explores the relationship between excessive reproduction and the potential for subversion and resignification through de-familiarization and re-appropriation. Taking Judith Butler's concept of "excitable speech" as a point of departure, my focus on performative repetition, not just of language, but also of literary genre, corporeality, and gender expectations contributes to models of interpretation that bring attention back to the sentient and material body when working through the social construction of female identity and subject-formation. Through an investigation of well-known texts and forgotten personal accounts, this dissertation shows how a turn to alternative understandings of illness, the citational aspect of language and non-normative conceptualizations of the female body can enact resistance to the status quo. In combining close reading with gender and feminist studies, I contend that the selected writers bring to light the power and potential of re-appropriation while bearing witness to the risks associated with embracing and writing from a position of Otherness.

French Abstract

La présente thèse examine l'emploi du langage injurieux, les espaces littéraires négligés, la performativité du genre, et le corps féminin dans des textes sélectionnés des années 1970 et 1980 écrits par trois femmes allemandes et autrichiennes, Elfriede Jelinek, Maria Erlenberger et Caroline Muhr. Comme je l'affirme, le mot d'ordre "répéter et résister" exprime la relation entre la reproduction excessive du langage et le potentiel de subversion et de resignification qui émergent des techniques de dé-familiarisation et de réappropriation dans les textes sélectionnés. En prenant le concept de "pouvoir des mots" de Judith Butler comme point de départ, j'analyse la répétition performative, non seulement du langage, mais aussi du genre littéraire, de la réalité corporelle et des attentes liées au genre. Mon étude contribue ainsi à la création d'un modèle d'interprétation qui ramène l'attention sur le corps physique et sensoriel lors de l'analyse de la construction sociale de l'identité féminine et de la formation du sujet. En étudiant des textes réputés ainsi que des témoignages personnels oubliés, la présente thèse montre comment l'acte d'écrire la maladie, l'aspect citationnel du langage et la conceptualisation non-normative du corps féminin peuvent incarner la résistance au statut quo. En combinant une lecture attentive et les études féministes et de genre, j'affirme que les auteures sélectionnées mettent en lumière le pouvoir et les potentialités de la réappropriation tout en étant témoin des risques associés au fait d'assumer la position d'Altérité à partir de laquelle elles ont choisi d'écrire.

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Preface

This dissertation explores how forms of resistance to the androcentric and patriarchal status quo were scripted in selected works of three female German-language writers during the 1970s and 1980s and how language, genre, gender, bodies, and illness are implicated in shaping resistance. In doing so, it contributes to recent research on the reappropriation of injurious language, on subversive modes of writing, on the potential and power of illness stories, as well as on discourses on 'female monstrosity.' It raises the question of how excessively utilizing hurtful and problematic language can effect a change in power dynamics, of how subverting idealized notions of corporeality and femininity can not only expose but overthrow confining and subjugating expectations, and how embracing illnesses such as anorexia or depression can catalyze processes of subject formation instead of being destructive and definitively erasing identity. By uncovering how the selected texts open up new pathways for subject-formation, my approach draws on traditional methodologies of close reading and literary interpretation, but also considers at times the general societal and cultural contexts of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than adopting a New Historicist angle, I focus on the traces of societal norms and cultural imagery in the texts at the time of their conception and reception. Gender studies and different branches of feminist thought both of the European and the American context from the 1970s up until more recent currents strongly influence my readings. This study thus aims to build a bridge between Elfriede Jelinek, Caroline Muhr, and Maria Erlenberger and their distinctive approaches to gendered oppression through theory-based readings of

their texts, which seek to respect and mirror the feminist approaches prevalent at their publication time in conjunction with more recent perspectives.

Considering the fact that the four texts – *Lust*, *Die Liebhaberinnen*, *Depressionen*, and *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* – operate within a (mainly) heteronormative, white, cis-gender framework, some analytical perspectives were less relevant to consider for this project. This means that when the category of 'woman' or 'man' is used in a more generic way in this study, I ask the reader to take into account the 1970s and 1980s cultural and social context. Moreover, I am aware of the crucial differences within these categories and ascribe to the justified and much-needed critique of a feminism that homogenizes, over-values, and takes as the norm white, cis-gender, able-bodied women.

My scholarship draws on Judith Butler's concept of the resignificatory processes of harmful language, as she calls it, "excitable speech," and the importance of historicity and citationality. It builds on an overall interest in the workings of re-appropriation of language to examine also the resignifying processes of genre, of corporeal representations, and of performativity. By reading both recognized and forgotten texts within the framework of countering voicelessness and objectification, I partake in a broader effort to carve out the subversive potential of repetition and excess and to reach a better understanding of feminist forms of resistance against the backdrop of the second wave women's movement and its aftermath. My focus contributes to debates on the danger and potential of re-using injurious language and to working within frameworks of re-appropriating and de-familiarizing normative gender expectations. I therefore add to existing discussions with regard to Elfriede Jelinek's use of phallocentric language and the concept of repetition, which have not been explored in depth from the vantage point of Butler's theories of the

performative nor in comparison with much less well-known authors Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger. I further provide new and more extensive insights into the, wrongfully, forgotten or neglected works of these two latter authors, by examining their 'illness stories,' which, in many ways, were ahead of their time, as the examinations of Muhr's dissection of the workings of the male-centered medical institutions or Erlenberger's understanding of anorexia will bring to light. I am adding to existing research on these three authors when I look at both their affinities and differences and the extent to which they are representative of or diverge from literary and societal tendencies of the time.

This project revives Muhr and Erlenberger's crucial but neglected texts for the study of emancipatory writing and brings them in dialogue with texts from a controversial but renowned writer. My discussion of these alternative texts sheds more light on what facets of women's life were explored in the literary writing of the time and to what extent the selected texts open up new ways of being by constructing a sense of self beyond the traditionally accepted forms of motherhood, marriage, or manual labour. The examination of both the less-canonical and more established literature of the time uncovers a turn to writing about illness as a means out of societal impasses and a new understanding of illness beyond the pathological connotations rather as something with the potential to empower. In addition to these alternative meanings ascribed to illness, traditionally accepted states such as motherhood or marriage are inscribed with destructive, sickening attributes opposite to their normative conceptualizations as societal remedy for women.

Introduction

1. Resistance

> Where there is power, there is resistance.
> –Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*

> Protest ist, wenn ich sage, das und das paßt mir nicht. Widerstand ist, wenn ich dafür sorge, daß das, was mir nicht paßt, nicht länger geschieht. Protest ist, wenn ich sage, ich mache nicht mehr mit. Widerstand ist, wenn ich dafür sorge, daß alle andern auch nicht mehr mitmachen.[1]
> –Ulrike Marie Meinhof, *Vom Protest zum Widerstand*

Forms of resistance are vital, manifold, and intricate. Resistance entails that one stands up against something (as in the German word 'Wider-Stand'), puts a halt to something, does not let something go on but rather blocks it. Resisting means to implicate oneself in the act, using one's own being in order to inhibit the continuance of the thing that is being withstood. It therefore involves a certain amount of risk, since there is contact, tangency, between the entity who resists and the person or thing that is being resisted. If someone engages in the act of resistance, it automatically implies that there is something that oppresses that person, something to which that person no longer wants to be exposed, something from which the person wants to be liberated or liberate themselves. In that sense, one result of resistance can be emancipation, the act of 'taking from someone else's grip,' thereby freeing oneself or another captive person.

[1] "Protest is when I say I don't like this. Resistance is when I put an end to what I don't like. Protest is when I say I refuse to go along with this anymore. Resistance is when I make sure everybody else stops going along too" (*Everybody Talks About the Weather . . . We Don't*).

The German writer Caroline Muhr, whose novel *Depressionen* (*Depressions*) is a vital part of this study, wrote the following poem entitled "Emanzipation"[2] (*emancipation*):

Welche Verheißung warst du am Anfang.

Doch jetzt bist du ausgeschlachtet,

ausgebeutet, missbraucht wie eine Hure,

die durch sämtliche Journalistenfedern

gegangen ist. Missgeburten holte man

aus deinem Schoß: Emanzen, einen Haufen schriller,

strenger Weiber, die das gesunde Volksempfinden

störten. Vorzeitig bist du abgetan

vom Überdruss, noch ehe du

mit der Wirklichkeit ein glückliches

Verhältnis eingehen konntest.[3]

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[2] Muhr was a very active writer in the women's movement in Bonn and had numerous poems and texts published in the book "Protest- und Spottlieder für die neue Frauenbewegung zum Haaresträuben" (*Hair-Raising Protest and Satirical Songs for the New Women's Movement*). The source of this particular poem, however, was difficult to track down. After some efforts, I was able to verify that the poem is part of the personal collection of Luise F. Pusch, the publisher of fembio.org (where it appears). A subsequent email exchange on August 2, 2018 confirmed that she came into possession of this and other unpublished poems through a close friend of Caroline Muhr's. The difficulty in finding more information on the poem and its origin is symptomatic of the overall situation regarding Muhr's (and Erlenberger's) works and personas, which are still under-explored.

[3] "What promise you were at the beginning.
But now you are cannibalized,
exploited, abused like a whore,
who has been handed from one journalist's feather
to the next. Monsters were taken
from your womb: women's libbers, a bunch of shrill,
strict broads, who disturbed
the healthy public feeling. You have been discarded prematurely
due to weariness, even before you

The poem personifies emancipation, making it an abused, exploited, promiscuous, discarded woman. Emancipation is gendered, corporeal, sexualized. She experiences a traumatic amount of violence, injury she had to endure because of the very fact that she is a woman, one who tried to become a subject in her own right. The poem's reference to the procreating female body, giving birth to disruptive, disturbing elements, evokes the imagery of the women's libbers as monstrous, as elements that have no place in society. Emancipation put everything on the line, risked herself, with the result of having been dismissed because of her excess. She was cut open, eviscerated, emptied out. There was a transient moment of possibility for deliverance, for resisting patriarchal oppression, but it did not last since resistance was wiped out prematurely. By saying that it was over before emancipation could form a relationship with reality, the poem suggests that the act of resistance, of liberation, was still in the imaginary stage, not yet tangible.

Muhr's poem represents some of the issues of women's literature in the 1970s in Germany. It was a literature that denounced the status quo of patriarchal rule and that tried to find a way to write women who exist in their own right and free them from the constraints of gendered oppressive societal expectations.[4] It was a literature that used strong language and violent imagery in order to jolt the reader into awareness, a kind of cry for disruption and change.

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were able to enter a happy
relationship with reality."
All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
[4] See, among others, Gerhard, *Frauenbewegung und Feminismus* 6-9, 107-13; Plowman, *The Radical Subject* 138-53.

2. 'Repeat and Resist'

By analyzing sites of resistance in the selected texts, this dissertation looks at how resignification, writing, gender performativity, and the 'monstrous body' contribute to the process of female subject-formation and to fashioning new forms of writing resistance during the 1970s and 1980s. As I will show, these four categories provide the critical basis for a better understanding of resistance through claiming a subject-position of one's own. At the same time, they also challenge notions about banning hate speech, paradigms such as aspirations to an individual sense of self, as well as established assumptions about the destructive force of death and illness. To address these ideas, this study leans on well-established and recent research in the fields of women's writing, gender studies, and illness studies and explores the various breaches that open up at the spaces in which binaries break down and a border-crossing into the a-social takes place. Accordingly, it seeks to delineate the extent to which both complicity in and resistance to oppressive societal structures are shaped by a simultaneity of survival and risk. The duality of both object status and the struggle for subjecthood, together with a conceptualization of subjectivity as an ongoing and evolving set of processes and as a way of undoing this duality, determine all forms of analyses in this study. This project is rooted in a social constructionist understanding of language, behaviours, sexuality, bodies, and illness, all the while not neglecting the deeply intertwined sentient materiality. It draws on theories looking at moments when bodies are doing things and how these instances contribute to an understanding of identity. It works from the understanding that subjecthood or subject-status entail a more political connotation in the sense of being societally recognizable, whereas selfhood or the self involve a more conscious decision-making and autonomy.

Subjectivity is a more ideal state of having gone through the process of subject-formation, while continuously being endangered by oppressive forces. While terms such as subject-formation connote a poststructuralist component and are thus to be understood within a framework of performativity and the social construction of gender, the question of identity politics is a prevalent one when approaching the readings from the standpoint of feminist politics. Even though there is tension between feminist discourse on 'identity' and the poststructuralist approach to 'subjectivity,' I argue that reading the terms with and against each other serves to account for the specificities of gendered subject-formation in the different texts. My methodological framework scrutinizes how the act of writing – writing re-appropriated language, writing illness, writing the body, writing identity – opens up spaces of resistance and how it uses Otherness and locations of alterity, such as the mental institution, the home, and nature. Disrupting and breaking with convention, appropriating difference, and excessively embodying cultural norms are ways of putting oneself at risk, of utilizing the forces that work to keep the status quo in place but potentially forging new modes of resistance. At the heart of this study, I aspire to bring to light the linguistic, textual, performative, and corporeal ways in which women's writing resisted being fixed in the eternal subjugated position, not through escape of the oppressive system but through powerful reappropriation.

3. Overview of Texts

Caroline Muhr, whose non-pseudonym was Dr. Charlotte Puhl, née Klemp, was a German writer who lived from 1925 to 1978. Even though her work has virtually fallen into oblivion, she wrote important pieces of women's literature, namely her diaristic novel

Depressionen, which was published in 1970, as well as two more novels and protest songs for the "Bonner Blaustrümpfe" (*Bonn Bluestockings)*, a women's group who wrote and recorded protest and parodic songs to decry the status quo of women's position in German society. Muhr's writing engages with women's role as housewives and the frustrations and difficulties women experience due to their limited possibilities. She also wrote more extensively about mental illness, more specifically, depression, from which she herself suffered. Her illness as well as a facial paralysis after a brain tumour removal likely motivated her suicide in 1978.[5] Critical engagement with Caroline Muhr's writing has been, with a few exceptions,[6] quite scarce.

Another contemporary writer who is similarly unknown but also writes critically about illness and women's societal roles in German-speaking society is Maria Erlenberger. To this day, it is unknown who is behind this pseudonym and one of the few things that seem to be known is that she must have been born around 1948 in Austria. Erlenberger published her autobiographical report *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn: Ein Bericht* (*The Hunger for Madness: A Report*) in 1977, which won a literary prize in 1978. In this report, the narrator details her stay in a mental institution, to which she was brought after having starved herself to near-death. She recounts the circumstances and processes that led to her institutionalization and provides intimate insights into her experiences in the institution, where she was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

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[5] For more details on her biography, see Pusch, "Caroline Muhr," http://www.fembio.org/biographie.php/frau/biographie/caroline-muhr/. Accessed on August 2, 2018.

[6] See Weigel, *Die Stimme der Medusa*; Stephan and Weigel, *Die Verborgene Frau*; and master theses such as Besch, *Zum Zusammenhang von Weiblichkeit, Depressionen und Schreiben am Beispiel der Tagebücher von Caroline Muhr und Elisabeth Opitz*. They were all published in the 1980s.

There are numerous similarities between the works of Muhr and Erlenberger. Both writers openly critique the normative roles for women with regard to family values, professional opportunities, aesthetic ideals, as well as intellectual engagement. Their works emerged during the 1970s women's movement in Germany, mirroring symptomatic attempts at women's self-discovery of that time.[7] Post-War Germany was characterized by the so-called "Wirtschaftswunder" (*economic miracle*), which gave rise to a return to traditional, patriarchal values, i.e. a political, economical, and cultural "re-masculinization" (Gerhard 107-8). The women's movement of that time as well as the literature that emerged from the movement addressed violence towards women, the constraints imposed upon women's bodies and sexuality, the limited societally accepted roles for women, gender inequality, as well as debates about abortion (111-12). Disclosure and critical questioning of gendered power dynamics hallmarked much of the German-speaking women's literature of the time,[8] which focused on inequality between men and women, and sometimes took into account matters of class and capitalist oppression. Questions of race or ethnicity were less prevalent, while certain writers sought to find liberating potential in turning their back on heterosexual relationships and exploring their homosexuality.[9] Despite some differences in focus or nuance, these works shared the objective of denouncing dominant power structures, with a strong focus on working through the multifaceted and various forms of gender oppression.

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[7] See Kramer, *The Politics of Discourse* and Plowman, *The Radical Subject* for more details.
[8] See, among others, Müller, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*; Reinig, *Entmannung;* Struck*, Klassenliebe*.
[9] See, for example, Bachmann, *Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah*; Reinig, *Müßiggang ist aller Liebe Anfang* and her short story "Ein Sonntag im Krieg;" Stefan, *Häutungen.*

Elfriede Jelinek's 1975 novel *Die Liebhaberinnen* [*women as lovers*][10] fits quite well with the two texts by Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger. It is the story of two women, paula and brigitte,[11] who are trying to live their life according to societal expectations, which means, finding a suitable husband and becoming a mother. The novel narrates the women's stories and destinies in parallel, which are both very similar and very different from each other: similar because they both embark on the same quest for securing a husband, different because paula had at times wanted more for herself, such as learning an actual profession. In the end, it is she who fails to fulfill her fate, that is, her designated destiny of unquestioning contentment in the role of housewife and mother. In her search for more, she is cast out as a prostitute and ends up where brigitte had started, as an assembly line worker.

Jelinek's novel is a perversion of the popular "Heimatroman" (a sentimental novel with a strong focus on a regional bond) and romance novels. It exposes the destructive mechanisms behind the myths of love, family, nature, and marriage that are sold to people (Cornejo 147). Motherhood is both a given role for women and at the same time extremely unrewarding and destructive. Marriage is a requirement, but it equals death since it is, what literary scholar Yasmin Hoffmann calls, a "Frauenvernichtungsmaschine" (*extermination machine for women*) ("Elfriede Jelinek" 85).

While the personal accounts of Muhr and Ehrlenberger focus on their projects of self-discovery, Jelinek's novel is deeply rooted in the "Darstellung der nicht möglichen,

[10] Since both Jelinek novels, *Lust* and *Die Liebhaberinnen*, exist as published translations, I will use their English titles in the text. With regard to the quotes, I will cite the German original in the text and include footnotes with the respective official English translation.
[11] Jelinek plays with orthographic conventions, which is why proper names, for example, are not capitalized in the novel. One of the incentives behind the use of small letters in the novel is to hamper unreflected consumption, according to Jelinek (see Wilke 95).

nicht vorhandenen Entfaltungsmöglichkeiten, eines Stillstands, eines Auf-der-Stelle-Tretens, eines Nicht-vorwärts-Kommens"[12] (Cornejo 149). Although women's literature of the 1970s explored the possibilities of somehow finding a way out of the societal impasse that comes with being Woman[13] in patriarchy, Jelinek's work stays tied to showcasing the hopelessness of getting out of the patriarchal and capitalistic system, since all the characters are deeply implicated in the reproduction of exactly that system. The women in the novel are not trying to establish an identity for themselves independent of prescribed roles. Rather, they participate in the system by using their bodies as commodities, be it as workers in the capitalistic system, be it for giving birth to the progeny that will ensure the continuous reproduction of the system, be it as sexual instruments (Cornejo 150).

In Jelinek, the female characters are "aktive[...] 'Reproduktionsmithelferinnen' der bestehenden Verhaltensmuster und Gesellschaftsnormen"[14] who are marked by a "Verzicht auf die Verwirklichung der eigenen Wünsche und Anpasser-Mentalität"[15] (Cornejo 151). Germanist Renata Cornejo very fittingly points out that within this all-permeating

[12] "representation of impossible, inexistent development opportunities, of a standstill, of a Not-getting-anywhere, of a Not-getting-ahead."

[13] Even though I am very aware of the dangers of and problems in universalizing and essentializing via a creation of the category of 'Woman' and do not want to assume one common identity to all people identifying as female, important political work can be achieved through group identity and one's inclusion in a delineated category. This is not to argue that all women share the same experiences, are subject to the same discriminations, or bring the same attributes to the table since the differences in race, ethnicity, sexuality, able-bodiedness, class, etc. play a decisive role. I therefore distance myself from a prioritizing of biological sex as defining trait of the category 'Woman' and universalizing ideas associated with the term during the 1970s second wave feminism, of which French feminists such as Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have been accused (see Katherine Costello, *Inventing "French Feminism:" A Critical History* 52-58, for more details). However, the use of the capital W symbolizes a common ground with regard to gender mechanisms and in this respect serves as a comprehensive classification to name and identify lived experiences, cultural associations, and societal expectations.

[14] "active 'reproduction helpers' for the existing behavioural patterns and societal norms."

[15] "foregoing of the realization of their own wishes and a mentality of adaptation."

inescapability Jelinek's women either have entirely internalized patriarchal oppression so that a questioning of the structures is unthinkable from the outset, or their attempts at breaking out of the system are characterized by transience since they are doomed to failure from the start (152).

In Muhr's and Erlenberger's texts and the tradition of women's writing in which they produced their texts, there is a stronger focus on female solidarity and communality, even though women are not by definition the ones that would be behind overthrowing the system. My comparative study of these works is motivated in part by the opposition between quests for self-discovery in the typical women's literature of the time and Jelinek's act of laying bare the mechanisms of unavoidable reproduction of oppressive structures. Of interest is also Jelinek's very explicit self-proclaimed differentiation of women's writers of her time. She emphasizes the importance of aesthetic subversion, which is, according to her, lacking in the works of women's literature: "Ich sehe das als eine Gefahr bei der neuen Frauenliteratur, einfach zu klagen und über ihre Situation zu jammern und Männer zu beschimpfen. Sie müßten versuchen, sich auch ästhetisch ihre Mittel zu erarbeiten und ein bißchen weiter zu kommen"[16] (Wilke 88).

Although representative of the women writers of the time, Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger do not conform to Jelinek's description of 'whining' females and have worked out their own aesthetic means in order to 'go further.' Muhr uses the diary as a subversive space for a woman suffering from depression, revealing the potential of this 'private' genre for resisting oppressive labels and writing through one's illness. As for Erlenberger, she

[16] "I see it as a danger in the new women's literature to just complain and to whine about their situation and to insult men. They should also try to develop aesthetic means and to go a bit further."

reappropriates the autobiographical form to open up a similar subversive space. However, her report, which I classify as feminist confession, further reworks and resignifies specific terms, generally used to insult or cast away people. While Muhr's diary struggles with the loss of language as a means to establish connections, Erlenberger's text plays with linguistic conventions and even undertakes a re-writing of the most prominent Western history of origins, i.e. the story of Adam and Eve. The two illness narratives are a far cry from Jelinek's characterization of female writing as merely 'whining and insulting men;' rather, they courageously take on oppressive patriarchal structures within the medical apparatus, revealing their harmful effects on women's mental and physical health and well-being.

While the three aforementioned works were all published in the 1970s, I include a later work by Jelinek, namely her novel *Lust* [*Lust*] because it is a prime example for endeavours to work out aesthetic means for one's goals. This novel, which was published in 1989, created a veritable scandal. Critics honed in on the pornographic aspect as well as the violence of the novel; even when they were able to further analyze the work and read it for its insurgent potential, they remained ambivalent about its subversive effect. Jelinek herself staged the discussion around the novel in various interviews. In the run-up to the publication, she informed people that she was working on a female analogue of George Bataille's *Story of the Eye* and emphasized her difficulty in writing 'female desire.'[17]

One of the linguistic methods that are prevalent in this work is re-signification of injurious speech, i.e. the phallocentric, violent language of mainstream pornography. In order to better comprehend the very complex workings behind this resignificatory project,

[17] See, among others, Gross, "Nichts ist möglich zwischen den Geschlechtern. Ein Gespräch mit Elfriede Jelinek."

I draw on Judith Butler's work, more particularly, her theory of 'excitable speech.' This approach allows for in-depth insights into the 'aesthetic means' that Jelinek works out in both her novels, one published at the height of the women's movement, one published with sufficient distance to the 1970s movement to see through its shortcomings and a time full of loud debates around the (non-)censorship of pornography.

My comparative analysis of these four texts acknowledges the genre specificities of each work, while concomitantly going beyond reducing Muhr's and Erlenberger's non-fiction accounts to purely 'confessional women's literature'. My study engages with non-fiction writing as a stylized, aesthetic undertaking regardless of authorial intention and genre restrictions but also as an act of constituting one's existence and sharing and communicating one's experiences. The tension between authorial intention and a text's reception underlies my analysis of the mechanisms of resignification in the non-fiction writing. Moreover, by reading Jelinek's fictional texts and Muhr's and Erlenberger's confessional accounts alongside and against each other, I engage with the particularities of Jelinek's construction of literary subjects and Muhr's and Erlenberger's writing of selves. The potential of engaging with fictional subjects lies in the broader scope for uncovering the discursive violence against women in patriarchal structures and possible resignification of such violence through alienation and de-familiarization. The distance created by these mechanisms holds potential but can be limiting. Identifying with the narrators of the non-fiction texts, the reader is affected on a more intimate level, which can foster deep engagement with the text, but can also stymie the political and subversive potential of the text. Expecting success, healing, and overcoming, the reader's tolerance for writing resistance through self-destruction is lower than in a fictional text. Acknowledging

but not limiting my readings to genre conventions and expectations, I carve out the possibilities of resignification and resistance in the various forms of (self-)destruction.

4. Contextualization / Framework

Underlying my analysis of four main texts by three German-speaking writers is Elaine Showalter's identification of two approaches of feminist criticism. She distinguishes between, what she calls, "feminist reading," which for her is "concerned with the feminist as *reader*, and […] offers feminist readings of texts which consider the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems" (182; emphasis in original). This mode is central to my study as I am particularly concerned with how to read deeply embedded stereotypical conceptualizations of women. In the case of Jelinek's novel *Lust*, such an approach is key to understanding the intense backlash against the novel, also very much from within the feminist community. I will engage with the perspective of readers of a text[18] that plays with the deeply ingrained characterization of Woman as lack, as non-subject, as the Other in the androcentric status quo. The act of reading is also vital to Maria Erlenberger's report since her work cannot be analyzed without taking into consideration how her anorexic body is read in a society and culture that promote ideals of slimness and control, and pathologize individuals who excessively embody these ideals. In addition to developing a feminist reading of the narrator's anorexic body, I will analyze the particular literary form of Erlenberger's text that targets a very specific reading audience, namely that of the sympathetic female reader, a dynamic that will be examined through the lens of the

[18] I would like it to be noted that I am however not engaging with reader-response theory in the sense of empirical studies of actual readers.

text being categorized as feminist confession, which, by definition, needs a recipient. Less explicitely but no less importantly, the feminist mode of reading is crucial to Caroline Muhr's diaristic account of her illness. Being constantly mis-read in the male-dominated medical domain, with devastating consequences for her well-being, Muhr's illness narrative sheds revelatory light on the misconceptions about women and depression (in women). My study aims to unearth the ways in which the texts manage to "find [their] own subject, [their] own system, [...], [their] own voice" (Showalter 184).

Showalter names the second approach of feminist criticism "gynocentrics," or the turn to "women as writers" with a focus on investigating "the history, styles, themes, and structures of writing by women" (184-85). Without neglecting the problematic aspect of gynocentrism,[19] this project examines the ways in which three female writers created texts that engage with the process of becoming a subject in systems that from the onset render women Other. I am not analyzing their writing from the vantage point of an isolated utopia of gynocentrism, but rather, how the authors drafted texts to write women as subjects, without denying the reality of the societal positions of which they could not rid themselves. In this sense, their texts combine the endeavours to write Woman in her own right while also acknowledging and working through the gaze to which she is subjected.

Looking at contemporary feminist critique, Showalter differentiates four approaches to women's writing, the first one being the interaction with biology and the

[19] Gynocentrism may have the same sort of reifying tendencies by placing Woman in the center as androcentrism. Therefore, it would merely be a reversal of disproportionate power dynamics and not an actual undoing of the imbalance.

body.[20] Foreshadowing later debates about the inclusion of the body's materiality in post-structuralist feminist theories, Showalter aptly clarifies the fact that the

> study of biological imagery in women's writing is useful and important as long as we understand that factors other than anatomy are involved in it. Ideas about the body are fundamental to understanding how women conceptualize their situation in society; but there can be no expression of the body which is unmediated by linguistic, social, and literary structures. (189)

My study examines how the material body is constructed and experienced in relation to its interaction with others and its surroundings, taking into account the female body's long-standing tradition of being conceived of as Other.

As mentioned before, the question of what language to use when writing within and against patriarchal oppression was one of the most pressing ones in the 1970s (and 1980s). Both in French feminism and in parts of the women's movement in Germany, there was a call for a sort of 'new language' that would not be tainted by the oppressive phallogocentrism at the heart of the language system in place. However, parallel to these calls for an unsullied language, there was a recognition of the utopian aspect of such a project and a turn to utilizing the language in place, but to, as Mary Jacobus argues "ceaselessly [...] deconstruct it: to write what cannot be written" (qtd. in Showalter 191). This is a perfect description of Jelinek's, Muhr's, and Erlenberger's literary projects with their constant making use of the power of disruption and language's inherent citationality.

This study would not be conceivable without the methods of poststructuralist critique. The projects of Muhr, Erlenberger, and Jelinek all illustrate a reworking and rethinking of the ways in which society constructs roles and identities for women and the

[20] In addition to the biological model, she identifies a psychoanalytic, a linguistic, and a cultural one. I am addressing the other models in the two subsequent paragraphs of this section. All approaches are further considered from the two angles of the feminist as reader and the woman as writer that I discussed in the first part of this section.

ways in which women in turn perform these roles and identities. As Showalter explains: "[A] theory of culture incorporates ideas about woman's body, language, and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. The ways in which women conceptualize their bodies and their sexual and reproductive functions are intricately linked to their cultural environments" (197). One of the central themes common to all three writers is the experience of a duality in the sense that there is the (aspired) experience and recognition of one's identity as self-created and, simultaneously and inextricably woven into this, the experience as Woman in society that is determined by the perception and gaze of others and measurement against the status quo. It is in this sense, Showalter argues, that "women's writing is a 'double-voiced discourse' that always embodies the social, literary, and cultural heritages of both the muted and the dominant" (201). This simultaneity is symptomatic of the selected texts in my study and explains in part my careful attention to the extent to which "the female tradition can be a positive source of strength and solidarity" but also very much "a source of powerlessness" (Showalter 204). The experienced alienation and yearning for belonging by Muhr's narrator as well as the tension between the desire for recognition and a concurrent dismissal of others in Erlenberger's text exemplify this duality. As Jelinek often disturbingly and blatantly shows, the oppressed are also fervent reproducers of the repressive systems.

5. Historical Background and Feminism

Given the influence of American feminism on the German women's movement of the 1970s, my theoretical framework is strongly based on this strand of feminist thinking. As sociologist Ute Gerhard points out, works such as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and

Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* had a significant impact on German feminism (113).[21] In addition to drawing inspiration from the US context, the German women's movement was strongly influenced by French works such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, which only became available in German in 1968 (Gerhard 113). Focusing on the relationship between language, the self, and difference in being Woman, my investigation also brings to light similarities with the French theory of 'écriture feminine,' which implicitly informs this study. My analysis also explicitely uses French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, whose theory of the abject is vital to a better understanding of Elfriede Jelinek's two novels.

In what follows, I investigate the traces of "[f]eminist intellectual challenges to conventional ideas about women in the 1970s and 1980s [that] were built on several central concepts: gender, women's experience, the personal is political, difference and intersectionality" (McCann & Kim 14). I look at the performativity of subject-formation, gender, corporeality, and illness and examine how gendered subjects are produced. More specifically, I analyze how "women are positioned as subordinate within [...] kinship systems [such as marriage] inasmuch as they are exchanged between men. As tokens exchanged between men, women cannot be self-possessed parties to the exchange" (15). Based on Gayle Rubin's landmark 1975 essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," this quote reflects a larger set of feminist concepts explored by scholars such as Sigrid Weigel, who wrote on the paradoxical situation of women as being both recognizable and limited due to their roles as mother or wife. The notion of female bodies

[21] In her foreword to her novel *Häutungen*, Verena Stefan, author of the purported first work of German radical feminism, talks in detail about the influences of these American feminists.

as commodities is crucial to Jelinek's, Muhr's, and Erlenberger's writing, which further bears witness to other feminist issues of the 1970s and 80s such as "inequality in marriage, male-centered sexuality, reproductive self-determination, and sexual and domestic violence" (McCann & Kim 20), which were often structurally supported by legal systems.[22]

In addition to the well-established theoretical background of Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity, this study also works within the framework of, as Joan Scott puts it, gender as "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and [...] a primary[23] way of signifying relationships of power" (1067). According to McCann and Kim, "cultural symbols, normative concepts, social institutions and organizations, and subjective identities" (17) are the four fundamental features of gender. As I will show, subjective identities include the practice of sharing intimate and personal details of one's private life and experiences in order to create a communality among women, a technique typical of the 1970s women's movement (18). This procedure is exemplified in the personal accounts of Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger, both of whom appropriated neglected or marginalized genres, such as the journal and autobiography respectively, to reflect on the "expressive power of language" (18) as well as its shortcomings. By examining their confessional accounts, this study traces the potential of communality as a means to go beyond phallocentric notions of an autonomous self and

[22] I include theorists such as Sigrid Weigel, whose work on women's subject-status dates from the 1980s, to examine the literary fabrication of this experience from a contemporary standpoint. Given that the texts, especially Muhr's and Erlenberger's accounts, process cultural and societal norms and currents from that time period, coeval theories supplement the engagement with more recent theoretical approaches to women's societal positions in the selected texts.

[23] Even though I mainly agree with this definition, I distance myself from the ascription of primacy to gender as I firmly believe that other concepts such as race, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and class, among others, equally determine relationships of power.

to find resistive possibilities through writing as a means to establish connections. In this sense, Muhr's and Erlenberger's texts pave the way for "identity politics," which gained importance during the 1980s and which combine "the relationship between one's experience, sense of identity as a woman, and one's knowledge of oppression" (19), all the while taking into consideration specific cultural, ethnic, and historical backgrounds (20).

6. Chapter Overview

In my study, I focus on the repetition and re-appropriation of language, genre, gender expectations, and depictions of corporeality in order to show how writing by women becomes a form of resistance when it engages with illness, pain, and the body, and when it seeks a path to subjectivity other than the one laid out by androcentrism. In the first section of this dissertation, I look at the potential of working with injurious language and of using writing as a site of resistance. My close investigations of the resignificatory processes of harmful language and the writing of the self in the diary and autobiography – classified as feminist confession, as I argue – uncover the risk and disruptive potential inherent to this undertaking. In addition, I consider the ways in which such writing can give rise to a sense of self that is not based on an individualistic paradigm but that, instead, begins building multiplicity and communality. By turning to debates on the constitutive aspect of subjugating terms and discourses, and by focusing on the therapeutic and formative component of writing one's illness, this section seeks to re-examine how writing by Jelinek, Muhr, and Erlenberger engages with the very forms that oppress women, how it writes and reuses the very language that subjugated women and how it succeeds or fails in outlining alternative projects of discursive subject-formation.

In the second section, I focus on the material and the sentient body as well as the conceptualization and play with bodily borders for the process of subject-formation. I am interested in evaluating how the body, which is both culturally constructed but simultaneously feels and does things, plays into processes of gendering and subject-formation. Showalter's argument points to the importance of looking at the body as both subject and object, as sentient and as having an effect on others, as both tangible and constructed. This study seeks to work out how Jelinek, Muhr, and Erlenberger write bodies and how they deconstruct and construct the sentient body. With a close examination of concepts such as the grotesque, the abject, monstrosity, illness, and pain, this section emphasizes the cultural significance of borders for conceptualizations of recognizable subjects. Mapping out the ways in which the authors write from the position of death, illness, the painful body, and dissolved borders brings to light the potential of the lived body to undo and exceed cultural norms.

In my analysis of language, genre, gender, illness, and corporeality, I seek to address several pressing questions about the potential of women's literature to write resistance through resignification. How can repetition be used to effect a change in conventional meaning and subject-status? What can be gained through taking on dismissed genres and using their semblance of privacy for facing and coming to terms with one's illness? What is the potential of not merely trying to rid oneself of one's ascribed object-position in society but taking it into account when reclaiming subjectivity? In what ways can writing from a position of death alter how the role of the author is conceptualized? What happens when one looks at subjects not as complete and whole, but rather embraces their openings, leaky borders, transformability, and instability? How can writing, not just about, but through

one's illness open up more empowering forms of existence? With these questions in mind, my study expounds the forms of resistance found in women's literature of the 1970s and 1980s and asks how language, culture, and bodies doing things can effect change that is relevant to the wide diversity of female conditions today as well.

Chapter 1
Linguistic Resistance: Repeating and Resignifying Oppressive Language

1. Introduction

> Sein Vogel ist wach und wird in den Käfig ihres Mundes gesperrt, so ergeht es ihm wohl, und er flattert unflätig herum, bis ein Würgen im Hals der Frau aufsteigt, das Wachstum rauscht, und ihre Kotze seinen Schaft entlang über das baumelnde Gewölbe seiner Hoden rinnt. […] Die Eichel wird ihr aus dem Schlund gerissen und die Frau halb über die Badewanne gekippt. Der Schwanz steht wie Schild um ihr Bett, in das er endlich endgültig gelegt wird, die Glocken ihrer Brüste werden geschlagen, Alkohol rinnt wie Wasser aus ihr, und in ihre Fotze springen kräftige Tropfen.[24]
> –Elfriede Jelinek, *Lust*

> Language sustains the body not by bringing it into being or feeding it in a literal way; rather, it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible. […] One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being *recognizable*. […] If language can sustain the body, it can also threaten its existence.
> –Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*

The two epigraphic quotes depict very contrasting forms of bodies being threatened and bodies being sustained. In the first quote, the threat is physical, described in extremely visceral terms, while in the second it is social, part of a more general understanding of subject formation. Despite the diverging forms, both Elfriede Jelinek's and Judith Butler's texts explore, among other things, the potential for defying the oppressive power of hurtful

[24] "His bird is wide awake, it's locked in the cage of her mouth, which is where it likes to be, flapping about till the woman starts to retch and heave and her vomit travels along his shaft and dribbles down his dangling testicles. […] His gland is yanked out of her pharynx and the woman tipped halfway over the tub. His prick is stiff as a bull-rush, and now he rusher her like a bull and tucks his prick up in bed where it belongs, he tolls the bells of her breasts, alcohol gushes from her like water, and potent drops of the good stuff squirt into her cunt" (*Lust*).

language. Nobel Literature Prize winner, Austrian writer Elfriede Jelinek, has been deemed a highly controversial and linguistically convoluted author, with the aura of mystique around her personality adding to the polemic created by her work. While *Die Klavierspielerin* [*The Piano Teacher*] might still be considered her most well-known work up to now – the fame of which increased with Michael Haneke's film adaptation – her other works do not fall short in terms of exposure and critical engagement. Jelinek's 1989 novel *Lust*, for example, led to an exceptional number of disputes, with some critics focusing on the work's scandalous alignment with mainstream pornography and obscenity, and others on its subversive potential as outlined by Jelinek's self-chosen designation of it as "anti-porn" (Lahann 80). In the coverage the work received, Jelinek was accused of erasing any pleasure in sexual desire and the sexual act and criticized for not setting out to write female desire. She was furthermore incriminated for using a very male-centered pornographic language when writing her originally planned female-centered counterpart to Georges Bataille's *Story of the Eye.* Numerous critics seemed disappointed by her ostensible re-use of such strongly connoted and oppressive phallogocentric language. However, there were also those who praised her approach of working with the language at her disposal and appropriating it for her means.[25]

Jelinek is known for her experimentation with language. She takes common figures of speech and puts them in unexpected contexts, which makes the reader stumble and creates an uncanny reading atmosphere. The words are close enough to normative usages and contexts but the substitution of letters, the replacement of idiomatic words with

[25] See, among others, Kyora, "Untote. Inszenierungen von Kultur und Geschlecht bei Elfriede Jelinek;" Höfler "Sexualität und Macht in Elfriede Jelineks Prosa;" Gürtler, "Die Entschleierung der Mythen von Natur und Sexualität."

phonologically similar, albeit significantly different words, or the insertion of philosophical or literary language into sexualized contexts, turn the text inside out. Her playing with expectations, with what seems or sounds familiar, is the precise moment for opening up new ways of working with language. Her linguistic project in *Lust* is no exception. Staying within the confines of oppressive, sexualized language allows her to subvert patriarchal structures from within the system. Writing the story with a brand-new language, i.e. different from phallogocentrism, would be an illusion, if not impossible. Moreover, the deployment of resistance from within is not limited to Jelinek's novel *Lust*. This approach permeates all of Jelinek's oeuvre, also her 1975 novel *women as lovers*, which tells the everyday stories of the lives of two women, brigitte and paula, who set out to find happiness in marriage and motherhood. The novel is rife with repetitions, which gives rise to a disruptive reading experience through the overuse of words and phrases that convey oppressive societal expectations.

Judith Butler proposes similar strategies for subverting oppressive linguistic structures. Her declaration about both the formative and destructive power of language in the epigraph above gets to the heart of the argument of her 1997 book *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. In this text, she confronts the workings and the force of injurious language, mainly injurious names, and proposes a path towards resistance and claiming one's subjectivity. She outlines her position on resignification through the concept of "excitable speech," a notion that I will thoroughly investigate in this chapter. Despite the apparent affinities between Jelinek and Butler,[26] a detailed analysis of their projects of

[26] As far as direct influence goes, Jelinek herself admitted in an interview with Heide Hammer in 2005 that, while being interested and curious about Butler's work, she had not

linguistic resistance has not yet been undertaken.[27] And yet critics of Jelinek's work have noted the similarities; for example, Pia Janke, in reference to *The Piano Teacher*, states that the text "verleibt sich die größten Autoren, Denker und Komponisten in einer Art erkenntnistheoretischem Verfahren ein, das im Rückgriff auf Judith Butler oder auch Luce Irigaray in der Forschung mit Begriffen wie „resignification," „kritische Mimesis" oder „hysterisches Schreiben" umschrieben worden ist"[28] (100). While I agree that Butler and Jelinek's methods of challenging oppressive language through resignification are undeniably similar, I deem it problematic to make such a claim without referencing detailed analyses of the respective workings of these mechanisms. Instead of merely stating that Jelinek's writing gains force from "resignifying" language, it is imperative to gain a better understanding of what "resignification" actually stands for, and where its potential, as well as its potential for failure, lies. By analyzing Jelinek's use of pornographic conventions and her play with repetitions, this section looks at how an excessive exposure to normative practices and a balancing act between repeating and – at times almost imperceptibly – distorting linguistic codes can effect linguistic resistance, and, in doing so, fashion a productive alternative to calls for censorship of hurtful language.

This chapter will undertake an examination of the temporality of the speech act and historicity of language, the force and the risk of repetition, and the redeployment of

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yet read enough of it to be able to situate her own theoretical and feminist position in relation to Butler's work.

[27] Besides a 2012 article by Maria Stehle on "Pop, Porn, and Rebellious Speech: Feminist politics and the multi-media performances of Elfriede Jelinek, Charlotte Roche, and Lady Bith Ray," I was not able to find any projects examining the correlation between Jelinek's and Butler's projects of 'excitable' speech, or 'rebellious speech,' as Stehle terms it.

[28] "in a sort of epistemological process, assimilates the biggest authors, thinkers, and composers, and which, with recourse to Judith Butler or Luce Irigaray, the research has described as 'resignification,' 'critical mimesis' or 'hysterical writing.'"

injurious language. Via a close analysis and comparison of Butler's theory of "excitable speech" and Jelinek's literary writing, I carefully consider the citational aspect of language and how it can be used for resistive means, how interpellation[29] via the narrative stance functions in Jelinek's writing, and to what extent Jelinek's re-use of injurious language and pornographic discourse contains a potential for subversion. While in *Excitable Speech*, Butler often references oral speech rather than written language, the chapter sets out to explore the potential for resignification in written, and more specifically, literary language. By means of these inquiries, I will also establish where the limits of Butler's reflections lie and where Jelinek's language could possibly help extend Butler's argument. I argue that Butler's explanation of the 'phantasmatic' character of pornography, which she uses to justify her rejection of censorship of pornography, does not necessarily hold up in light of Jelinek's use of both the allegorical aspect of pornographic discourse and the very real and constitutive effects of this discourse on language and subject positions.

2. The Force of Language

2.1 Excitable Speech

In *Excitable Speech*, Judith Butler analyzes various acts of hate speech and deconstructs calls for censorship of certain forms of such speech while going into depth about the workings of injurious language. Her argument about the resignification of hateful terms serves as a vantage point for analyzing Jelinek's project. Butler posits that "speech can be 'returned' to its speaker in a different form, that it can be cited against its originary

[29] I use the term 'interpellation' in the sense of Louis Althusser's 1970 theory that "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (1269); in other words, interpellation is a process by which an individual becomes a socially and politically recognizable subject, one constituted by and through ideology.

purpose, and perform a reversal of effects" (*Excitable Speech* 14). This declaration can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, it can be read in terms of the potential of injurious language to counter its violating impact by transgressing this sphere and by being utilized in new, empowering ways. On the other, it can be understood as recognizing that a well-intended re-use of hurtful language can backfire; instead of having the desired subversive effect, it can result in an unmeant sedimentation of the injurious effect of the terms. The risk that comes with the unforeseeable outcome is an integral part of the potential of "speech [that] is always in some ways out of our control," or as Butler terms it more concisely, "excitable speech" (15). When speech is out of control, it is beyond the sovereignty of the speaking agent; it transcends context and is not bound to one moment in time. Another way to understand speech as out of control is to comprehend it as things being in motion. If something is out of control, there is usually unforseeable movement; it is impossible to predict what is moved and how, what is possibly added or taken out of the scene; unthought of constellations can happen; and above all, the outcome and effect are beyond anyone's control or imagination. Butler is not, however, implying that excitable speech is out of control to the extent it becomes undecipherable. With all its possibilities for resignification, language remains subject to rules and limitations, which is also why Butler advocates for a reappropriation of speech in place rather than pressing for the creation of a new language.

Jelinek epitomizes the language game of moving things, meanings, and images around. She has repeatedly been referred to as a master of the "Kalauer" (*corny joke, paronomasia*) with word plays such as the following abundant in her writing: "[…] in der Natur, wo sich das Wahre ereignet und die Waren von ihren eigenen Etiketten

beschwindelt werden"[30] (*Lust* 206). Not only does she play with the phonological sameness between "Wahre" (*the true*) and "Ware" (*thing, commodity*), but she also adds another dimension when she uses the antithetical verb "beschwindeln" (*to swindle*), which again is paired with a term that denotes the economic market, "Etiketten" (*tags*), thus referring back to capitalistic commodity. Her use of puns deconstructs socially constructed myths, such as the supposedly unquestionable truth of nature, and it also creates new possible meanings for language by forming unexpected constellations within familiar speech. She surpasses the imagination of some critics who, instead of recognizing what she is doing with language, are too preoccupied with being baffled.[31] Rather than engage with the word plays, they decide that she merely must not be able to speak, or rather write, language properly and that she repeatedly misses the mark of the correct usage of terms. I argue in favour of recognizing Jelinek's gift for surprising, or in her own terms, for having her texts slap the reader in the face with their language games; her acts of moving language around and of allowing language to move beyond her control or intention constitute a possibility for resistance to oppressive language structures. She breaks language open to wrench it from its conventional context and puts it in new contexts by creating never-before heard-of combinations. There is no way to predict how her "excitable speech" will be received, which is in part due to the fact that failure is an inherent component of speech acts as well as to language's out-of-controlness: language that has been appropriated for hurtful and degrading purposes at one moment by one speaker or rather group of speakers, possesses

[30] "[…] in nature, where the true and good dwelleth and goods are lied to by their own labels" (*Lust* 167).
[31] See, for example, Federmaier's article „Sprachgewalt als Gewalt gegen die Sprache: Zu Jelineks *Lust*," which is clearly overwhelmed by Jelinek's use of language.

the inherent potential to be re-appropriated at a different point in time, by a different set of speakers for completely different purposes.[32]

2.2 Citationality

Taking up Jacques Derrida's understanding of speech acts, Butler rejects the idea that language originates with a single speaker and asserts that speech is always citational, or in other words, that "[a] speech act does not take place in the isolated moment of its utterance, but is the 'condensation' of past, present, and even future unforeseen meanings" (Salih 102). Butler works through numerous questions relating to citationality and concludes her reflections with the following observation:

> [I]s iterability or citationality not precisely this: *the operation of that metalepsis by which the subject who "cites" the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself?* The subject who utters the socially injurious words is mobilized by that long string of injurious interpellations: the subject achieves a temporary status in the citing of that utterance, in performing itself as the origin of that utterance. (*Excitable Speech* 49-50; emphasis in original)

There are several aspects that need consideration when thinking about citationality. Butler points out that the utterance, or the discourse, does not originate with the subject who speaks or, as can also be argued, writes it.[33] Discourse is always already there. It is just in

[32] See Stehle, "Pop, Porn, and Rebellious Speech" 233, on the (un)intended 'failures' of feminist political performance.

[33] While speech and writing are not the same, Derrida argues that writing comprehends speech, and more generally, language (Glendinning 44-45). He thus positions himself against thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau who based their theories on a binary between speech and writing and argued that speech is the more natural, truthful form of language while writing is mediated in time and space. For Derrida, writing reveals the structures inherent to language. He brings to light the constructedness of the apparent naturalness of speech by showing that language always defers meaning; writing exemplifies this difference or *différance* that appears more hidden in speech. According to Derrida, "there is no outside text" (*Of Grammatology* 158), which means that the system of language has a structure with writing at its center, which he positions both within and outside the

the moment of language being uttered that the utterer is temporarily positioned as the point of origin. One problematic aspect of this understanding of citationality is that a person who invokes and attempts to disseminate the hurtful effects of hateful language could try to shift responsibility away from themselves and towards the historicity of the utterance or discourse. However, Butler's definition of citationality also makes it clear that even though injurious language is "cited from elsewhere […] it requires the subject for its efficacy" (80). She goes on to clarify that injurious language could not act as such "if it were not *a citation of itself;* only because we already know its force from its prior instances do we know it to be so offensive now […]. The iterability of hate speech is effectively dissimulated by the 'subject' who speaks the speech of hate" (80; emphasis in original). This is exactly the point at which both the potential for resignification as well as the risk for failure lie, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter.

The fact that hate speech is dependent upon a speaker for its efficacy often leads to arguments for censorship of said speech. However, censorship does not take away the force of hateful speech, but rather (re)produces its strength by imposing limits on its speakability. Even if hateful speech is censored, its power to hurt is still invoked, just in different contexts: "Thus, the effort to constrain the term culminates in its very proliferation […]. The term not only appears in the regulation as that discourse to be regulated, but reappears in public debate over its fairness and value specifically as the conjured or imagined act of self-ascription that is explicitly prohibited by its regulation" (131). On the basis of the example of the US military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, Butler

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structure (Klages, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences – A Reading Guide," http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~sflores/KlagesDerrida.html. Accessed on July 24, 2018).

outlines how censorship does not lead to a disappearance of the term or discourse to be suppressed, but instead to a prolific production of the prohibited speech. She argues that by regulating language, as in what is speakable and what is unspeakable, the censoring body is responsible for a sort of redoubling of the restricted speech (130-33). Repressive rules and control of speakability entail that a possibly productive resignification of hateful speech is prevented. However, without censorship, the "'subject' who speaks the speech of hate" can cite injurious language with the purpose of spreading and sedimenting it or cite it with the goal of breaking with its prior use and opening it up for new contexts.

2.3 Open Temporality

Citationality is not only constitutive of hate speech; it is an inherent component of language on the whole. Hate speech is one instance of more general characteristics of language, but one whose citational aspect is more striking because of its hurtfulness. In addition to its citational nature, language also possesses the integral aspect of open temporality. There is never a clear origin or a clear end, i.e. no finite meaning to a set of words, in the sense that language can be re-contextualized and thus opened up to new meanings and purposes, as long as the basic rules of the functioning of language, such as grammar, are maintained. Butler attributes "changeable power" (14) to language, or, as Derrida would argue, the structure of writing, which comprises the spoken and the written word as well as whole sets of discourses. In terms of temporality, a term or discourse can be re-appropriated because a speech "'act' is not a momentary happening, but a certain nexus of temporal horizons" (14); language that was at some point used in a hurtful way in one context can be used in a different context at another point in time. Speech contains the

possibility of a "restaging" (14), which is the moment for possible resistance. Butler clarifies this potential for resignification or a 're-staging' by pointing out that the "changeable power of […] terms marks a kind of discursive performativity that is […] a ritual chain of resignification whose origin and end remain unfixed and unfixable" (14). She provides a concrete example of when she herself was in a situation during which resistance of a hurtful term became possible. In an interview, she described the following scene:

> I remember once walking on a street in Berkeley and some kid leaned out of a window and asked, "Are you a lesbian?" Just like that. I replied, "Yes, I *am* a lesbian." I returned it in the affirmative. It was a completely impulsive moment. It was an interpellation from nowhere. Of course, what such a questioner is really asking is, "Are you this thing that I fear and loathe? Do you dare to say yes to this thing that you apparently are, at least on the basis of what you look like? And I have power over you to the extent that I am now seeking to expose you through the question I pose to you." To the extent that I was able very quickly to turn around and say, "Yes, I am a lesbian," the power of my interrogator was lost. My questioner was then left in a kind of shock, having heard somebody gamely, proudly take on the term-somebody who spends most of her life deconstructing the term in other contexts. It was a very powerful thing to do. It wasn't that I authored that term: I received the term and gave it back; I replayed it, reiterated it. (Olson 759-60; emphasis in original)

This moment of 're-staging' through language's inherent citationality is a comprehensive and compelling example of how injurious language can be used against its original purpose and effect a reclaiming of agency and power.

Butler's theory of re-signification can be used to better understand Jelinek's literary project and her integral language games. For instance, Butler's notion of the open temporality of speech, i.e. her focus on language's citationality with indefinite possibilities for resignification, can lead to insights into Jelinek's attempts to subvert pornographic discourse by "giving back its historicity."[34] Both Butler and Jelinek are aware of how

[34] The notion of historicity will be explored in more depth in section 3.1 of this chapter. To summarize rapidly, the idea of giving back historicity means bringing to light the

speakers use hurtful language in a way that masks both the historicity and the "changeable power" of that language. Often, oppressive language is employed in a way that makes it appear as set in stone and irrefutable, radiating airs of infinite power. This is exactly what Butler and Jelinek attempt to deconstruct, each in their own ways, with Butler working more in the theoretical domain and Jelinek more in the literary. They demonstrate how "counter-speech, a kind of talking back" (*Excitable Speech* 15) works: "The interval between instances of utterance not only makes the repetition and resignification of the utterance possible, but shows how words might, through time, become disjointed from their power to injure" (15). As demonstrated throughout this chapter, Jelinek's oeuvre is a satiric[35] take on the situation that "[t]hose who seek to fix with certainty the link between certain speech acts and their injurious effects will surely lament the open temporality of the speech act" (15). From both Butler's and Jelinek's perspective, it is counter-productive to censor hurtful language and impossible to invent a brand new, non-hurtful language. Instead, it is necessary to work towards a re-contextualization of language that is always already there.

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constructedness of injurious language by making the reader see that there is nothing natural about prevalent dynamics, practices, and structures, but that they developed over time and that they are invested with power relations. Returning historicity to a discourse is thus not the same as historicizing it since the former is more interested in the constructedness and power mechanisms than the latter which treats language from an historical perspective by outlining its historical development.

[35] Critics have used various descriptors, such as parody, satire, irony, among others, for Jelinek's writing. I deem 'satiric' one of the most fitting given that satire entails a critical voice in addition to an excessive parroting and exaggerated imitation. This does not negate the presence of forms of "parody, excess, deformation, and doubling," (Stehle 233) in addition to other styles.

3. Reinscription of Historicity

3.1 Giving Back Historicity

Jelinek masterfully deploys a constant re-contextualization of established and normativized speech. In *Lust,* for example, her writing quite clearly does not attempt to arouse the readers; rather, it deconstructs the concept of desire, which, as mentioned above, leads to the denomination of her novel as "anti-pornography" (Kaplan 150) both by herself and critics. Commenting on the intent of her novel, Jelinek asserts that she actively tried to hamstring the experience of pleasure, using aesthetic and linguistic traps to "absorb lust;" she adds that the novel is not to be consumed like mainstream pornography (Lahann 78). Taking up Butler's theoretical framework, it is possible to assert more specifically that Jelinek's project is one of giving back historicity: "Eine pornographische Darstellung ist auch immer eine geschichtslose Darstellung. […] Es geht darum, Sexualität als etwas Politisches und nicht als etwas Unschuldiges zu begreifen, das einfach da ist"[36] (Jelinek, "Der Sinn des Obszönen" 103). Jelinek undertakes to reveal the myth of sexuality,[37] to uncover the construction of its power dynamics, to make the reader aware of the mechanisms at work beneath the surface of a supposed "naturalness" of things. Sexuality is not given; it is political in the sense that it cannot be reduced to an expression of physical desires and also in that the sexual act influences other spheres of life. It is in this sense that Jelinek's *Lust* gives back historicity to pornography.

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[36] "A pornographic representation is also always an ahistorical representation. […] It's about conceptualizing sexuality as something political and not as something innocent that is simply there."

[37] See, for example, Gürtler, "Die Entschleierung der Mythen von Natur und Sexualität;" Chien "Der Mythos des Weiblichen erläutert an Elfriede Jelineks Romanen *Die Liebhaberinnen* und *Die Klavierspielerin*."

A closer look at Butler's argument about the "historicity" (*Excitable Speech* 36) of injurious names helps shed light on Jelinek's project. Butler elucidates the historicity of the name in the following way: "[it] might be understood as the history which has become internal to a name, has come to constitute the contemporary meaning of a name: the sedimentation of its usages as they have become part of the very name, a sedimentation, a repetition that congeals, that gives the name its force" (36). In other words, the history of the name has become so internal that it is not questioned any more, or rather, the history of the name has faded away and the only aspect that is still apparent is the result of its sedimentation and hence its force. As Butler explains, the "force of the name [thus is] an effect of its historicity" (36); hence, the necessity of uncovering language's open temporality and the developmental path of speech if one wants to intervene in the force of the injurious name.[38] One thus not only uses the fact that a meaning of a name is not fixed, but one can also undo the veiling of the development and implications of a speech act or a discourse. Butler writes that "[c]learly, injurious names have a history, one that is invoked and reconsolidated at the moment of utterance, but not explicitly told. This is not simply a history of how they have been used, in what contexts, and for what purposes; it is the way such histories are installed and arrested in and by the name" (36). The fact that the history of the name, which is implied, is present but not "explicitly told" is the exact reason for the

[38] The open temporality of language, which allows for exactly these moments of breaking with the determinative history of the name, can also be understood along the lines of literary and feminist scholar Carla Freccero's 2007 argument about the queering of time. Freccero deconstructs the notion of history as a fixed, unchanging concept and pushes for an understanding of constantly evolving nonlinear temporalities. Drawing on Derrida's elaborations on the linguistic sign's inherent potentiality for a rupture with prior contexts, Freccero explains that the linearity of temporality has to be rethought and denormatized since the constitutive aspect of the sign being "already divided by repetition in its 'first time'" ("Theater of Cruelty" 14) does not allow for an upholding of the construction of teleological, linear temporality (Freccero 489).

power of the name and its injurious potential. However, this historicity can also serve as the gateway to breaking open the name's supposedly fixed temporality and making its power structures explicit.

Jelinek repeatedly maintains that her writing project is not meant to duplicate mainstream pornography, or even simply re-write it from a female-centered perspective, which is not possible as the language of desire is phallologocentric – "Ich habe gemerkt, daß es für eine Frau nicht möglich ist, [über die Lust] zu sprechen, ohne in die Sprache der Männer zu fallen"[39] (Lahann 78). In *Lust*, she aims to write and make explicit the history of women's oppression that is at the heart of pornographic representations of sexuality. For Jelinek, pornography obfuscates the historicity of the debasement of women and the ensuing acceptance of such torture by representing woman as enjoying sexual degradation and subjugation (Lahann 78). Jelinek's take on pornographic writing resembles the more general idea of the bind of phallocentric power that surfaces even in erotic writing from a female-centered perspective, for example in well-known tropes such as women 'wanting' to be overpowerd by men in sexual play.

Before analyzing specific examples of Jelinek's writing, it is crucial to take note that Butler is not only referencing the historicity of individual names as in 'name-calling.' Drawing on Michel Foucault's work, Butler clarifies that it is "less [about] the power of the name than […] *the name of the power*" (*Excitable Speech* 34-35; emphasis in original). In the words of Foucault, "power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (*The History of Sexuality* 93). Butler derives from this that

[39] "I realized that it is not possible for a woman to speak about [lust] without falling into the language of men."

"[p]ower works through dissimulation: it comes to appear as something other than itself, indeed, it comes to appear as a *name*" (*Excitable Speech* 36; emphasis in original). This theory of how power works is key to a more complex understanding of Jelinek's writing and her project of uncovering the historicity of terms and discourses as well as using their open-endedness. To summarize, injurious language gains its force via the sedimentation of its historicity; it gains power via an "arrest of movement, as a movement which comes to a halt or arrests itself – through nominalization. The name [thus] carries within itself the movement of a history that it arrests" (36). I argue that Jelinek is attempting to restart this movement and resignify injurious language.

3.2 Taking Risks

Resignification has to be understood in this context of injurious interpellation concealing its historicity while at the same time remaining open to future meanings. Historicity cannot be ignored or left out of the picture, insists Butler, since "prior meanings are still important in constituting both social and physical identities" (Salih 113). However, while the historicity of injurious language does have an effect on the constitution of the subject who is addressed, this historicity is not eternally determinative of its future meaning. Within the context of the open temporality of speech, Butler advocates for the re-appropriation of injurious language: "Insurrectionary speech becomes the necessary response to injurious language, a risk taken in response to being put at risk, a repetition in language that forces change" (*Excitable Speech* 163). Even though the act of repeating injurious language carries the risk of failure, it is necessary to put language on the line. Only by re-using the same language, only by breaking open context, only by rupturing the afore-

established conventional meaning does a path to linguistic resistance open up. Or, in Butler's words:

> The name one is called both subordinates and enables, producing a sense of agency from ambivalence, a set of effects that exceed the animating intentions of the call. To take up the name that one is called is no simple submission to prior authority, for the name is already unmoored from prior context, and entered into the labor of self-definition. The word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation. (163)

This ambiguity is thus an integral aspect of harmful language, marking the productive moment for taking a chance at re-appropriation.

Jelinek's writing exemplifies the workings of excitable speech and thus demonstrates a potential for resignification of injurious language. Throughout her 1989 novel, *Lust*, there are passages in which the debasement of women is made notably obvious. For example, Jelinek deconstructs the binary construction of both the physiologically and spiritually perfect Mary, mother of Jesus, and the aging, wrinkled, decaying, and leaking old woman, the Vetula. The main female protagonist in the story, Gerti, is described with breasts like withering plants: "Geübt fängt er im Flug ihre Titten aus dem Kleid heraus und bindet sie, die schon verwelken, an ihren Wurzeln mit Schnüren zu prallen Ballons zusammen"[40] (*Lust* 75). The dichotomy implies that the repulsive aspect is inherent in every woman and that it is her task to counter such debasement by striving for the ideal of Mary.[41] Controlling disgust is one way of maintaining patriarchal power structures (Reichenpfader 336-38), something that Jelinek is clearly subverting in her novel by letting the 'disgusting' aspect of Gerti's corporeality come to light and be realized.

[40] "With a practised hand he catches her tits as they fall from her dress, they are already sagging and wilting but he gathers them into bunches like balloons with a firm grip" (*Lust* 64).

[41] In the fourth chapter, I will look in more depth at additional contsructions of the female body as monstrous, abject, and grotesque.

In addition, Jelinek rewrites the morally, spiritually and physically clean woman by portraying Gerti as the "ewig schmutzige, blutende, faulende Loch, das den Mann hinabzieht"[42] ("Schamgrenzen" 138). The possibility of resistance is however severly limited, as it is Gerti's husband who forbids her from taking care of her body and washing herself:

> Neuerdings hat er seiner Frau Gerti auch verboten, sich zu waschen, denn auch ihr Geruch gehört ihm ganz. [...] Wie einen Faden soll diese Frau ihre Gerüche nach Schweiß, Pisse, Scheiße, hinter sich herziehen, und er kontrolliert [...]. Dieser lebende Abfallhaufen. [...] Es gefällt ihm, daß diese im Ort bestangezogene Frau in ihrem eigenen Schmutz herumlaufen soll."[43] (*Lust* 56-57)

At the same time, the combination of the uncleanly female body and the husband's role in this state of affairs opens up the historicity of female corporeality in such a way as to make room for resignification. As has been shown, one effect of using the excitability of language, of moving language around is that it allows Jelinek to uncover the absent historicity of oppressive discourses. For example, the woman is described, in numerous and creative variations, as being an empty shell. In pornographic settings, the "emptiness of woman" is often exploited: female orifices serve the role of being filled up with the man's genitalia, various objects, or fluids such as his ejaculate. In *Lust*, this discourse is supplemented by the references to woman herself as nothingness: "Die Frau ist dem Nichts entwendet worden und wird mit dem Stempel des Mannes jeden Tag aufs neue entwertet"[44] (19). Besides the apparent nod toward and overt rewriting of positions such as that of Friedrich

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[42] "eternally dirty, bleeding, rotting hole that pulls down the man."
[43] "Recently he forbade his wife Gerti to wash. For her smell too belongs to him entirely. […] He wants her trailing a banner of sweat, piss and shit scents. And he checks […]. A living heap of garbage. […] He likes to have this woman, the best-dressed woman in the village, going about the house in her own dirt" (*Lust* 47-48).
[44] "She has been drawn forth out of nothingness, out of the void, and every day the Man cancels her with his stamp anew, rendering her null and void" (*Lust* 17).

Hebbel, who claimed that "Ein Weib ist ein Nichts; nur durch den Mann kann sie etwas werden" [45] (26), Jelinek literarily processes what she had argued in her article "Schamgrenzen." Woman's corporeality is not only filled up by man; Jelinek also makes explicit the underlying hostility towards women that has been part of Western culture for so long. In her novel, the woman is "gähnende Leere"[46] (*Lust* 29), she is "weniger als überhaupt nichts mehr"[47] (133). By inserting and repeating positions such as Hebbel's but to such an extent that repetition structures the text, Jelinek reveals the historicity behind constructions of female inferiority.

3.3 Deconstructing the Status Quo of Voicelessness

In addition to deconstructing prevalent societal myths about women and their role in society, Jelinek tackles the construction of female voicelessness in her oeuvre. The silencing of women is key to a certain portrayal of womanhood; the lack of a voice, or at least, a voice that is being heard, is part of the historicity of the term "woman."[48] Jelinek herself, as mentioned above, claimed that her goal in the writing of *Lust* was to uncover the historicity of pornographic language. By understanding pornographic representation as a form of hate speech, not in order to call for censorship but in order to affirm its capacity to surpass the sphere of the phantasmatic, one can begin to see how "the subject [is constituted] in a subordinate position" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 18). The narrator of the novel constitutes the main characters in their respective subject positions. While dialogue

[45] "A woman is nothing; it is only through the man that she can become something."
[46] "yawning emptiness" (*Lust* 26).
[47] "The woman is less than nothing at all now (*Lust* 110).
[48] See Rebecca Solnit's book *Men Explain Things to Me*, and most particularly her chapter "Cassandra Among the Creeps" for a discussion of the history of women being silenced.

is completely absent from the novel, there is nevertheless a difference with regard to the attribution of speech. Even though the man is not quoted directly, the narrator clarifies that he is the one who gets to speak, whereas the woman is the one who must be silent and without a voice. As the man himself is constructed solely in terms of his position of privilege in society and his sexual insatiability, his internal focalisation can be read as the language of pornography and thus exercising a form of hate speech:

> Zuerst will er sie sich vornehmen, dafür hat er 2 Termine abgesagt. Die Frau öffnet den Mund, um ihm abzusagen. Sie denkt an seine Kraft und schließt den Mund wieder. Dieser Mann würde auch im Schoß von Felsen seine Melodie spielen, er würde schallend auf der Geige und dem Glied streicheln. Immer wieder geht dieses Lied los, dieser knallende Laut, der so überraschend furchtbar ist, von unwilligen Blicken begleitet.[49] (*Lust* 16)

The choice of the word "absagen" (*to cancel*) in this passage provides insight into who has the authority to "sagen" (*to say*) something and who doesn't. While the man has the voice to cancel his appointments, the woman is not in a position to go further than simply opening her mouth, prohibited from uttering the sound necessary to speak against her imminent appointment with her husband. He does not even have to explicitly evoke his superiority here as the mere thought of his strength renders her silent. She has been in this situation numerous times before and her subject position has already been and keeps on being constituted by the mere possibility of him exercising a form of hate speech directed towards her. His words have the power to enact what they name and to constitute her social reality. The opposition between the words "streicheln" (*to stroke, to caress*) and both

[49] "First he wants a crack at her. He's cancelled two appointments in order to have it. The woman opens her mouth to cancel *this* appointment, but she thinks of his strength and shuts her mouth again. This man would play his tune even in the bosom of the mountains, his violin stroke would echo off the rocks, he'd stroke his rocks off. Time and again the same old song. The resounding banging tune. So astoundingly terrible. To the accompaniment of resentful looks" (*Lust* 14).

"schallend" (*resounding*) and "knallend" (*popping*) emphasizes his force and power even more. The aesthetics of musicality combine with the hurtfulness of hate speech to create a certain ambiguity in the text. In lieu of words, the sounds transform the act of speaking into a corporeal act,[50] forcing the female body to subject to the man's linguistic and discursive power.

The question remains of how exactly the mechanics of voicelessness work. Butler invokes Catharine MacKinnon's position regarding pornography, and even though she clearly distances herself from MacKinnon's stance, her arguments help shed more light on the mechanism of silencing:

> The class of people, mainly women, who are subordinated and degraded through their depiction in pornography, the class to whom pornography addresses its imperative of subordination, are the ones who lose their voice, as it were, as the consequence of having been addressed and discredited by the voice of pornography. Understood as hate speech, pornography deprives the addressee (the one depicted who is at once presumed to be the one to whom pornography is addressed) of the power to speak. (*Excitable Speech* 82)

Gerti is time and again addressed by the voice of pornography – that voice coming from both the diegetic level, i.e. her husband and her lover Michael, but also from the extradiegetic level, i.e. the narrator in many instances and its personification of the male gaze. These voices are to be understood less as personalized entities and more as a medium for the all-pervasive workings of power.[51] Throughout the text, the reader is made aware of

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[50] See also Butler's discussion of her argument that "*speaking is itself a bodily act*" (*Excitable Speech* 10; emphasis in original). See further chapters 3 and 4 for a more in depth discussion of the function of embodiment.

[51] As Karin Bauer points out in her article "The End of Tragedy out of the Spirit of the RAF: Elfriede Jelinek's *Ulrike Maria Stuart*," "Jelinek's figures are carriers and products of ideas, [...] [by which] she lays open the ideological nature of all ideas. Her figures speak with multiple voices becoming the *medium* rather than the *agent* of language" (163; emphasis in original). The ideological function and the significance of citationality behind this claim will be examined in relation to narratorial interpellation in section 4.2 of this chapter.

Gerti's lack of a voice and her wordlessness, which is one of many instances where Jelinek uncovers the historicity of the construction of womanhood. The most audible sound uttered is accidental and primal: "Der Wind erpreßt Stimme von ihr. Einen unwillkürlichen, nicht sehr wilden Schrei preßt es ihr aus den Lungen, einen tauben Ton"[52] (*Lust* 84). Not only does Gerti not come close to uttering words – "a frozen [...] and none too savage cry" – but she does not even succeed in claiming some sort of agency – "the wind forces," "involuntary," "squeezed out." In the end, all that comes out is a "mute sound," an oxymoron that serves as an allegory for the impossibility of constructing and writing female desire.

In response to a question about *Lust*, Jelinek explains that she "versuch[t] hier das weibliche Begehren zu thematisieren, das sich niemals realisieren kann, weil es sich nur in seiner eigenen Auslöschung realisieren läßt"[53] (Gross 10). Her novel illustrates how the female voice is realized only through its own annihilation. In Jelinek's fictional world, phallocentric structures destroy attempts by women to break through voicelessness. For example, the few times when Gerti opens her mouth to say something, the phallus literally silences her: "Gleich will die Frau, aus der Geschlechtsnarkose erwacht, wieder zügellos den Mund zum Sprechen benutzen. Sie muß sich stattdessen aufsperren und den Schwanz Michaels in das Kabinett ihres Mundes einlassen"[54] (*Lust* 120). After awakening from the sexual act, Gerti's effort to claim a voice is undercut. Similar to Jelinek's point about the

[52] "The wind forces a frozen cry from her lips. An involuntary and none too savage cry, a mute sound squeezed out of her lungs" (*Lust* 71).
[53] "here tries to thematize female desire, which can never come into existence, because it can only be realized in its own effacement."
[54] "The woman, awoken from the sedation of sex, is about to use her gob for uninhibited talking, but while it's open Michael can think of better things to do with it and shoves his corncob in" (*Lust* 100).

simultaneous writing and annihilation of female desire, Gerti's effort at speaking is undermined from the start. What's more, the use of the word "Kabinett" (*cabinet*) evokes the domain of politics, which calls for an understanding of the act of silencing as a political one, and thus, one of subject formation. However, it is not only Gerti's voice that is curbed. The narrator also turns to the reader, quite often, but not always, an implied female reader,[55] and orders her to "Bändigen Sie Ihre Sprache"[56] (*Lust* 174). The passage immediately preceding this command shifts from describing an individual woman's activities to evoking a community of women, by using the supposedly inclusive "wir" (*we*). This pronoun creates a semblance of closeness as if the text was making the call for female voicelessness overtly visible and in that point-blankness disrupts the continuous workings of the power inherent in silencing. Even though the text itself does not already resignify the status quo of voicelessness, it paves the way for such a resignification by historicizing voicelessness and unveiling the power mechanisms behind it.[57]

4. The Workings of Resignification

4.1 The Language of Pornography

As Jelinek points out in numerous interviews, her 1989 novel *Lust* is meant to be a re-writing of pornography, or in the words of Butler, a re-writing that historicizes and utilizes the phallocentric language of obscenity. It is clear that *Lust* restages pornographic settings with the all-too potent strong man and the constantly willing and docile woman:

[55] See references to "wir Frauen" throughout the novel on pp. 145-46 or p. 203.
[56] "Mind your language" (*Lust* 143).
[57] The narrator plays a decisive role in the positioning of the characters and in the reproduction and resignification of pornographic discourse. For that reason, the function of the narrator is discussed in more detail in the following section 4.2 entitled 'narratorial interpellation.'

> Neben der Frau fallen Kleidungshaufen zusammen wie tote Tiere. Der Mann, immer noch im Mantel, steht mit seinem starken Glied zwischen den Falten seiner Kleidung, als fiele Licht auf einen Stein. Strumpfhose und Unterhose bilden einen feuchten Ring um die Hausschuhe der Frau, aus denen sie steigt. Das Glück scheint die Frau schlaff zu machen, sie kann es nicht fassen. Der schwere Schädel des Direktors wühlt sich beißend in ihr Schamhaar, allzeit bereit ist sein Verlangen, etwas von ihr zu verlangen. Er neigt sein Haupt ins Freie und drückt statt dessen das ihrige an seinen Flaschenhals, wo es ihr schmecken soll. Ihre Beine sind gefesselt, sie selbst wird befühlt. Er spaltet ihr den Schädel über seinem Schwanz, verschwindet in ihr und zwickt sie als Hilfslieferung noch fester in den Hintern. Er drückt ihre Stirn nach hinten, daß ihr Genick ungeschickt knackt, und schlürft an ihren Schamlippen, alles zusammengenommen und gebündelt, damit still aus seinen Augen das Leben auf sie schauen kann.[58] (17)

But what exactly constitutes the pornographic aspect in the text and wherein does Jelinek's supposed subversion of the literary genre lie? In her 2009 article, Jelinek scholar Stefanie Kaplan works through some of the essential criteria for pornography as literary genre by referring back to two studies conducted in the 1990s, which outline various factors as fundamental for a text to be pornographic. The first one concerns the explicit and detailed representation of sexual acts (Kaplan 144). *Lust* is full of very specific, straightforward descriptions of not only sexual, but indeed very much hard-core, scenes. The example above is one of numerous passages in which the reader is confronted with an elaborate illustration of intercourse between "the man" and "the woman." The male character is at times identified as "the Direktor," which exemplifies his power position both in society and

[58] "Beside the woman, clothing falls in a heap, like dead animals. The Man, still in his coat, is standing with his member standing firm amidst the folds of his clothing. Like light falling on a stone. The tights and panties make a moist ring around the woman's slippers as she steps out of them. Happiness seems to be making the woman go slack. She can't grasp it. The Direktor's cumbrous cranium worries amongst her pubic hair, he bites, his desire is always at the ready, ready to desire something of her. He raises his head to the air and now presses hers to the neck of his bottle, here, taste this. Her legs are in a tight grip. He is touching her up. He cracks her skull on his prick, vanishes inside her and gives her derrière a good hard pinch to help things along. He forces her head back so that her neck cracks, an ungainly sound, and he slurps at her labia, gripped and gathered tight, the life gazing silently from his eyes up to her" (*Lust* 16).

in his house and also hints at the role of a movie director, i.e. him being the producer of pornography. The fact that the characters are most often than not referred to by their gender roles of "man" and "woman" rather than by their names further recalls the staging of pornography that effaces distinguishing personal features, making characters exchangeable (Faulstich 206-7) and providing a more accessible projection surface for the viewers or readers.

The suppression of names not only emphasizes the corresponding gender roles of the characters and their position in society that follows from these these roles, but also reduces them to their sexual organs. The only aspect that seems to be interesting about the woman is her genitalia and the text zooms in on this part of her body from several angles (Faulstich 207-8). In the passage cited above, the director orally stimulates his wife and "life gaz[es] silently from his eyes up to her." While the translator chose the singular pronoun "her" in this final sentence, the German word "sie" can also mean the plural "them." The man could be directing his gaze at the woman, i.e. "her" – and so reducing her to a sexual object -- or at her labia, i.e. "them" – and so exercising a fragmenting gaze. In addition, the original German implies that his eyes are looking down on her, further emphasizing the power dynamic between the couple. The text also "zooms in" on the man's genitalia, but without reducing the man to the potency of his penis. While the man's "heavy head" has the power to blaze a trail through the woman's genitalia, thus being portrayed as indestructible, the woman's head is split in half by the force of his penis, thus portrayed as fragile and a sort of brittle empty shell with no significant content.

Despite the elevated degree of brutality and obscenity in the description, the irony in the depiction of the man's member's potency cannot be ignored. As much as he would

like to simply use his 'God-given superiority' over the woman and not have to give a little boost to the supposed 'natural supremacy' of his penis, his actions are clumsy and almost a bit desperate. He "pushes her head to his bottleneck," the "taste of which she should enjoy," thus leaving room for the option that she does not enjoy it. Furthermore, despite possessing a 'potent penis,' he needs help to crack open her head, which makes the reader start to question the force of his member. And even the act of expediting seems unskillful, as he exercises his strength in such a way that her neck cracks awkwardly. Moreover, Jelinek brings words such as "wrinkles" (an alternative translation for "folds") or "limp" (alternative translation for "slack") in close proximity to the description of "his member standing firm." In this way, she "untether[es] the speech act from the sovereign subject" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 15) with the speech act being the pornographic representation and the sovereign subject the one who claims agency in this scene. Certainly, the "director" could be read as the potent and superior life-giving master were it not for the ironic insertions which reduce the injurious force of phallocentric pornography and complicate the construction of subjectivity by deconstructing the constitution of male superiority and female inferiority in standard pornographic settings.

While ironizing the potency of the male member, the depiction simultaneously plays into the "penis cult" (Ertel 99), that drives much of mainstream heteronormative porn. The man, "the director," controls and stages the sexual encounters with his almighty organ, which represents his sexual power. According to Ertel, the "penis cult" also plays out in the emphasis on oral stimulation (99-100): not only is the woman supposed to pleasure the man orally, but his organ is so powerful that, as mentioned above, it splits her head in half. The parodic depiction of the strength of the penis also signifies the general heightened

sexual potency of the man. Standing upright in pole position, his "strong member" even seems to possess the power to produce light, reminiscent of God's command in Genesis "Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1.3).

The discourse of male power needs a corresponding lack of power in the female counterpart: the woman is presented as always ready, always willing to have intercourse, an expectation that is firmly embedded in the fulfillment of her conjugal duties. In contrast to the man who is presented as standing upright, the woman is associated with a lack of strength as her clothes "fall to the floor like dead animals" and her undergarments lie on the floor like a "moist circle" around her legs. While the adjective "moist," or "wet," has a clear sexual connotation in this context, one could also read the depiction of her wet clothes lying around her as sign of a loss of control. The "euphoria" associated with imminent intercourse (Ertel 97-98) leaves the woman "limp," the exact opposite of the man's anything but flaccid male member.

As is the case throughout the novel, the text meets certain criteria of the pornographic text, while also including elements that alienate it from the categorization as pornography. Although the man's penis is denominated with the highly sexualized word "cock," it is also described as a "bottleneck," a term that would not be used in a standard pornographic setting. The text stays within the register of liquids by referring to the director's act of orally stimulating the women as him "slurping her labia."[59] Sexually

[59] Kaplan demonstrates to what extent Jelinek's texts show how men cannibalistically incorporate women's bodies: "Immer bereit zu sein, ihr Herz herauszureißen, es auf die Zunge zu legen wie eine Hostie und zu zeigen, daß auch der restliche Körper für den Herrn zubereitet ist, das erwartet er von seiner Frau" (*Lust* 55). ["Always to be at the ready. To tear her heart out. To lay her heart on her tongue like the host, and to show that the rest of her body is in readiness for the Lord, as he expects of his wife" (*Lust* 46)]. The depiction of the female heart and body as the host renders the female body an oral sustenance good for

explicit, this description simultaneously de-familiarizes the language used for sexual acts. Instead of the term "to lick," which would be more fitting in a pornographic setting, the narrator uses a term which adds a certain level of disgust or at least a lack of manners. According to Kaplan, Jelinek borrows from pornographic discourse, but she trangresses these conventions by making them overly visible via means of alienation and exaggeration (150). As Kaplan further points out, unlike the pornographic text, *Lust* prevents readers from identifying with the characters by making use of an omnipresent narrator whose commentary cannot be dissociated from the events (148).

4.2 Narratorial Interpellation

Jelinek continuously uses "word[s] that wound" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 163) in order to realize her project of working against the pleasure of pornographic consumption (Lahann 78) and uncovering the power structure between men and women in pornography. In *Lust*, it is the narrator and not the characters who utter 'words that wound.' Given his/her ability to inform the reader about what is going on inside the characters' thoughts, this narrator could be characterized as omniscient. But s/he does not reveal any psychological insights about the characters because this is not how they are conceptualized; they remain "flat" surfaces on which the actions seem to be writen. In addition, the narrator often comments on the events, actions and deeds reported, taking on the characteristics of an intrusive and judgemental narrator. However, Jelinek's narrators are not individualized; instead, they narrate the events through a distorting mirror of

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the man. This discourse hints both at sexuality's potential for consumption as well as Jelinek's play with the incorporation and ejection of other texts (Kaplan 152).

cultural and societal beliefs (Wilke 115). In this sense, the narrator fills in the position of a socially constructed, discursive power.

To better understand the interpellative acts of Jelinek's narrators, it is essential to go back to Butler's argument about the absence of sovereign agents of language. Without taking responsibility away from the speaking subject, Butler clarifies that "subjects are not uniquely accountable for their speech" (Salih 105). What she means is that it is not an individual speaking agent who is behind the force of injurious language, but rather ideologies and discourses. But because it is not feasible to legally prosecute ideologies and discourses, the law retroactively, in a sort of Foucaultian nod, creates the accountable speaking subject. "Although the subject is *not* the intentional originator of its deed, this does not prevent the law from prosecuting a subject which is a pre-eminently *fictional* construct" (Salih 105; emphasis in original). I argue that Jelinek's narrators can be understood as belatedly fabricated, blameable, fictional constructs. Butler's reflections render the question of blame much more complex "since it is no longer clear who or what is culpable in cases of hate speech or 'obscenity'" (Salih 105). Similarly, Jelinek's narrators, who are not only fictional constructs in the sense that they are assigned agency in order to be prosecutable, but also fictional in the literal sense due to their existence in a work of fiction, complicate the question of who or what is to blame for the pornographic representations in her texts.

As I will show in the upcoming textual analysis, Jelinek's narrators are constructed as the "subjects" of injurious speech by parroting oppressive discourses. The man and the woman in *Lust*, for example, are continuously constituted in their subjectivity via the narrator's interpellative actions. To understand this process, it is helpful to come back to

Butler's reworking of French philosopher Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation. For Butler, "the linguistic constitution of the subject may take place without the subject's even registering the operation of interpellation" (Salih 106). At no point in *Lust* are the characters directly hailed by someone, but they are nevertheless constituted by their respective oppressive or dominating gendered subject positions. More importantly, Butler does not limit the workings of interpellation to an authoritative person directly hailing another person in order for subject constitution to take place. She "asserts that power is not invested in a single divine subject, neither does it reside in a name, so that interpellation has no clear origin or end" (Salih 107). What this means for Jelinek's narrators is that they are vehicles of interpellation without being the origin of such processes and so their remarks remain open to the possibility of resignification. I would go so far as to argue that Jelinek's writing engages with the fact that "interpellation is an address that regularly misses its mark" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 33), because of the "open-ended semantic future" of words and the fact that "power cannot be localized or personified" (Salih 107). Jelinek's narrators illustrate the possibility of resignification in these interpellative structures: "[t]he terms by which we are hailed and […] [which] we never really choose are the occasion for something we might still call agency, the repetition of an originary subordination for another purpose" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 38). In *Lust*, for example, the narrator's repetition of the subjugation of patriarchy can be read as alienating the reader from such subjugation by making it all too obvious.

Jelinek's earlier work, *women as lovers*, also contains examples of resignification of oppressive language structures. The dialogue in this novel creates the stage for the more conventional use of interpellation with one character hailing another as well as the already

discussed form of narratorial interpellation. The final scene of paula's "downfall," that is, her turn to prostitution, includes such a double interpellation. First, paula is addressed and constituted as a prostitute by a stranger, who, by being a man, seems to have the required authority to hail her as such: "als paula beim bahnhof einparkte, beugte sich ein fremder zu ihr ins fenster und fragte sie: was ist, wollen wir nicht ein bißchen küssen gehen? Zuerst hat paula nein gesagt ich bin doch verheiratet und habe zwei goldige kinder"[60] (Jelinek, *Die Liebhaberinnen* 151). Even before she agrees to go with the man, she is constituted as a prostitute. But the text goes further in its positioning of paula as a prostitute: "es ist eine prostitution, die paula da macht. paula ist eine hure"[61] (152). Here, it is the narrator who intervenes and interpellates paula not only as a prostitute but as a "whore." Is it possible to speak of a resignifing of the injurious label "whore" in this case? It could be argued that paula does not own the term, that she has lost everything, and that her "downfall" into "harlotry" is the end to her life. From this angle, there seems to be no way in which the text repeats "an originary subordination for another purpose." However, the world of paula and brigitte is one in which marriage and children are the path towards increasingly subjugated female roles and lives. So the fact that paula is breaking away from this world by becoming a "whore" can be, and I argue, needs to be read as a resignification of the term. Jelinek's text deconstructs the mother-whore dichotomy, by desedimenting both motherhood and commodified sexuality.

[60] "when paula parked at the railway station, a stranger bent down to her window and asked her: how about it, why don't we go and kiss a bit? at first paula said no look i'm married and have two cute children" (*women as lovers* 185).
[61] "what paula is doing is prostitution. paula is a whore" (*women as lovers* 186).

4.3 Reinforcement and Disruption

The reinforcement of and resistance to oppressive and negating representations of femininity remain ambiguous throughout the novel. This can be seen in moments when the narrator intervenes directly, transgressing the diegetic limits of the story, and with this distancing move, interrupting the flow of female annihilation: "Vielen Dank, daß Sie meinen Beleidigungen zugehört haben"[62] (Jelinek, *Lust* 144). These narratorial interjections highlight the ways in which the text is playing with the illusion of a failure of resignification. They entertain the ambiguity that "the injurious address may appear to fix or paralyze the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 2). The innumerable insults that rain down on Gerti in the novel first seem to fix her in her subordinate position. However, in shifting the focus from narratorial interjections to the plot level, one remarks two significant moments that can be read as attempts to break out of the oppressive mould that the narrator's discourse seems to create. The first moment is Gerti's escape from her husband's tight grip and into nature and her lover's arms. It is a very short-lived moment and one that portrays her in a frenzied state: "Als gäbe es hier Mücken und eine andere befremdete Brut, schlägt die Frau in die Luft und fällt über eine Wurzel, reißt sich das Gesicht in altem Firn auf und verschwindet an dunkleren Stellen des Waldes"[63] (*Lust* 96). Described as a distraught animal, trying to break free, Gerti's only option is to embrace her insanity if she wants to have a chance at agency at all. The re-appropriation of derangement in this moment is however not lasting. Almost immediately following, "kommt sie freiwillig wieder an die Leine und Gurten

[62] "Many thanks for listening to these insults" (*Lust* 119).
[63] "As if she'd run into a swarm of gnats or some other unfamiliar mob, the woman waves her arms about, trips over a root, cuts her face on hard old snow and vanishes into the darker part of the wood" (*Lust* 81).

zurück"[64] (97). The second moment of possible escape is longer lasting and occurs at the end of the novel – it is when Gerti kills her son in his sleep. While I will examine this scene in detail in the fourth chapter, it is helpful to note here that the novel is not using infanticide to reveal Gerti's psychological state but instead to resignify the constant subordination she has been exposed to. The shocked reader may question Gerti's sanity, but it is exactly this kind of response that reveals the oppressive structures in which Gerti is caught. When the narrator explains that the son "freut[e] sich gewiß aufs Wachsen, ähnlich dem Glied seines Vaters"[65] (*Lust* 254), it becomes clear to the reader that Gerti is stepping in and hamstringing the repetitious cycle of oppression via the force of the male member. At the same time, there is an inherent risk in resignification processes, and so there is no guarantee that the reader will indeed read such moments in a subversive manner and could just as well read them as further instances of Gerti being fixed in an inferior subject position.

In the novel, Gerti is continuously being hailed in her corporeality, her inferiority, in her "Freigabe zu Quälereien, zu Erniedrigungen"[66] (Lahann 78):

> Ihr Allmächtiger, der Direktor der Fabrik, dieses Pferd mit seinem riesigen Leib, der noch vor Braten dampft, möchte unmäßig Arme und Beine um sie legen, ungeduldig ihr Obst schälen und es energisch auslecken, bevor er mit seinem Ständigen hineinfährt. Diese Frau ist zum Anbeißen und Abbeißen da. Er möchte ihre untere Hälfte aus ihren Häuten reißen und sie, noch dampfend, mit seiner guten Soße gewürzt, verschlingen.[67] (*Lust* 103)

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[64] "she returns of her own free will to the leash and strap" (*Lust* 81).
[65] "is no doubt looking forward to growing up, like his father's member" (*Lust* 206).
[66] "release to torture, to degradation."
[67] "Her Almighty, the mill Direktor, that horse of immense physique, still steaming with roast, wants to wrap his arms and legs about her. Peel her fruit impatiently. Lick the juice. Before he rams his ever-ready in. His battering ram. Salt and battery, very tasty, the woman's good enough to eat. He could go for her lower half, he'd wolf her down, still steaming, with some of his own sauce to taste" (*Lust* 86-87).

In this passage, the man is clearly positioned as superior to the woman, as being her "almighty" god, as being the one who can take her whenever he pleases and take from her whatever he pleases. She is nothing more than corporeality, whose purpose is to be eaten up, to be ingested, to serve as fodder for the strengthening of the male. The vocabulary in this and other passages is violent enough to be reminiscent of the language of degrading and violent pornography, against which Jelinek explicitly states she is working. However, as shocking and disturbing as the description of the woman in this scene is, it again breaks with prior contexts of subjugating pornographic discourse by de- and re-contextualizing specific semantic fields. While references to the culinary sphere are often paired with sexual descriptions, the specific vocabulary used here distorts the conventional usage of this association. The expression "ihr Obst schälen"[68] creates a stumbling block in the text and the reader wonders what exactly is supposed to be peeled, creating a picture that is far from erotic and rather unappealingly violent. The description of the man wishing to tear the woman's lower body part from her torso breaks with pornographic discourse by taking the conventional aspect of fragmentation to an extreme. Another typical expectation that is undercut is when the narrator informs the reader that the woman is "zum Anbeißen und zum Abbeißen da."[69] Saying that someone is "zum Anbeißen" does indeed entail that this person is thought of as a sexual object and positions the person as such. Adding the out-of-place "zum Abbeißen" interrupts the discourse of sexuality, adding a new signification to the expression "zum Anbeißen." Simultaneously highlighting and disrupting the association between food and sexuality, the text opens up a path to resistance. Claiming that the woman exists to literally be bitten into and to have parts bitten off lays bare the degrading

[68] "peel her fruit."
[69] "very tasty, the woman's good enough to eat."

aspect of the discourse. Thus, the expression has been subversively re-deployed in a similar enough but nevertheless new context, which enables a moment of resistance to the mere subjugation to the male gaze and dominance.

4.4 Risk and Potential of Repetitions

Jelinek and Butler clearly overlap in their refusal to ban the pornographic text and their awareness of the necessity to "read such texts against themselves" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 69). I argue that Jelinek writes her texts, not merely to be "read against themselves," but as objects that "hit back" (Lahann 78). This implies the possibility that "if the text acts once, it can act again, and possibly against its prior act, [which] raises the possibility of *re*signification as an alternative reading of performativity and of politics" (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 69; emphasis in original). Jelinek unlocks such discursive potential in her writing of "anti-pornography:" "Es mag zwar vordergründig manchmal wie Pornographie aussehen, aber es ist eben etwas, das man sich nicht so hineinziehen kann […]. Mein Text hat eine dialektische Wechselwirkung"[70] (Lahann 80). At the same time, she recognizes the inherent possibility for failure in her undertaking, i.e. the danger that her books are read as a reiteration of past usages of oppressive, misogynist discourse and not as a subversive alternative.

The potential for re-appropriating an otherwise harmful term or oppressive discourse is what makes the act of resignification both very powerful and dangerous. As Butler explains, the "disjuncture between utterance and meaning is the condition of possibility for revising the performative, of the performative as the repetition of its prior instance, a repetition that is at once a reformulation. […] The citationality of the

[70] "It may sometimes superficially look like pornography, but it is precisely something that one cannot simply consume […] My text shows a dialectic interaction."

performative produces that possibility for agency and expropriation at the same time" (*Excitable Speech* 87). To resist oppressive language means trying to re-use that exact language. Censorship of hurtful language does not allow for reclaiming agency: "Keeping such terms unsaid and unsayable can also work to lock them in place, preserving their power to injure, and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (38). Rather than trying to silence hurtful language, Butler explains how it must be repeated, potentially ascribing new meaning to it, while also accepting the possibility of failure.

There are countless instances where Jelinek plays with the risky opening for resignification: "Als wollte er einen Kadaver ausnehmen, zieht er ihre nach Unzufriedenheit und Sekreten stinkende Fotze an den Haaren vor sein Gesicht"[71] (*Lust* 108). The word "Fotze" (*cunt*) is generally an extremely derogatory and demeaning term; in this particular instance, it is used both to denote the actual genital and to interpellate the woman as a whole. It can be argued, on the one hand, that the narrator fixes the woman once again in her subordinate subject position, but on the other, that repetition of this injurious word has the potential to re-signify it. Butler gives the example of the term "queer" and her description of the re-signification of this term sheds some light on Jelinek's linguistic undertaking:

> As an example, consider the word queer, which thirty years ago (even twenty, even fifteen years ago) was considered profoundly derogatory and frightening as a speech act. I remember living in great fear of the word, knowing I was eligible for it, thinking that once it actually landed on me I would be branded forever and that the stigma would do me in completely. Ten or twelve years ago when queer started to happen as a term, people would ask, "What do you think, should we produce a journal called Queer Theory?" I thought, "My God, do we have to use that word?" I

[71] "As if he were dissecting a corpse, he seizes her hairy cunt, stinking of secret dissatisfaction and dissatisfied secretions, and buries his face in it" (*Lust* 90).

> was still in its grip. I was still thinking, "Must we take on this word? Isn't it too injurious? Why do we need to repeat it at all?" I still think there are words that are in fact so injurious that it's very hard to imagine that they could be repeated in a productive way; however, I did note that using the word queer again and again as part of an affirmative practice in certain contexts helped take it out of an established context of being exclusively injurious, and it became about reclaiming language, about a certain kind of courage, about a certain kind of opening up of the term, about the possibility of transforming stigmatization into something more celebratory. (Olson 759)

Butler convincingly argues that repetition is essential for words to be re-contextualized, to be used with another connotation (*Excitable Speech* 100). She points out that there is no path towards resignification without repetition:

> No one has ever worked through an injury without repeating it: its repetition is both the continuation of the trauma and that which marks a self-distance within the very structure of trauma, its constitutive possibility of being otherwise. There is no possibility of *not* repeating. The only question that remains is: How will that repetition occur, at what site, juridical or nonjuridical, and with what pain and promise? (102; emphasis in original)

Despite the risk of consolidating injurious meanings and repeating or increasing the hurt caused by such terms, the only option for change is re-iteration. Not repeating it would lead to the terms being fixed and enshrined, forever determined by their injurious power, not allowing for resignificatory openings.

Jelinek's take on the marriage contract illustrates one instance of working through trauma via repetition, but in this case repetition of a social custom rather than a single word. The understanding of marriage as something contractual and not that different from prostitution[72] runs through Jelinek's works like a common thread. In her 1998 study of *Sexuelle Poetik: Proust, Musil, Genet, Jelinek*, writer and literary critic Ina Hartwig offers an insightful overview of both the legal and social implications of 'conjugal duties.' In *Lust,* Jelinek points readers to the background story of sexual compliance as part of the marriage

[72] See Hartwig, *Sexuelle Poetik: Proust, Musil, Genet, Jelinek* 243-4.

contract: "Der Mann beschließt, der Frau das Einhalten des Ehevertrags zu gebieten"[73] (26). The declaration of the man's resolution – which exemplifies his agency in that he is the one who is in command, almost the "Gebieter" (*lord, ruler*), in the position to make a decision and demand – is followed by a detailed, violent and degrading description of how he makes his wife abide by her conjugal duties. Or, as Hartwig puts it, "von der Frau das zu verlangen, was als *Wort* inzwischen aus dem österreichischen und deutschen Strafgesetzbuch gestrichen wurde, 'Ehepflicht,' doch als *Sprachwirkung* überlebt hat"[74] (234; emphasis in original). The "Sprachwirkung," i.e. the force of language to enact what it names and, in this instance, merely implies, shows that speech acts indeed perform a social function. Hartwig outlines a 1966 divorce case that was brought to the Federal Court of Justice and which, in its decision, even outlines, "*wie* die Ehefrau sich hingeben solle: nämlich mit 'Zuneigung und Opferbereitschaft'"[75] (237; emphasis in original). Hartwig meticulously and convincingly demonstrates the longevity and prevalence of the idea that one of the components of marriage included, and in fact at times still includes, "das Recht des Mannes auf die Hingabe der Frau"[76] (237).

The dynamic of the marriage contract is illustrated over and over again in Jelinek's *Lust*: "Sie soll wissen, was sie an ihm hat. Und umgekehrt weiß er von ihrem Garten, der, stets geöffnet, zum Herumwühlen und Grunzen bestens geeignet ist. Was einem gehört,

[73] "The Man resolves to command the woman to observe their marriage contract" (*Lust* 23).
[74] "ask of the woman that which has been, as a *word*, effaced from the German penal code, 'conjugal duty,' but which has nevertheless survived as *linguistic efficacy*."
[75] "*how* the wife should devote herself (sexually) to her husband: namely with 'affection and readiness to make sacrifices.'"
[76] "the right of the man to the woman's (sexual) devotion."

muß auch benutzt werden, wozu hätten wir es denn?"[77] (45). The novel repeatedly shows the "sexuellen Anspruch des Ehemanns als Norm und Normalität"[78] and the wife's obligation to not only obey the rule but even "willkommen heißen"[79] it (Hartwig 238). Even if the judicial sphere has been getting rid of some of these antiquated formulations, Jelinek's novel suggests that these attempts are somehow secondary; what is decisive is the power these former concepts have on current understandings of husband-wife interactions and dynamics. Words such as 'conjugal' and 'duty' are prime examples of the power of language, i.e. their perlocutionary force, which led to the creation of an oppressive social reality for women. The crux of the wife not observing her conjugal duties not only lies in the husband then having the right to indulge in extramarital affairs,[80] but also having the right to forcibly claim sexual satisfaction from his wife.[81] In some cases, such claims were not even called rape, as the husband's demands were supposedly within his rights. As Hartwig explains, "die ständige Wiederholung der geschlechtlichen Vereinigung"[82] (Horn qtd. in Hartwig 240) was believed to be an essential component of marriage. In Jelinek's novel, such scenes of sexual obligation as "endlose Wiederholungen"[83] (*Lust* 13) are numerous. Hartwig puts this in a nutshell:

> Rhetorisch betrachtet, stellt Jelinek eine Hyperbel dessen her, was von der einen Semiotik impliziert wird (Recht), von der anderen expliziert (Pornographie). Die

[77] "she has to know what kind of deal she's got, so that as his value appreciates she'll appreciate him the more, and likewise he knows of her garden, ever open, which is ideal for grunting and wallowing. After all, we have to make use of what belongs to us, don't we? Why else would we have it in the first place?" (*Lust* 39).
[78] "husband's sexual entitlement as norm and normalcy"
[79] "bid it welcome"
[80] See Hartwig 238.
[81] On pp. 239-240, Ina Hartwig names Eckhard Horn's argument on the legality of marital rape.
[82] "the constant repetition of the sexual union."
[83] "endlessly […] repeating" (*Lust* 12).

> Gewalt des Protagonisten Hermann wird zwar nicht als legitime präsentiert, doch als im Bewußtsein der Legitimität angewandte: Die „Macht des Mannes" bedarf „keiner Listen und keiner Waffen," nur eines „Ehevertrags" (Lu, 26). Das heißt, die Gesetzlichkeit, die im „Ehevertrag" zusammengefaßt wird, *ist* männliche List und Waffe. Damit wird auch gesagt, daß die Gesetze allein den Zweck verfolgen, die schrecklichen Vorrechte der Männer zu sichern."[84] (240-41; emphasis in original)

The notion that all that is needed for the assertion of male power is a "contract"[85] exemplifies the illocutionary force of the speech act: it brings about what it names and thus enacts the superiority of man over woman.

To summarize, the trauma of patriarchy that is played out over and over again in the marriage contract is not a personal one but a social one. *Lust* does not psychologize the married couple; nor does it delineate Gerti's personal suffering. Instead, the novel mirrors societal dynamics, using repetition to render the construction of masculinity and femininity visible. By 'endlessly repeating' the marriage dynamic, the novel creates an opening for resistance, for rewriting the story by uncovering the constructedness and the meaninglessness of such a dynamic. Jelinek's texts thus can be read as "parodistische Performanzen [...], die durch die überspitzte, scheinbar irrsinne Reproduktion und zwanghafte Reiteration der Normen Widerstand gegen die normativen Geschlechtsmuster und –bilder anmelden"[86] (Bauer, "Manchmal wird es mir peinlich" 258).

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[84] "From a rhetorical viewpoint, Jelinek fabricates a hyperbole of that, what is being implied by one semiotics (law) and expatiated by the other (pornography). Although the violence of the protagonist Hermann is not depicted as legitimate, it is nevertheless presented as applied in the awareness of legitimacy: The 'power of the Man' requires no 'trickery or weapons,' only a 'marriage contract' (*Lust* 23). Which means that the legality, which is summarized in the 'marriage contract' *is* male trickery and weapon. Which additionally implies that the laws merely serve to secure the terrible privileges of men."

[85] See also Alexandra Pontzen's article "Beredte Scham - Zum Verhältnis von Sprache und weiblicher Sexualität im Werk von Elfriede Jelinek und Marlene Streeruwitz" for the marriage contract as a guarantor for Man's entitlement to Woman's sexuality.

[86] "parodistic performances [...], which declare resistance against the normative gender patterns and depictions through the exaggerated, seemingly insane reproduction and

Jelinek's 1975 novel *women as lovers* is just as much structured by the force of repetition as *Lust*.[87] This formal technique ranges from the replication of the same sentences and the reiteration of the same words, to the recurrence of the same words in slightly different arrangements. While *Lust* is mostly structured around repetitions of scenes and themes, *women as lovers*, besides a parallel recurrence of themes such as marriage, motherhood, (female) workforce, or femininity, incessantly repeats select sentences and words. It is true that the linguistic repetitiveness can be read as brigitte and paula's way of convincing themselves of the *raison d'être* of their lives, telling themselves over and over what they are set out to do and supposed to feel. But there is an added dimension that the text is addressing through the trauma of female subjugation to marriage and societal expectations of womanhood. Jelinek's constant and at times almost monotonous repetitions make the reader aware of the historicity behind the expectations of femaleness. The workings of power are impersonal, all-permeating, and self-repeating; they are not limited to individuals or particular groups of people. To break open the power of conventional signification and open up the discourse for re-signification, Jelinek confronts her readers with numbing repetitions. The novels' characters, who themselves repeat actions and words, are accomplices in the system, used by language. At the same time, the text itself, by reiterating the words and structures of female oppression, starts opening up ways to resist oppressive interpellations.

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compulsive reiteration of norms." Even though Bauer is referencing a different author's prose, namely that of Unica Zürn, her statement aptly applies to Jelinek's work as well.

[87] See Höfler, "Sexualität und Macht in Elfriede Jelineks Prosa" for his argument on the "diverse repetition of the ever-same."

The outlook of Jelinek's literary world is not, however, one of a new universe full of promising possibilities. Rather, her text deconstructs predominant myths[88] and leaves the reader with the shattered pieces. As grim and devastated as paula's life looks at the end of the novel, it is the only option for re-siginification:

> paula arbeitet hier als ungelernte näherin am fließband.
> paula arbeitet hier als ungelernte näherin am fließband.
> paula hat dort geendet, wo brigitte auszog, um das leben kennenzulernen. brigitte hat das leben kennengelernt und ihr glück darin gefunden.
> paula hat das leben auch kennenlernen wollen, jetzt lernt sie die arbeit als angelernte arbeiterin in einer miederfabrik kennen.
> das ist auch eine art leben.[89] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 155-6)

The fact that the text repeats paula's occupation twice makes the reader hyper-aware of the prospects for women within the workforce. paula is exemplary of the options women have when they want to work. Not only is she limited to an occupational sphere that is associated with women, but her job does not even require any specific skills. She can perform her duties without any particular skills because the nature of her work is so simple and repetitious. Moreover, her work on an assembly line strongly evokes monotony, repetition, and subjugation to an oppressive capitalist system.[90] The production line sews bodices, which further recalls standardization and repression of femininity. By repeating

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[88] For analyses of Jelinek's tackling of myths, see Fischer, *Trivialmythen in Elfriede Jelineks Romanen "Die Liebhaberinnen" und "Die Klavierspielerin;"* Luserke-Jaqui, "Trivialmythos Lust und Liebe? Über Elfriede Jelinek: *Lust;"* Gürtler, "Die Entschleierung der Mythen von Natur und Sexualität."

[89] "paula works here as an unskilled seamstress on the assembly line.
paula works here as an unskilled seamstress on the assembly line.
paula has finished up in the place from which brigitte set out, to get to know life. brigitte has got to know life and found her happiness in it.
paula wanted to get to know life too, now she's getting to know the job of a semi-skilled worker in an underwear factory.
that too is a kind of life" (*women as lovers* 191).

[90] The interchangeability of the female workforce will be analyzed further in chapter 3, section 3.3.

and contrasting phrases, the text uncovers the constructedness of societal mechanisms and breaks open language for re-apporiation. While the story may appear to merely perpetuate a vicious cycle via the disturbing use of repetitions, it can also be argued that paula has been freed from false illusions of happiness and purpose. As for the reader, the unconventional repetitions disturb the narrative flow and force the reader to scrutinize the myths that are created in conventional romance novels. Stumbling over the repeated phrases and words, such as the varied reiterations of the verb "lernen," the reader looks at them more closely and uncovers the futility of paula's attempts to set up a life for herself within the patriarchal society she inhabits. Jelinek once again disturbs the pleasure in unreflected consumption (be it sex, supposed happiness or freedom, or even literary texts) and leaves the reader with the shattered pieces of deconstructed illusions and interpellations.

4.5 Critical Mimesis

German studies professor Sabine Wilke analyzes these 'endless repetitions' as "Kritik als Mimesis ans Verhärtete" [91] (87), to capture the deliberate imitation of deadlocked structures, but also the potential for a critical re-working. Wilke convincingly argues, that "es geht um die Reproduktion der in der Dialektik im Stillstand produzierten Bilder, die als verewigte Gesten ein Bild der Zerstörung darstellen"[92] (87). Moreover, she explains that critical mimesis works through an artificial reproduction of oppressive language in order to unmistakably reveal its exploitative intention (94). While I agree that

[91] "critique of the sedimented as a mimesis."
[92] "it is about the reproduction of the dialectic in standstill produced images that, as immortalized gestures, represent an image of destruction."

Jelinek's use of repressive language uncovers the subjugating force and mechanisms behind it, I argue that her project is better understood in terms of re-signification, which goes beyond the aspect of 'artifical reproduction' and also recognizes the possibility of failure. Jelinek's use of mimesis may or may not be interpreted as critical depending on whether the reader recognizes the subversive use of repressive language. Jelinek does not simply repeat the injury of misogyny; rather, by blatantly holding a mirror in front of gendered power dynamics and narrating them either with an unapologetic matter-of-fact attitude, with judgmental wit, or with sarcastic and ironic idealization, she re-appropriates the repeated trauma while still acknowledging her own implications in reproducing such a system. The novel *Lust* is rife with instances of unaffected narration of the most degrading scenarios such as

> Wie ein Frosch muß die Frau ihre Beine seitlich anwinkeln, damit ihr Mann in sie möglichst weit, bis ins Landesgericht für Strafsachen, hineinschauen und sie untersuchen kann. Sie ist vollgeschüttet und vollgeschissen von ihm, muß aufstehen, die letzen Hülsen auf den Boden fallen lassen und einen Hausschwamm holen gehen, den Mann, diesen unversöhnlichen Feind ihres Geschlechts, von sich und dem Schleim, den sie hervorgerufen hat, zu säubern. […] [M]it pendelnden Zitzen kniet sie über ihm und schrubbt, […] fremden Speichel in der Halsgrube, den blassen Killerwal dort vor ihr, so lang, bis das freundliche Licht herunterfällt, die Nacht kommt und dieses Tier aufs neue mit seinem Schwanz zu peitschen beginnen kann.[93] (77)

[93] "The woman has to crook and angle her legs like a frog so that her husband, the examining magistrate, can look into the matter closely. A court of no appeal. She is flooded and shat full of him, she has to get up and the last of her clothes fall on the floor and she fetches a sponge to clean the Man, that irreconcilable enemy of her sex, of himself and the slime that she has caused him to emit. […] [T]its dangling, she kneels above him and scrubs. […] Another person's saliva at the base of her throat. The pale killer whale there before her till the friendly light dies, night comes, and the animal can begin to lash her with his tail again" (*Lust* 65).

This passage not only narrates the coital scene with an alienating soberness but also weaves in powerful sarcasm, divergent comparisons, and mixed metaphors in its description of the man's superiority.

Aware of its own complicity, Jelinek's writing mimics the power imbalance by reproducing discourses of oppression. This reproduction usually happens through an imitation of representative perspective, but without enabling identification with these attitudes since the mimesis is done in an exaggerated way, bordering on hyperbole (Wilke 104). The mimesis is thus rather alienating, using the awareness of its inevitable implication to possibly resist the system via repetition from within. The narrators in Jelinek's work offer a critical perspective for understanding the workings of this awareness and alienation. The narrative stances vary constantly, a destabilization technique that is further intensified by the shifting back and forth between condescension for women and men. In the passage quoted above, the narrator adopts a third-person perspective, outside of the story, as if observing the scene from a distance. But the novel also contains examples of a first-person narrative point of view: "Dem Mann ist sehr an seinem Werk gelegen, in dem Papier erzeugt wird, damit es uns gutgeht. […] Ich schreibe es jetzt deutlich auf: Ich bin wie Wachs in der Hand des Papiers. So einen Menschen möchte ich auch einmal kennenlernen, der die Macht hat, mich in dem, was ich sage, neu herzustellen"[94] (*Lust* 135). In this instance, the narrator clearly positions herself as a woman but she takes on the power of creation that is ascribed to men and so risks the possible loss of a female voice. She evokes the possibility of a "new woman" made out of the "things [she] says," echoing

[94] "The Man sets great store by good works, works where paper is made for the well-being of us all. Let me write it down, quite unambiguously: paper could cut me open as a paper knife slits paper. I'd like to meet the person who could make a new woman of me out of the things I say" (*Lust* 112).

Butler's point that language constructs the speaking subject and not vice versa, while at the same time casting serious doubt on the ability to create such a woman. Moreover, she highlights the tenuous nature of her status as narrator – a figure who can be "cut open" just as easily as a "paper knife slits paper" – an ironic comparison when one considers the ways in which the characters are constantly judged and dismissed in the novel.

To further clarify the differences between Wilke's critical mimesis and Butler's resignification, it is useful to come back to Butler's reflections on the link between trauma and repetition. According to Butler, trauma is "not remembered, but relived, and relived in and through the linguistic substitution for the traumatic event. […] Social trauma takes the form, not of a structure that repeats mechanically, but rather of an ongoing subjugation, the restaging of injury through signs that both occlude and reenact the scene" (*Excitable Speech* 36-37). For Jelinek, patriarchy is the main source of such trauma: "Das Patriarchat herrscht als kulturelle Norm schon so lange, daß eine Veränderung dieses Problems gar nicht mehr vorstellbar ist"[95] (Gross 10). Throughout *Lust*, the narrator makes numerous references to the dominant patriarchal system that puts men in a superior position:[96] "Alles soll ewig sein und noch dazu oft wiederholt werden können, so sprechen die Männer […]. Und jetzt fährt dieser Mann wie geschmiert in seine Frau hinein und wieder heraus. Auf diesem Feld kann sich die Natur nicht geirrt haben"[97] (Jelinek 20). Patriarchal discourse is indefinitely

[95] "Patriarchy has been reigning as a cultural norm for such a long time that a change of this problem cannot even be conceptualized any more."

[96] Jelinek often clarifies that, while it is true that men are also negatively influenced by the capitalistic system, it cannot be denied that they are never as badly affected as women, see, for example, Brandes, "Gespräch mit Elfriede Jelinek vom Münchner Literaturarbeitskreis" 174.

[97] "For all things shall be everlasting and what's more they shall be indefinitely repeatable, so say the men, […]. And now the Man slides into his wife as if he were greased, in and then out again. Nature cannot have been mistaken about this field" (*Lust* 18).

repeatable and it establishes the power dynamics of heterosexual coitus.[98] By repeating the trauma of such structures, Jelinek is working to uncover the historicity of patriarchy. This means that her texts question the supposed naturalness of the social order and bring to light the history behind the oppressive workings of patriarchy. Jelinek sets out to disrupt the power it has gained by means of its repetitious, ongoing, unquestioned enactment. Her textual strategies cut into that arrested development, expose it, and thus take away the force of the patriarchal discourse. By interrupting the continued injurious working of hate speech, her writing removes its hurtful power and enables a path towards resignification.

5. Breaking with Convention instead of Advocating for Censorship

5.1 Against a Censorship of Pornography

On the other side of the debate about resignification, i.e. re-appropriating language and discursive structures, there have been many publicly voiced attempts to redefine the status of the female body, with one such effort being to censor pornography. Butler engages with this position by responding to feminist Catherine MacKinnon, a key figure in the call for new laws on restricting and penalizing pornography. According to Butler, the problem with pornography for MacKinnon and like-minded voices does not lie in the fact that it "reflects or expresses a social structure of misogyny, but that it is an institution with the performative power to bring about that which it depicts" (*Excitable Speech* 66). Butler distances herself from MacKinnon's view of pornography as "not only substitut[ing] for social reality, but that […] substitution [being] one which creates a social reality of its own, the social reality of pornography" (66). As per Butler's critique, this understanding of

[98] See Höfler, "Sexualität und Macht in Elfriede Jelinek's Prosa" 100.

pornography leads MacKinnon to call for a censorship of pornography since it is able to enact that which it portrays (Salih 108).

In opposition to MacKinnon, Butler reads pornography as "phantasmatic" (*Excitable Speech* 68). She argues that "pornography neither represents nor constitutes what women are, but offers an allegory of masculine wilfulness and feminine submission [...], one which repeatedly and anxiously rehearses its own *un*realizability" (*Excitable Speech* 68; emphasis in original). Cautioning against a reading of pornography as perlocutionary speech, i.e. speech acts that affect consequences after having been made, Butler understands "pornographic representations as [...] unreal and unrealizable allegories of impossible sexuality that have no power to wound" (Salih 108). To some extent, Butler's argument presupposes a highly critical and self-aware reader since she assumes that it is within the power of the reader/viewer of pornography to decide whether or not to be wounded by these representations. Without ignoring the problematic implications of Butler's position, I argue that she is not trying to minimalize the oppressive effects of pornography; rather, she is attempting to take a step away from calls for restriction or censorship, as these actions would not be able to change the narrative of pornography:

> Indeed, one might argue that pornography depicts impossible and uninhabitable positions, compensatory fantasies that continually reproduce a rift between these positions and the ones that belong to the domain of social reality. Indeed, one might suggest that pornography is the text of gender's unreality, the impossible norms by which it is compelled, and in the face of which it perpetually fails. [...] [P]ornography charts a domain of unrealizable positions that hold sway over the social reality of gender positions, but do not, strictly speaking, constitute that reality; indeed, it is their failure to constitute it that gives the pornographic image the phantasmatic power it has. In this sense, to the extent that an imperative is "depicted" and not "delivered," it fails to wield the power to construct the social reality of what a woman is. (*Excitable Speech* 68)

While Butler's call for a "feminist reading of pornography that resists the literalization of this imaginary scene, one which reads it for the incommensurabilities between gender norms and practices that it seems compelled to repeat without resolution" (69) is a valid one and one which, I argue, is more productive than a call for simply censoring pornography,[99] her emphasis on the 'phantasmatic,' unrealizable aspect needs to be looked at in more depth. I disagree with Butler that there is no construction of a social reality whatsoever with regard to the depiction of pornographic imagery. Butler herself, as Sara Salih points out, brought up the problematic distinction between the phantasmatic and the real (*Bodies that Matter* 59), which, at least partially, takes force away from her argument about the 'unrealizability' of pornographic representations.

In an interview with the magazine *Stern* in 1988, Jelinek forcefully asserts: "Pornographie ist nicht das Beschreiben von Vögeleien oder das Beschreiben von nackten Leuten, die irgendwas miteinander machen. Pornographie ist die Darstellung der Frau als Hure. Also ihre Freigabe zu Quälereien, zu Erniedrigungen und ihre Lust daran"[100] (Lahann 78). While it can be argued that Jelinek's novel *Lust* does indeed depict the 'unrealizable allegories' of gender positions, it nevertheless steps out of the mere phantasmatic. The fact that Jelinek realized, for example, when writing her novel that it was impossible to find a "weibliche Sprache für das Obszöne"[101] because women are not supposed to speak about

[99] In addition to censorship not being effective at re-directing hate speech, calls for restriction of pornography unquestioningly imply mainstream, heterosexual and cis-gendered pornography, and thus fail to differentiate between the vast diversity of different kinds of pornographic representations.

[100] "Pornography is not the description of screwing or the description of naked people that do some stuff together. Pornography is the depiction of Woman as whore. Which means her release to torture, to degradation."

[101] "female language for the obscene."

sex (Lahann 78) shows that the depiction of a social reality can indeed lead to the construction of such a reality.

A famous example of such a position, beside MacKinnon's book *Only Words*, is the German feminist Alice Schwarzer's porNO initiative, which construed pornography as a form of "hate speech that has the power to enact what it names" (Salih 108). While Jelinek's texts make it clear that she would not align herself with this side of the debate on pornography, she is nevertheless aware of the power of pornography to do what it says. In an explicit reference to Schwarzer's anti-porn campaign, she comments on pornography being a depiction of women's degradation and an exploitation of the pleasure associated with that humiliation:

> Bei dieser ganzen Pornographie-Debatte geht es ja in erster Linie um die riesige Basis an kommerziellen Gewalt-Porno-Videos, die jetzt bis in die deutschen Kinderzimmer schwappen und die Gesellschaft verändern. […] Ich finde es bei der jetzigen gesellschaftlichen Situation schon irgenwie lachhaft, wenn in den späten 80er Jahren lauter Jeanne d'Arcs der 60er Jahre für die Freiheit der Pornographie kämpfen, während in den deutschen Kinderzimmern die Erniedrigung der Frau bis zu ihrer Ermordung auf unglaublich brutale Weise gespielt wird.[102] (Lahann 78)

In contrast to Butler's definition of pornography as phantasmatic, Jelinek's writing illustrates the 'realizable' influence pornographic depictions can have on women's realities. It thus traces a position between Butler's contradictory postion on the (in)distinction between the phantasmatic and the real, and the so-called 'Jeanne d'Arc of the 60s fighting for the freedom of pornography.' At the same time, Jelinek's writing clearly rejects the call

[102] "What this whole pornography discussion is first and foremost about is the immense base of commercial violence-porn-videos that now even make their way to German children's rooms and which transform society. […] Under the current societal situation I find it somehow ridiculous when in the late 1980s numerous Jeanne d'Arcs of the 60s now fight for the freedom of pornography, while the debasement of Woman up to her assassination in an unbelievably brutal manner is being played in German children's rooms."

for censorship and instead works to performatively repeat pornographic scenes, 'exciting' injurious speech, and in doing so re-signifying patriarchy's subjugating power. In this sense, Jelinek's text could be labelled "re-pornography" in lieu of "anti-pornography" since her text is not written from an oppositional stance but from a repetitious one. As Stehle argues, "Jelinek took a particular kind of risk. [...] [Her] words are clearly marked as repetition of injuries that pornographic language inflicts. [Her] citational language consciously shifts the contexts in which words are uttered" (234). Jelinek's project thus is a potentially powerful means of breaking with pornographic convention and making use of the intrinsic component of "Ver-Sprechen"[103] for her project of resignification: "jedem Sprechakt [ist] ein Anders-Handeln, ein Ver-Sprechen, d.h. der Lapsus/die Fehlhandlung inhärent"[104] (Strowick 33). Conventions require repetition to maintain their existence and in that repeatability, they simultaneously open up the possibility for non-compliance (34).

5.2 Intention and Reception

The discussion so far has shown that instead of seeking recourse to the legal sphere, Butler's theory and Jelinek's oeuvre focus on the inherent repeatability of injurious language; their position asserts "that it is more effective to exploit the open temporality of signs that may be wrested from their prior contexts and made to resignify in unexpected, subversive ways" (Salih 112). In numerous interviews and essays, Jelinek explains that her project of writing *Lust* had this inherent potential as an initial position. Her "anti-pornography" (or rather, "re-pornography") was meant to re-conquer the representational

[103] "mis-speaking."
[104] "an acting-differently, a mis-speaking, which means, the slip / the error is inherent to each speech act."

possibilities of the obscene, which had been usurped by men (Jelinek, "Sinn des Obszönen" 102). However, she discovered that it was impossible to write female desire without resorting to phallologocentric language because no provisions have been made for woman to be able to speak about sexuality. The only option for resistance to the contemptuous male gaze and pornography as the representation of degradation (102) was to explore the potential for subversiveness and re-signification in the repeatability of signs and injurious language.

As discussed earlier, Jelinek's goal was not to write a text for pornographic consumption; on the contrary, she created countless traps in the novel to undercut sexual arousal (Wilke 113) and which, it can be argued, serve as a point of departure for a 'politics of resignification.' Jelinek herself distinguishes between a resistance to oppressive descriptions of obscenity and a complicity with and perpetuation of them: "Kriterien für das, was sexistisch ist, muß man sich erst erarbeiten. Die Intention der Darstellung ist für mich das Entscheidende. Die Frage ist, ob die Erniedrigung der Frau, ihre Verfügbarkeit als Hure, beabsichtigt ist oder gerade eben kritisiert wird. Da gibt es haarfeine Unterschiede"[105] ("Sinn des Obszönen" 101). While I agree that the distinction between the two is paper thin, Jelinek's claim that the intention of the representation is the essential component does not hold in the face of Butler's theory of excitable speech. If language is "out of control," the speaker's intention does not guarantee the success in the reception of a critical utterance as resistance. A subversively intended utterance can be understood by one person as a reinforcement of oppressive mechanisms, and by another as a ground-

[105] "One has to first work for an accumulation of criteria for what is sexist. For me, the intention behind representation is the decisive factor. The question that needs to be asked is whether the degradation of Woman, her availability as whore, is intended or if it is precisely that which is being criticized. There are subtle differences in this distinction."

breaking path to resistance; it can even be read in these contradictory ways by the same person at different times. Every re-iteration of language is opened up to this risky potential due to language's inherent citationality, which can affect a change in meaning due to its dependence on context, setting, speaker, addresse, timing, and so on.

In her analysis of the novel, Wilke, too, questions the notion of intentionality behind Jelinek's re-pornography writing project:

> Intentional ist *Lust* Anti-Pornographie. Die Sprachspiele und metonymischen Verschiebungen resultieren in einer Distanz zwischen den Lesern und den Charaktern. Von daher frustriert der Text auch die pornographischen Gelüste der Leser. Auf einer vielleicht versteckteren nicht-intendierten Ebene jedoch läßt er sie auch wiederum zu, indem der Blick eben doch (in kritisch-mimetischer Absicht zwar) auf den Körper der Frau sich richtet. Jelineks Text ist vielleicht nicht immer „eine radikale Gegenschrift zu den Beschreibungen der Frau durch den Mann," die durch ihre spezifisch artifizielle Sprache diese Verdoppelung der frauenfeindlichen Machtideologie durch kritisch intendierte Mimesis erzielt."[106] (115)

The presence of an intrusive narrator complicates even further the relationship between author and reader, between intention and interpretation. Time and again the narrator breaks down the fourth wall by either addressing the reader directly or by using inclusive pronouns, so that the reader is left to wonder about the identity and affiliation of the narrator. In defence of Jelinek and in contrast to Wilke, I would argue that this technique does indeed counter the "Blick, [der sich] auf den Körper der Frau richtet,"[107] a technique

[106] "The intention behind *Lust* is that of anti-porn. The language games and the metonymic shifts result in a distance between the readers and the characters. This is one of the reasons why the text does not satisfy the pornographic desires of the readers. However, on a possibly more hidden, non-intended level, the text nevertheless allows them by having the gaze (albeit in a critically-mimetic intention) directed towards the body of the woman. Maybe Jelinek's text is not always a 'radical counter-statement to the description of the Woman by the Man,' which achieves, by means of its specifically artificial language, the doubling of the misogynist power ideology via an intended critical mimesis."

[107] "gaze that is directed towards the body of the woman."

that has also elaborately been discussed in relation to Jelinek's novel *The Piano Teacher.*[108] The characters' de-psychologization in the novel is paralleled with the narrator's transgression in terms of reader-address. Comments such as "Die intimste Wäsche wird verkauft, damit das Erleben – wie wir Frauen es gern und ergebnislos versuchen – immer anders ausschaut"[109] (*Lust* 68) start to unravel some of the implications of the porn industry and offer insight into the divide between media-created expectations and lived reality. Reading the narrator's – quite critical and satirical – use of "we" in opposition to Jelinek's use of "I" in her statement about intention illustrates the difference between one person's original intention and the collective social context of language, which is represented by the "we." The gap between these two instances – the "I" and the "we" – is where resignification and failure of injurious language can occur, depending not on intention but on reception.

6. Conclusion

This chapter examined Butler's theory of excitable speech and its potential for resistance to oppressive power structures. I looked at the citational aspect of language and the re-appropriation of hateful speech when processes of signification are placed within an open temporality. I compared Butler's theoretical framework with Jelinek's fictional use of oppressive language and discourses to better understand the workings and dangers of both injurious speech and pornography. Given that the secondary literature on Jelinek has not

[108] See Landwehr, "Voyeurism, Violence, and the Power of the Media: The Reader's/ Spectator's Complicity in Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher* and Haneke's *La Pianiste, Caché, The White Ribbon*;" Riemer, "Michael Haneke, *The Piano Teacher* [*Die Klavierspielerin*]: Repertoires of Power and Desire."

[109] "Intimate lingerie is sold, so that experience – the kind of experience we women hopefully and vainly long for – will look different" (*Lust* 57).

provided such an inquiry, this chapter yields a more thorough investigation of Jelinek's resignificatory mechanisms.

A critical engagement with Butler's concept of excitable speech and close readings of Jelinek's texts highlight the subversive potential that lies in giving back historicity to language and discourses, by breaking their veneer of 'naturalness' and opening them up for new meanings. Butler's examples of the re-appropriation of previously injurious words such as "queer" or "lesbian" served as a vantage point for an analysis of Jelinek's constant repetition of degrading and oppressive language. Whereas Butler provides an illustration of the end of oppressive language use, Jelinek's oeuvre is more ambiguous, staging excessive patriarchal structures in order to re-signify them but without any guarantee of success. Reappropriation remains indeterminate since resignification contains both the risk for further dissemination of subjugation and the potential for empowerment. The main insight of this chapter is that by refusing to censor pornographic representation, Jelinek exploits the intrinsic component of language for its failure, i.e. its possibility for breaking with convention. Since the outcome of "Ver-Sprechen" (*mis-speaking*) cannot be controlled by the speaker but depends on the recipient, it is not possible to categorically determine whether Jelinek's resignificatory processes are a failure or a success. In this way, Jelinek's literary project supplements Butler's argument against a censorship of pornography by exploring the constitutive power of language.

While this chapter focused more on re-signification of language and discourses, the following chapter will look more closely at the feminine modes of writing and the re-appropriation of genre such as diary and the confessional. It will continue the examination

of gender construction and the power that lies within deconstructing social norms and conventions, as well as the relation between language and subjectivity.

Chapter 2
Writing Illness, Writing Resistance: The Personal Accounts of Maria Erlenberger and Caroline Muhr

1. Introduction

> Meine freiwillige Unfruchtbarkeit ist der einzige Protest gegen dieses Leben, den ich zu leisten imstande bin. Sie rechtfertigt meine Anklagen, meine allzu vielen Worte der Negation, mein sonst so vergebliches Aufbegehren. War ich bisher nicht fähig, mit der Beendigung meines eigenen Lebens zu protestieren, so tue ich es wenigstens damit, daß dieses Leben nach meinem Tod nicht in einer neuen Existenz weitergeht.[110]
> –Caroline Muhr, *Depressionen*

> Mein Hunger faszinierte mich. Es war der Hunger meines Seins nach dem Leben und nach dem Tod. […] Ich lebte damit und dafür, das fühlte ich, ich war es. Ich gebar mich jeden Tag, heute sowie damals. […] Mein Hunger ist geblieben, ich liebe ihn, er ist ich. […] Ich strecke meinen Kopf aus den Wogen des Wahnsinns und sehe um mich. Ich sehe nichts, außer viele Wogen, die mich alle tragen können, es sind die Wogen meines Blutes, und ich schreibe mit meinem Blut Buchstaben Worte Sätze.[111]
> –Maria Erlenberger, *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*

Resistance is a common denominator in the works of less well-known writers Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger, whose personal first-person accounts about their battles with anorexia and depression respectively will be the focus of this chapter. While genre will serve as the predominant vantage point for analyzing resistance in Muhr's 1970

[110] "My voluntary barrenness is the only protest against this life that I am able to do. It justifies my accusations, my many many words of negation, my otherwise so futile rebellion. Having so far not been able to protest by ending my life, at least I am doing it by not extending my life after my death into a new existence."
[111] "My hunger fascinated me. It was the hunger of my being for life and death. […] I lived with it and for it, I felt it, it was me. I gave birth to myself every day, now and then. […] My hunger stayed, I love it, it is me. […] I stick out my head from the waves of insanity and I look around. I see nothing besides lots of waves, which can all carry me. They are the waves of my blood and I write letters words sentences with my blood."

diary, I will examine the ways in which Erlenberger's 1977 confessional account allows insights into resignificatory processes from the point of view of both literary genre and "excitable speech." When put in dialogue with Elfriede Jelinek and Judith Butler, Erlenberger's and Muhr's projects offer a better understanding of how the redeployment of injurious language works. Both accounts, authored by pseudonyms, illustrate how the act of writing can be used as resistance to oppressive structures. This chapter will analyze to what extent embracing illness and writing about it lead to new understandings of subject-positions and uses of injurious language. It will also examine how voicelessness plays out in terms of the narrators' accounts of dealing with both a figurative and a literal lack of voice.

2. Resignification and Subjectivity

2.1 Redeployment of Injurious Language

Maria Erlenberger's 1977 text *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn: Ein Bericht* is the story of a woman who starves herself to near-death and who claims to have embarked on the fasting project with the goal of finding a sense of her being. She takes up writing in the psychiatric institution and describes both her experiences in the ward and her journey from a typical housewife and mother to a woman who gives up eating in order to exercise control over her life and her body. Her account is interspersed with philosophical, psychological, and social reflections and she allows the readers into her innermost thoughts, which circle around food, bodily processes, the incompetence of the medical apparatus, the dichotomy between sanity, aka normalcy, and insanity, and the admission and background of new patients. After several months of re-feeding and gaining weight, she is deemed healthy enough to leave the psychiatric institution. As her text is rife with

deconstructions of binary oppositions, it is worth taking a closer look at how Erlenberger deploys the terminology of mental illness in various contexts with respect to Butler's theory of excitable speech.

One exemplary instance of her redeployment of injurious speech is the usage of terms such as "irr" (*mad*), "wahnsinnig" (*maniac*) or "Narren" (*fools*) throughout the text. The account starts with the screams of a new patient who yells "Ihr seid alle wahnsinnig!"[112] (Erlenberger 7) to the bystanders. On the first page alone, descriptions of "verrückt" (*crazy*), "Narren" (*fools*), "irre" (*mad*) abound. However, it is not always the same group of speakers who utters these words and the connotations, which accompany the proclamations, change. The circle of 'insane inmates' confer these designations upon the newcomers in a kind of welcoming diagnostic gesture: "Die Narren sind sich einig: Die ist wirklich irre"[113] (7) and include a successful initiation that, it could be argued, acts as an effective process of interpellation: "'Aber die Narren haben Zeit …' flüstert die Irre bald"[114] (7). The new inmate's reference to herself as a fool, the same word that was used shortly before by the narrator for the other inmates (or, for lack of clarity, it could even apply to the care staff) is not uttered with an acknowledgement of defeat, or of submission, but rather in an almost empowering, resisting way: as she utters it, she is using her teeth to free herself from the cage that is her cot – and she succeeds in getting out. The reference to time here is thus very different from the one that is made much later in the text, where it is associated with women's confinement to the house and the resulting boredom. Here, time is seen as an underestimated good that is given to the insane, who can use it to their

[112] "You are all insane!"
[113] "The fools agree: She really is mad."
[114] "'But the fools have time …,' the madwoman whispers soon."

advantage without anyone noticing due to society's inability to ascribe anything else than paralyzing illness to those placed in mental institutions. The reader is, in this way, from the very beginning, presented with a re-working and an attempt at resignification of a semantic field that has been used to fix the insane Other in an inert inferior position.

The text not only works through such a resignification but also plays with the question of what difference word choice can make and how an illusion can be created by using language that is, on the surface, meant to be less subjugating and hurtful. When the narrator turns from an observation of the admission of the new patient to herself, she immediately localizes the happenings and names her whereabouts "Irrenanstalt"[115] (7), a term that is more generally derogatory than the expression used shortly afterwards: "Jetzt bin ich Patient der Psychiatrischen Anstalt"[116] (7). This switch exemplifies the divide between what is happening inside the walls of the institution and how the outside world refers to such places. It illustrates the narrator's awareness that even if euphemistic words are used, the world of the institution is seen as a place for the deranged Other, a place that the outside world tries to keep at a safe distance and over which it has the power to name who is inside. The next time the narrator uses the word "die Irren" (*the fools*) she indirectly includes herself in the denominated group: "Die Irren pampfen das Essen in sich hinein, aber manche essen gar nicht. […] Jeder erfüllt hier seine Krankheit, die er sich ausgesucht hat, um einen Haltegriff im Leben zu haben. Ich bin auch angepampft"[117] (13). When she first arrives at the institution, she still observes from an outside perspective, describing the

[115] "lunatic asylum."
[116] "Now I am a patient in the psychiatric institution."
[117] "The fools munch their food but some don't eat at all. […] Everybody here fulfills their illness that they chose in order to have a grip on life. Me too I am 'angepampft'" (contraction between 'munched' and 'fed up').

dinner events and distinguishing among categories of various illnesses. By creating the word "angepampft," she aligns herself with "die Irren" who "pampfen" (*munch*) the food into their bodies and also gives voice to her anger by using the very colloquial word "angepampt" (*fed up*). Furthermore, she opens up a path of autonomy for the patients, as she does not buy into the idea that disempowering illnesses befell the institutionalized subjects; instead, she ascribes an active choice to them by using the word "ausgesucht" (*selected*) and by arguing that patients are also agents with the goal of finding a purpose and support in life.

2.2 Discursive Formation of the Subject

The multiple repetitions of the word "irr" (*mad*) including different forms of the word and synonyms in Erlenberger's account can be understood as an attempt at claiming subjectivity and resisting being subjugated to oppressive power structures. Instead of suppressing the generally hurtful word "irr" and thus in a way censoring it, the narrator overuses it. The term is inserted in numerous places, and the text often not only ignores the stylistic problem of repetition but also injects it into sentences where it is not even conceptually necessary: "Es soll einmal einer im Irrenhaus in den Irrenpark zur Sonntagsmesse gehen"[118] (16). While "Irrenhaus" (*insane asylum*) is a generally used word, "Irrenpark" (*insane park*) is a neologism that forcibly inserts a repetition of "irr" in the sentence. The narrator's repetitions can be understood in the context of Butler's argument about the indispensable act of reiterating hate speech and in this way opening it up for new contexts and meanings.

[118] "In the insane asylum, one should go to Sunday mass in the insane park."

The redeployment of injurious language in Erlenberger not only has the desired effect of changing discourse but it also highlights that subjecthood is at stake for the narrator and the other patients in the institution. Butler clearly explains the ways in which subjecthood and speakability or censorship of speech are related:

> […] censorship seeks to produce subjects according to explicit and implicit norms, and […] the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech. The subject's production takes place not only through the regulation of that subject's speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable discourse. […] To become a subject means to be subjected to a set of implicit and explicit norms that govern the kind of speech that will be legible as the speech of a subject.
>
> Here, the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate for subjecthood obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. *To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject. To embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.* "Impossible speech" would be precisely the ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the "psychotic" that the rules that govern the domain of speakability produce, and by which they are continually haunted. (*Excitable Speech* 133; emphasis in original)

Erlenberger's account initiates a breaking open of this binary between subjectivity and non-subjectivity by critiquing the societal fabrication of subjecthood:

> Sie sprechen nicht, sie führen ihre Sprache der Verachtung, von der sie annehmen, ein Irrer könnte sie nicht bemerken. Sie glauben, er sieht nichts, dass Irresein auch Blindheit miteinschließt, ist mir neu. Oder wissen sie, dass er alles versteht, wollen sie ihn damit bestrafen, daß sie ihm vorspielen, als verstünde er nicht. Sie wollen ihn ja verwirren, auf daß er als Irrer über die Liste geht. Sie müssen ihn ja einreichen können. […] Der nächste Patient wartet. Es gilt, einen neuen mit Verachtung zu umspielen, bis er erschöpft niederbricht und in wirre Zuckungen des Geistes verfällt. Das braucht Kraft, das bringt Geld.[119] (229)

[119] "They do not speak, they stock their language of contempt about which they assume that an insane person is not able to discern. They think he sees nothing, that being insane also entails blindness is new to me. Or is it possible that they know that he understands everything, do they want to punish him by pretending to act as if he didn't understand anything? They want to confuse him so that he is being taken up in the list as a fool. They have to be able to turn him in. […] The next patient is waiting. It's about confronting a new

The text uncovers the medical community's construction of distinctions between sanity and insanity, which is responsible for a division of people into 'normal' people and 'abnormal' patients. The process that takes place is symptomatic of Michel Foucault's model of the functioning of power, with the asylum operating with the features of 'hierarchical observation,' 'normalizing judgment,' and the 'examination.' The process by which the patients are classified as 'insane' exemplifies this threefold working of disciplinary power:

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgment. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them. [...] At the heart of the procedure of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (Foucault, *Discipline & Punish* 184-5)

The passage in Erlenberger uncovers the normalizing gaze of the medical staff in the asylum, who has the power to classify the admitted people as insane and to punish, or treat, them accordingly. However, the authority the medical personnel has is not so much due to a possession of curative knowledge, but rather because "they represent the moral demands of society" (Gutting 74). The passage's final reference to strength emphasizes that power is wielded not by the psychiatrist but by the discourse he uses. The doctors in the asylum thus act as "an instrument of social values" (74).

The patients of the institution are forced into the subject position understood as 'insane.' They are constituted through the discourse behind the stigmatization of mental illness and the maintenance of the status quo (Mills 102) and are thus made into medical subjects. By being defined as 'insane,' they are confined to a position outside of society. In

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one with contempt until he breaks down in exhaustion and lapses into confused convulsions of the brain. This takes strength, this brings money."

that space, unlike the medical staff, they have no discourse that empowers them. Erlenberger's narrator is 'moving outside of the domain of speakability' by not only aligning herself with the other patients but by taking the path towards denominating herself as "irr:"

> […] jetzt bin ich auch irre. Ich muß gestehen, ich war schon immer so irre wie jetzt, nur mit dem Unterschied, daß ich jetzt in der Irrenanstalt wohne und es nicht allein von mir abhängt, wann ich sie wieder verlasse. Mein Irrsin ist aufgefallen als solcher, er ist aufgegriffen worden von der Administration. "Der Irre Nummer Soundsoviel." Ich habe einen Namen. Ich bin eingeteilt. Ich gehöre nicht mehr in den Karteikasten, auf dem "Normal" zu lesen ist.
> Ich kann damit leben, ich kann es aufschreiben. Vorher hatte ich nichts aufzuschreiben.[120] (125)

The passage very clearly shows the machinations of psychiatry as a 'discursive formation' that creates the category of the 'insane.' However, the narrator does not write from a position of total subjection. She is aware of the workings of the machinery of the mental institution and she consciously 'risks her status as subject.' She willingly and embracingly crosses over into the sphere of 'impossible speech'[121] and accepts her inclusion into the domain of the 'ramblings of the asocial, the rantings of the 'psychotic.'' The fact that her lunacy has been taken up by the administration exemplifies her being fixed in her illness, of her having traversed into the domain of the a-social. She is aware of having been completely subjugated to a subject position created by medical discourse, when denied her

[120] "[...] now I am also mad. I have to admit that I have always been as mad as now. The only difference is that I now live in the insane asylum and that it is not solely up to me when I get to leave it. My madness as such got noticed, it has been taken up by the administration. "Lunatic number such-and-such." I have a name. I am assigned. I am no longer part of the index box which is labeled "normal." I can live with that, I can write it down. Before that, I had nothing to write down."

[121] Even though her writing is readable, the fact that her writing is never controlled or looked at by the medical personnel can be understood as it being classified as 'impossible speech.' In addition to the intradiegetic aspect, at the end it becomes very difficult for her readership to decipher her account in its meaning, which would align it with the 'ramblings of the insane.'

name and referred to as 'madwoman number such-and-such.' The reference to a card index box labeled 'normal' is further evidence of her awareness of the construction of a strict dichotomy between 'normal' and 'abnormal, 'sane' and 'insane,' as well as who has discursive authority and who doesn't.

However, her being assigned the label 'insane' does not lead to her demise. On the contrary, freed from the burden of trying to remain in the sphere of the power of discourse and the social, she finds an opening to write and thus to a new kind of subjectivity, not one that fits into the predetermined category of normal, and not one that is already pre- or clearly defined. The deconstruction of the dichotomy frees the way to something new, something that is still unknown but that can be productive for her well-being. The fact that she has something to write down, unlike before, can be read as her illness giving her existence content and meaning.[122] Her transgression into the 'a-social' brings her close to an affirmative and productive nothingness, not one that she has to escape from but one that she can embrace: "[E]s ist Auflösung der Grenzen, die eins vom anderen unterscheiden lassen. Ich muß nicht trennen, ich kann mich ganz sein lassen. Ganz nichts, ganz im Nichts. Das bin ich – das ist eins, mein Körper, mein Geist"[123] (Erlenberger 231).

[122] For a more detailed analysis of how the narrator's loss of weight correlates with an increase in the volume of filled pages, see Sukrow "Sich zum Verschwinden bringen."
[123] "[I]t is dissolution of the boundaries that facilitate distinction of one from the other. I do not have to separate, I can let myself be whole. Completely nothing, while in nothingness. This is me – this is one, my body, my spirit."

3. Genre, Language, and Sense of Self in Caroline Muhr's *Depressionen*

3.1 Overview of Caroline Muhr's *Depressionen*

Making use of the act of writing and trying to find meaning in one's illness are also crucial components of Caroline Muhr's *Depressionen.* Her diary account describes the course of a malady and raises the possibility of an illness being a means out of a societal impasse. The journal begins in December 1963 and details the narrator's spiralling descent into and condition of depression. Alternating between past and present tense, the narrator outlines how her condition and resulting feelings of isolation and helplessness worsen and how she passes through numerous medical institutions and endures various medical experiments, none of which have a remedial effect on her mental (as well as physical) health over the course of three years. Aside from the diarist's medical trials and diagnoses, the reader also learns about the precarious state of her marriage due to a past affair, her mental state, and her overall feelings of isolation from her surroundings. While the doctors try to impose their diagnoses and cures on her, she herself is highly aware that the reason for her condition is what she calls a "fatalen Zustand der Vergegenwärtigung"[124] (Muhr 39), an absence of 'healthy' distance and illusion, an ever-present realization of the interconnectedness with others but at the same time an isolation due to a state of numbness. She increasingly speaks of her desire to end her life in order to escape her situation but she is fully aware that she does not have enough impetus to go through with suicide. During one of her stays in a clinic, a doctor sexually assaults her, which results in a

[124] "fatal condition of realization."

three-month writing break as "[a]lle Worte waren verbraucht"[125] (83). Over the course of two years, her desire for an end to her existence intensifies and all she does is wait for death, which leads her to eventually undertake an, albeit failed, attempt at suicide. After an endless administration of all sorts of medication, she is once again released from the hospital and has to live the existence of a subordinate housewife, a fate that immensely scares her. She is so reluctant to succumb to this status that her body develops a physical inability to swallow,[126] which leads to yet another hospitalization. This stay results in a certain degree of improvement and she slowly becomes part of 'normalcy' and all its delusions again so that she finds herself able to tolerate her existence as a housewife. The 'return to normalcy' engenders an end to her diary writing and the account finishes with her being "durchschnittlich zufrieden"[127] (172). Re-reading her notes from the previous years, she is fully aware that her "blissful illusion," which brings on a bearable existence, can be disturbed at any time with the clear-sightedness and destruction of illusions that result from and in depression.

3.2 The Diary as Literary Genre

Before delving into an analysis of the aspect of linguistic resistance in Muhr's *Depressionen*, I will shift the attention to the specific form in which the account is presented. As the title of Muhr's text indicates, it is written in the form of a "diary."

[125] "all words have been used up."
[126] This condition is reminiscent of Freud's patient Dora, who had developed a nervous cough and strong feelings of disgust in her thorax. In contrast to Freud's reading of these symptoms as indices of repressed sexual desire, critics such as Hélène Cixous or Maria Ramas, have often understood them as signs of resistance. The development of Muhr's narrator's inability to swallow can similarly be read as an indication of rebellion against her prescribed role as housewife.
[127] "averagely content."

Numerous critics in the field of autobiography studies, such as Elizabeth Podnieks or Felicity A. Nussbaum, to name but a few, have pointed out the extent to which the genre of the diary has received little to no critical attention. Besides having been considered a lesser form of the autobiography, the diary was debated for reasons of authenticity and literariness, as well as readability and access, all of which led to it being neglected in critical analyses for the longest time (Podnieks 4). However, starting in the 1970s, "feminist revisionism of literary history has produced a plethora of texts devoted to establishing, retracing, or resurrecting a female tradition of diary writing" (4). In *Daily Modernism: The Literary Diaries of Virginia Woolf, Antonia White, Elizabeth Smart, and Anaïs Nin,* Elizabeth Podnieks makes an argument for the "diary as a subversive literary space for women" by outlining how "[t]he diary is a place where women can express themselves through narratives which conform to culturally scripted life stories, while at the same time they can rewrite them to reflect their subversive desires and experiences" (6). Podnieks adds that "the diary [is] not a more female than male space, but a more necessary and meaningful site for women than for men" (6) since the diary form allows for a bringing-to-light and grappling with certain taboos. She asserts that:

> many women wrote their diaries by keeping up a pretence that they were private, while intending them to be published at a later date. In this way, they could communicate to an audience thoughts and feelings that were too personal or controversial to be revealed through fiction, but which they wanted, and needed, to convey. The private-diary-as-public-text proves the perfect vehicle by which women can deliver their own versions of themselves. (7)

This insight allows for an understanding of why Muhr would have chosen the specific form of a diary. Her description of illness, and more specifically, mental illness, is a subject that falls into the category of taboos, together with topics such as adultery or the refusal to fulfill the prescribed role of motherhood. Muhr thus created a space that allowed her to

communicate her experiences, that gave her the freedom to be as open, honest, and straightforward as she saw fit since she could use the pretence of writing not for publication but for herself only. The diary form therefore provides not only "subversive spaces" (7) for women writers but also "'protective' modes and sites of production: the supposedly private nature of the form allows writers to express themselves freely without the immediate fear of censorship" (6).[128] Interestingly, *Depressionen*'s blurb captures the blurriness of the lines of genre distinction and does not strictly demarcate between private and public, nor does it dismiss the literary aspect of the text or the openness of the narratorial figure, referring to the protagonist as "first-person narrator" or "narrator-patient," and, by using the author's pseudonym, equating author with narrator.

The secondary literature on the genres of diary and autobiography focus, inter alia, on the importance of not strictly delineating, for example, diary from autobiography from novel, and instead, on acknowledging the influence the genres have on each other. Nevertheless, Podnieks' definition of "diary literature" is essential for an understanding of Muhr's account:

> The diary is a book of days presented in chronological sequence, though not necessarily recorded as such. It inscribes the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of its author and may depict the social, historical, and intellectual period in which she or he lives and writes. Aspects of the author's character may be denied or repressed,

[128] One of the first diaries in German literature, which also made use of this subversive potential is Margarethe Böhme's *Tagebuch einer Verlorenen,* which was published in 1905, became a bestseller, and is almost forgotten today except for a small-scale revival due to renewed interest in G.B. Pabst's film adaptation of the text. The early twentieth-century diary used the literary space to depict the experiences of a young bourgeois woman 'falling into' prostitution and the hardships and prejudices she has to experience in her life as a 'lost girl.' The bourgeois background enabled reader-identification with the envisaged readership and the diary uncovered the double standard with regard to female sexuality and femininity.

> or acknowledged and celebrated. The author is identical[129] to the protagonist in this life story, though the author necessarily narrates it through varying layers of personae or invented, fictive selves. The diary is an open-ended book, but it may include internal closures and summations. By virtue of its status as a book of days, it is disconnected, yet it may offer structural and thematic patterns and connectives. Though likely written spontaneously, it is a consciously crafted text, such that the diarist often takes content and aesthetics into account. Finally, though composed in private, the diary is not necessarily a secret document. It may be intended for an audience: an individual, a small group of people, or a general public, and either contemporary with or future to the diarist's lifetime. (43)

Muhr's diary account is presented chronologically with entries beginning in December 1963 and ending in January 1967. While all entries are dated by month and year, they do not provide exact dates as the information for specific days is missing (the most detailed information is the mention of the time of day when two entries were drafted on the same day). Muhr added, however, information regarding location to the entry dates, which helps the reader understand when she was in a sanatorium or clinic. While the exact location is concealed by either the absence of city names or the use of merely the first letter, a distinction is drawn between the specific types of institutions in which the narrator finds herself. In addition to referencing hospitalization locations, Muhr also mentions a spa stay, which does not fall into the category of medical attempts for cure but rather vacation time.

While the author is clearly posited as the narrator of the account, there is no mention of her name to be found in the text. The people surrounding the protagonist are given names but the narrator remains unnamed. What is more, the author uses the pseudonym Caroline Muhr, instead of her real name, Dr. Charlotte Puhl, née Klemp. The usage of an alias can be understood as an added layer of protection for the delicate content

[129] Even though Podnieks complicates her equation of the author and protagonist in the next clause, I would like to point out that I will work with the assumption that the story is told via "varying layers of personae or invented, fictive selves" rather than the protagonist being an identical version of the author.

of the account, since Muhr was well aware of the tabooed nature of her story. The narration via "varying layers of personae or invented, fictive selves" is something that Muhr's diary explicitly thematizes:

> Es ist merkwürdig, ich habe so geschrieben, als spräche ich vor einer anonymen Instanz, als hätte ich es nötig gehabt – nicht mich zu rechtfertigen, aber mein Leben vor ihr auszubreiten, mein gelebtes Leben und das, was ich gerade durchlitt. Als hätte damit etwas erreicht werden können an dem grausamen Geschehen, das in mir ablief. Nur durch das Aussprechen, das Niederschreiben, dadurch daß es in Worte gebracht wurde. Wahrscheinlich ist das der geheimnisvolle Impuls hinter allen Tagebüchern, die sich nicht mit angenehmen Ereignissen befassen. Nur war es eigentlich mehr als ein Impuls, es war ein Zwang.[130] (170)

Not only does she describe the distance, but not distinction, between her living self and her writing self and thus imply the construction of a writing persona, but Muhr also refers to the presence of a reading audience, which deconstructs the idea that the diary is only kept for the writer. Her reflections in this passage also illustrate the craftedness of the text and oppose the idea of impulsively written notes. Muhr speaks of her "compulsion" to write the text and thereby demonstrates the need for a subversive space in which female writers can produce and present their versions of their selves and have their voices heard. This passage, together with the ending of the diary, suggests that the space of the text was the only option for the narrator to improve her mental health at least to some degree. All the institutions and steps she went through were not able to help her; she needed to find her version of her self, to have that self acknowledged and to have her thoughts and ideas heard. In the medical field, she was confined to imposed versions of femininity and so

[130] "It's weird, I wrote as if I had been speaking in front of an anonymous authority, as if it had been necessary – not to explain myself, but to unfold my life in front of it, my lived life and that what I had been suffering at the time. As if something could have come out of it, as if something could have changed the gruesome events that were happening inside of me. Only by saying it aloud, by writing it down, by having it transformed to words. This is probably the secret trigger behind all diaries that don't deal with pleasant things. But the thing is, it was more than a trigger, it as a compulsion."

unable to break out of patriarchal structures. But the literary space of the diary allowed her to tackle taboo topics and to work through her anxieties and confront her depression without having to censor herself or be censored in the act of speaking.

At the very end of her account, which is suggestive of a conclusion to her story, Muhr deconstructs the expectation of closure that is associated with linear accounts and narratives. Readers anticipate an ending when they finish a book and superficially this is what she delivers: "Es scheint, ich gehöre tatsächlich wieder zu den Normalen, zu denen, die sich abfinden, die sich arrangieren, zu denen, die aus ihren Erfahrungen das Fazit ziehen: 'So ist nun mal das Leben.' Ich werde mir eine neue Arbeit suchen, ich werde eine bessere Ehefrau sein, ich werde durchschnittlich zufrieden leben"[131] (172). She portrays the end of her diary as a state of having found a conclusion to her suffering; she counts herself as one of the people who will lead their lives in normalcy, without any surprising interruptions to the conclusion of the predictable "that is how life is supposed to be." However, she troubles the readers' expectations for an ending and adds "Aber ich fürchte, eines Tages werde ich wieder glauben, ich müßte nach einem anderen Fazit suchen"[132] (172), thereby turning the illusion of closure upside-down and emphasizing the open-endedness of life and thus of the diary, as well as uncovering the constructedness of concepts such as closure, which are exactly what have limited her during her illness as well as during the time leading up to her illness.

[131] "It seems as if in fact I am again part of the normal ones, part of those that resign, that come to terms with life, that draw the following conclusion from their experiences: 'That's life.' I will look for a new job, I will be a better wife, I will live unexceptionally content."
[132] "But I'm afraid that one day I will again believe that I have to look for a different conclusion."

3.3 The Diary as a "Female Space"[133]

In her book, Podnieks provides a historical overview of the development of the diaristic genre as well as the exclusion of women writers from literary history due to the standards of canonization. She outlines the fall into oblivion of female diary writers and their artistic significance as well as the resurrection of these writers and an emerging critical interest in women's diaries, which contribute to an understanding of the space of the diary as subversive. The twentieth century brought "destabilizations of the notions of self, author, representation, narrative, and gender" which disrupted the "ideology of a unitary self" and allowed for "alternative ideologies of self and narrative" (Podnieks 59). Citing Rachel Blau Du Plessis' argument in *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Podnieks argues that traditional narratives have been opened up and re-written in works by twentieth-century female authors. An example of such rewriting of traditional narratives is the ways in which endings go beyond the dichotomy between "[p]rotagonists who were successful in their femininity [being] rewarded with marriage" and "those who failed to meet societal standards [being] judged […] corrupted or failures or […] made invalids and often doomed to death" (59). Podnieks argues that "[w]riting beyond this kind of ending results in narratives that challenge scripted, limited roles and experiences of women" (60).

In Muhr's diary, the binary hold over the ending is unarguably broken up. While the narrator does intend to be a better wife and can in this sense be read to propagate an embrace of a traditional prescribed role for women, there is considerate space left for a

[133] The descriptor "female space" refers to the above-mentioned significance of the literary space for women, in which they can rewrite narratives to mirror their own thoughts and experiences (Podnieks 6).

recognition of the constructedness and lack of fulfillment that correlates with this side of the binary. At the same time, there is a hint at a potential sort of punishment (possibly coming from within) should the narrator chose to dismiss the path of expected forms of normalcy, as she still vividly remembers the torments of her depression. However, this hint at punishment does not negate the fact that throughout the account, the narrator has outlined the disillusionment and, in a sense, freedom that came along with her states of depression as she was able to see through the societal constraints and expectations that do not render people happier but simply allow them to live a more numbed and thus bearable existence.

Drawing on Hélène Cixous's notion of *écriture feminine*, Podnieks maps out the "unended, fragmented, and fluid" (69) nature of women's diaristic and autobiographical writing. She points to another potential source of subversiveness in "the way that it [diaristic and autobiographical writing] blurs traditional divisions between self and others, writer and reader, text and experience, art and life" (69). Muhr's account follows these blurred lines between text and experience, art and life as explicitly advertised in the text's blurb: "Diese Tagebuchaufzeichnungen, mit der letzten Kraft einer Verzweifelten geschrieben, um zu fühlen, noch 'ein Mensch' zu sein, sind ein erschütterndes Zeugnis menschlicher und ärztlicher Unzulänglichkeit und ein Stück Literatur zugleich"[134] (2). In addition to combining "testimony" and "literature," the text also deconstructs the division between lunacy and sanity, health and illness, normalcy and abnormality:

> Manchmal habe ich den schrecklichen Verdacht, dass es bei mir gar nichts zu heilen gibt. Ich bin zwar nicht normal, wie die Masse der Menschen normal ist. Aber mein

[134] "These diary entries, which were composed with the last ounce of strength in a state of desperation and with the goal of still feeling like a 'human being,' are both a shocking testimony of human and medical inadequacy and a piece of literature."

> Zustand ist eine Krankheit, die keine Krankheit im pathologischen Sinne ist, die von Nervenärzten kuriert werden könnte. Vielleicht ist dieser Zustand mein Normalzustand, in den ich nach langen Jahren der Vorbereitung hineingewachsen bin. Vielleicht ist er meine Art und Weise, dieses Leben zu Ende leben zu müssen.[135] (151)

The diary's troubling of these strict binaries is a foreshadowing of feminist literature of the 1970s, which starts questioning the patriarchally influenced construction of what constitutes (mental) health and illness as some universal, neutral truth.[136] Both literary works and expert literature from the field of psychiatry and sociology started to uncover the sickening effect on women that comes along with an adapation to the prescribed and limited models of a 'correct' femininity (Zehetner 235-6).

3.4 Border-Crossing

Despite suffering from depression, the narrator longs for an entry into the world of insanity,[137] as this is the world that seems to represent a way out for her from patriarachal structures, despite the fact that such a notion is highly coded by the medical community.[138]

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[135] "Sometimes I suspect, that there is nothing to cure when it comes to my condition. Even though I am not normal like the mass of the people is normal. But my condition is an illness that is not an illness in the pathological sense with the possibility of being cured by neurologists. Maybe this condition is my normal state, into which I have grown over the course of many years of preparation. Maybe it's my way to have to live this life to its end."

[136] This is very much in line with Michel Foucault's poststructuralist approach, which has served as the basis for the analysis of the discursive formation of the subject in section 2.2 of this chapter.

[137] In the text, the narrator uses the term 'insane' or descriptions of that state in a positive, almost glorifying way. She looks at other 'insane' patients (usually older women) and longs to be like them. Depression, on the other hand, is for her something destructive that wears her down and eats her up, but that does not provide the sort of liberation that she ascribes to insanity.

[138] Some famous examples of other 'crazy' women would be Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* or the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper."

The border-crossing into insanity would provide her with a comfortable numbness,[139] a liberation from the constraints of trying to be part of "normalcy." It would absolve her from societal constraints and position her outside of society, far away from the expectations of human interaction: "Ich möchte eine von ihnen sein, nicht mehr denken, nicht mehr empfinden, erloschene Augen haben, die nichts wahrnehmen, ein versteinertes Gehirn, das nicht fähig ist, Zusammenhänge zu bilden, Ursachen aufzunehmen, Rechtfertigungen zu verlangen, nach Sinn zu suchen"[140] (Muhr 158). Her illness exiled her from the state of unquestioning acceptance of social conventions that enables 'normalcy' and led her to question the status quo of existence. But instead of steadily hoping for a return to this kind of numbness, she begins to yearn for the apathy of insanity. According to Podnieks, "women lived their lives in perpetual and multiple states of exile, in terms not only of geographical but also of gendered dislocations. They exiled themselves to various foreign lands, and they were exiled by others to marginal positions within society and the family" (68). Marginalized as a depressed female patient, Muhr suffers from an illness that cannot be visibly discerned, cannot be satisfactorily explained or understood let alone cured. Instead of wishing for a return from that exile, the narrator craves for even more of an exile, but one that she herself would then take on and that would bring her peace. She would embrace the exclusion that comes with insanity and in this way take charge of her isolation.

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[139] The numbness she associates with insanity is similar to the one she ascribes to 'normalcy,' even though the one on the side of insanity is a more lethargic one, one that is beyond returning to a state of clear-sightedness and sensitivity.

[140] "I would like to be one of them, not think any more, not feel any more, have expressionless eyes that don't perceive anything, have a petrified brain that is incapable of making connections, of absorbing causalities, of demanding justifications, of looking for meaning."

The diary entries not only deconstruct binaries of sanity and insanity as well as gender dichotomies, they also thematize the breaking down of boundaries of existence and of substance. Muhr writes about how she increasingly lost her supposed essence along the way: "Ich bestand nur aus dem einen schwer zerstörbaren Kern der Selbsterhaltung und alles, was ihm nicht dienlich war, ließ er fallen wie störenden Ballast. So spielte sich meine Existenz in jenem großen Zimmer ab, als gäbe es keine Außenwelt"[141] (48). Here too, the narrator, once admitted into the sanatorium, transgressed into the world of the 'psychotic' and the 'a-social,' losing her sense of subjecthood. Unable to speak and excluded from the domain of the speakable, she feels a deep sense of loss: "In diesem Augenblick fühlte ich mich nicht mehr wie ein Mensch, sondern wie ein Tier, dem keine Sprache mehr, nicht einmal Winseln oder Bellen verliehen ist"[142] (8-9). The narrator associates the ability to speak not only with humanness but also with how Judith Butler defines subjecthood.[143] The comparison to an animal's whimpering and barking suggests that it is not only verbal language that she has lost but also all other means of non-verbal communication. Even though she manages to break away from social conventions of femininity, she does not embrace the potential of having destroyed these expectations; instead she feels confronted with a void, one that frightens her rather than makes her see its potential:

> Was da in den Tiefen meines Leibes vor sich gehen wird, das heimliche Wuchern, der Zerfall, den man nur indirekt beobachten kann, wird nicht nur die Gewebe verfaulen lassen, sondern auch den letzten Rest von Fantasie und Trost vergiften, er wird die Depression endgültig machen, ihr immer neue gräßliche Fangarme

[141] "I only consisted of the one, hard to destroy, core of self-preservation and everything that did not serve its purpose was left behind like disturbing dead freight. This is how my existence took place in this big room as if there were no outside world."
[142] "In this moment I no longer felt like a human being but like an animal, one that no longer has language, not even a whimpering or barking."
[143] Sections 2.2 and 3.5 of this chapter engage in more depth with the relation between speakability and subjecthood.

> verleihen, die mich vielleicht noch vor dem körperlichen Tod ersticken werden.[144] (55)

Despite her claim that she has chosen her illness herself as a way out, Muhr's narrator is unable to reclaim autonomy in the illness. She is scared of the nothingness with which she is confronted. The disintegration of her life is stuck in a stage where it is not yet on the way to something new; moreover, the question of whether she will find herself confronted with her illness again, whether she continues to follow the path of 'normalcy' or whether she will experience something beyond these two opposing options remains unanswered in her diary.

Part of the narrator's loss of self comes from a realization that there is a disconnect in language's ability to create connections with others, to communicate a sense of self. The disjuncture in language, the break-down of the correlation between signifier and signified is exemplified in the narrator's vain attempts at speaking with her husband Heinz, from whom she is separated because of her illness and his healthy mental state:

> Auch unsere Sprache ist kein Medium der Kommunikation mehr. Wenn ich sage, ich habe Angst, dann ist das etwas ganz anderes, als er sich vorstellen kann. Und wenn er sagt, du brauchst keine Angst zu haben, dann bin ich nicht getröstet wie früher, sondern kann überhaupt nichts mehr damit anfangen. Er weiß ja nicht, daß wir alle Angst haben müssen, ununterbrochen und aus tausendfachen Gründen, er weiß es nicht, weil er sich in dem merkwürdigen Zustand befindet, den man seelische Gesundheit nennt."[145] (11)

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[144] "That which will happen in the depths of my body, the secret proliferation, the decay that one can only indirectly observe, it will not only make the tissue rot but it will also poison the last bit of fantasy and consolation, it will finalize the depression, give it ever-new gruesome tentacles, which might even suffocate me before corporeal death comes."

[145] "Our language also no longer is a medium of communication. When I say that I am afraid then it is something completely different than what he can imagine. And when he says you don't need to be afraid then I am not comforted like I used to be in the past but I can't do anything with it. But he doesn't know that we all have to be afraid, incessantly and for thousandfold reasons, he does not know because he is in that odd state which is called mental health."

Even though her depressive state is more painful and more precarious, there is also an association with seeing things clearly, with having passed into a sphere of actual unobstructed sight, with having overcome the illusion of well-being that is only that – a delusion. By noting her husband's 'odd state' of 'mental health,' the narrator draws attention to the constructedness of the concept of sanity. Her subsequent awareness comes at the price of confronting and living in pain, of losing her status of subject, but it seems to be the only way to break out of her previously lived oppression, the one that drove her to her state of depression as the conflict between expectation and needs mounted. Her path towards recognizing her lived conflict and the imposition of roles and expectations leave her more and more isolated and unable to connect with any one of the people who were previously close to her: "Es wird von Tag zu Tag schwerer, sich verständlich zu machen. Oft glaube ich, statt der Worte kommen mir Luftblasen aus dem Mund. Ich schreie, wie so oft in meinen letzten Träumen, lautlos"[146] (41).[147] In Muhr's *Depressionen*, the narrator, even though she is trying to break away from the system that restrains her, is not able to transcend the state of voicelessness, leaving her impuissant, confined to a place structured by patriarchal frameworks. However, she is able to work within the subversive space of the diary and thus make her experience heard, or rather, read.[148]

[146] "It is getting harder and harder each day to make oneself comprehensible. Often I think that, instead of words, air bubbles are coming out of my mouth. I scream without a sound, as I have so often done in my dreams lately."
[147] The act of 'screaming silently' is one that also appears in Jelinek's *Lust*, where Gerti is not able, even in her attempt to break away from her husband, to produce a sound.
[148] In Jelinek, Gerti opens up spaces of resistance through acts such as infanticide, which allow for, if not a lasting, then at least a transient break out of the cycle of patriarchal silencing.

3.5 Language and Subjectivity

The various instances of binary deconstruction in Muhr's diary can be read as an attempt to cope with the threat to subjectivity that comes with the loss of language. As argued above, Muhr explicitly connects the loss of one's humanity to the loss of the ability to speak, and consequently to the loss of one's subjectivity. She is unable to find the words to express how she feels, to use signifiers that can establish meanings for others.[149] The shortcomings of language lead to her disintegration as a subject:

> Wie unzulänglich sind alle Worte, um diese Qual zu beschreiben. Man müßte ein neues Wort dafür erfinden. Man müßte das Wesen, das ich bin, das sich hinlegen und nur noch laut schreien möchte, mit einem Siegel aus schwarzem Blut behängen, um es zu bezeichnen. Aber warum überhaupt noch etwas bezeichnen, was nicht mehr zu bezeichnen ist.[150] (43)

The use of the term "Siegel" (*seal*) together with the verb "behängen" (*to hang/drape*) is reminiscent of the physical object of the diary, a conventionally locked notebook. While the use of the term seal alone would connote letter-writing, the correlation with the verb "to hang" brings to mind the image of a lock hanging from a diary. The description of "black blood" references black ink that is urgently needed to write the materiality of the body and thus breaks down the separation between body and word/language. Her diary provides a space for using words in a different way that opens up the possibility of designating herself.

At this stage, the diarist is still struggling with language to the extent that the only way she can envision successful communication is through the invention of a 'new

[149] In chapter 3, section 4 and chapter 4, section 5.4, I will examine in more depth the unshareability of pain and further elucidate the narrator's difficult experience of writing about her suffering.

[150] "How inadequate are all words for describing this torment. A new word would have to be invented for that. The creature that I am, that wants to simply lie down and scream loudly, would have to be draped with a seal of black blood in order to be designated. But why should one designate something that cannot be designated any more."

language.' This initial desire is characteristic of the time when women were preoccupied with finding a way to write their painful existence.[151] However, a later generation of feminists developped a strong critique of this expectation of inventing a 'new language' since there can be no such thing as untainted, 'free' language. As poststructuralists like Butler argue, language is always already citational. Even though Muhr's narrator does not explicitly acknowledge it yet, her project of (re)writing her self is already an indirect recognition of the potential of resignification of language. Her diary is a performative act of resignification before being explicitly acknowledged as such.

The linguistic struggle is thematized over and over again and symbolizes her struggle with the loss of subjecthood:

> Die Disharmonie offenbart sich in meiner Handschrift. Sie ist zerrissen. Gruppen von zwei oder drei Buchstaben eines Wortes stehen eng zusammen, ohne Sinn- und Silbenzusammenhang, während der Rest, durch einen unsinningen Abstand getrennt, für sich steht wie ein neues Wort. "M" und "n" sind nur noch waagerechte Striche. Die Senkrechten sind oben und unten verkürzt, und sie sind sehr zittrig. Zeitweise muß ich ganz alltägliche Worte wie von weit her holen. Ich brauche sehr viel Zeit zu diesen Aufzeichnungen. Auch wenn ich spreche, entstehen merkwürdige Pausen innerhalb eines Satzes. Oft vergesse ich in dieser Pause den Anfang des Satzes, und ich habe das Gefühl, daß der Schluß gar nicht mehr zum Anfang paßt. Beim Schreiben ist das einfacher, weil ich immer wieder zum Anfang zurück gehen kann."[152] (136)

The fragmentation of language, the levelling of distinctive differences, the break-down of linearity and causality, all demonstrate the narrator's experience of moving, as Butler

[151] See, for example, Verena Stefan's *Häutungen.*

[152] "The disharmony reveals itself in my handwriting. It is disjointed. Groups of two to three letters from a word stand closely together, without any coherence in meaning or syllables. The rest, separated by a pointless space, stands alone like a new word. "M" and "n" are nothing more than horizontal lines. The vertical ones are shortened on both ends and are very shaky. At times, I have to fetch common everyday words from very far away. These notes take me a very long time. When I speak, weird breaks within a sentence arise, too. Often, I forget the beginning of the sentence in this break, and I get the feeling that the end does no longer fit the beginning. It's a bit easier when I am writing as I can go back to the beginning whenever I want to."

characterized, "outside the domain of speakability" (*Excitable S*peech 133). Her speech is no longer "legible as the speech of a subject" (133) and she is thus using the space of the diary to create her own subjectivity. As conventional words are further and further removed from her, the narrator finds herself unable to abide by the conventions of causality and rather finds herself in a state of unendedness and fragmentation. The "disharmony" that she speaks of not only refers to the disconnect between her thoughts and her linguistic output but also to the disconnect between the role prescribed to her by a patriarchal society and her attempt to establish a more self-determined sense of self. She is at the threshold of embracing a possibly liberating otherness but for that she has to come to the realization that "the subject capable of full self-knowledge [has been constituted] as a universally male one, consequently negating, ignoring, or marginalizing female selfhood" (Podnieks 62).

3.6 A 'Multiplicity of Selves'

Muhr's experience of and struggle with the break-down of language can be better understood alongside literary scholar Susan Stanford Friedman's 1998 critique of philosopher Georges Gusdorf's highly influential "individualistic concept of the autobiographical self" (Friedman 72). According to Friedman, the "model of separate and unique self-hood that is highlighted in his [Gusdorf's] work and shared by many other critics establishes a critical bias that leads to the (mis)reading and marginalization of autobiographical texts by women and minorities in the process of canon formation" (72).[153]

[153] Despite the emphasis on autobiography in this article, Friedman's arguments can also be applied to the diary form since the distinction between diary and autobiography is not clear-cut (see Podnieks 16-17).

Without diminishing Gusdorf's ground-breaking insights into autobiography studies, Friedman nevertheless highlights why his model is not applicable to writings by women and minorities. The two main reasons consist in the fact that Gusdorf's emphasis on an individualistic sense of self fails to take into account the influence of the community on women's and minorities' identities; furthermore, it disregards the disparity in gendered identity construction (72). From Gusdorf's emphasis on a "model of self that he identifies as endemically Western and individualistic" (72) emerges a particular emphasis on the potency of and power over language. For Gusdorf, autobiography "[a]s a genre […] also represents the expression of individual authority in the realm of language. The 'sign' to which Gusdorf refers is […] the 'mark' or 'imprint' of man's power: his linguistic, psychological, and institutional presence in the world of letters, people, and things" (73).

Friedman alters Gusdorf's theory in order to come closer to an understanding of the conception of women's autobiographical and diaristic selves:

> [a]utobiography is possible when 'the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community… [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being.' (74-75; emphasis in original)

She clarifies how Gusdorf's "emphasis on individualism as the necessary precondition for autobiography is thus a reflection of privilege, one that excludes from the canons of autobiography those writers who have been denied by history the illusion of individualism" (75). Non-marginalized groups have the privilege of forgetting about their gender, their skin color, their sexual orientation, and can afford to "think of [themselves] as an 'individual'" (75). Women are not afforded this luxury and cannot escape their "sense of collective identity" since the "cultural hall of mirrors [...] does not reflect back a unique,

individual identity to each living woman; it projects an image of WOMAN, a category that is supposed to define the living woman's identity" (75).

At first glance, it might seem as if Muhr does not share any sense of identification with others and that she has severed all bonds with the surrounding community due to her continuous references to a crushing sense of isolation. However, her isolation is to be understood along the lines of sociologist and historian W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness, which he worked out in 1903 in *The Souls of Black Folk* about being black in a predominantly white world, and which Friedman describes as the experience of a "self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription" (75). In her redefinition of the autobiographical self, Friedman not only references Du Bois but also brings up other scholars, such as Sheila Rowbotham, to carve out the potential for resistance and transformation in this collective identity. One aspect that goes hand in hand with this interrelated sense of self is alienation but another, more positive aspect, is "the potential for a 'new consciousness' of self" (Friedman 75). Rowbotham, applying the experience of a double consciousness to that of women in general, describes this division in the following way:

> But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity. We were never all together in one place, were always in transit, immigrants into alien territory […] The manner in which we knew ourselves was at variance with ourselves as historical being-woman. (31)

Muhr's passage about the disharmony in her handwriting can be read as an allegory for her struggle with identity. She is torn between two senses of self, finding herself isolated from others but without a real possibility for self-definition outside of the community of others,

the distance causing an, at least temporary, loss of context and meaning. This rift leaves her without a language of expression but she is attempting to find her way out of double consciousness by means of her diary-writing, which opens up the possibility for overcoming the "tongue-tied paralysis" of her identity.

According to Rowbotham, solidarity with other members of one's marginalized group, e.g. women, is the path to overcoming the disconnect that comes from the experience of double consciousness: "In order to create an alternative an oppressed group must at once shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles it and, at the same time, project its own image onto history. In order to discover its own identity as distinct from that of the oppressor, it has to become visible to itself" (27). While Rowbotham argues specifically for group solidarity amongst women, her argument can also be extended to a group identity among marginalized groups such as people with mental illnesses. Muhr's narrator describes how patients look for similiarities in other patients to find a sense of belonging and common ground:

> In Bademäntel gehüllte Gestalten tasten sich an den Wänden entlang zur Toilette […] Auch spähen sie sich gegenseitig in die Gesichter, um eine Ähnlichkeit des Ausdrucks, eine sich in ihnen widerspiegelnde Affinität der Seele herauszufinden, die sie vielleicht zu trösten vermöchte. […] Im graubleichen, neonbelichteten Halbdunkel sehen sie alle aus wie bunt und schlampig gekleidete Geister, die nach einer Öffnung in der sie umschließenden Hohlkugel ihres Leidens suchen. […] Verschärft werden diese Eindrücke durch den normalen Gang der Schwestern, ihre sachlichen Alltagsgesichter, die weiße Akkuratesse ihrer Kleidung, die Unbefangenheit ihrer Gespräche und Zurufe.[154] (137)

[154] "Figures wrapped in bathrobes are groping for the way to the toilet […] They also peer into each other's faces in order to find some sort of similarity in expression, a self-reflecting affinity to the soul, anything like that which could possibly console them. […] In the gray, pale semi-darkness which is breached by fluorescent lighting, they all look like colorful and sloppily dressed ghosts who look for an opening in the them-encompassing hollow-sphere of their suffering. […] These impressions are intensified vie the normal gait of the nurses, their objective ordinary faces, the white accuracy of their clothes, the lightness of their conversations and shouts."

The patients seek to "shatter the self-reflecting world which encircles" (Rowbotham 27) them by "looking for an opening in the hollow sphere of their suffering" (Muhr 137). The female nurses, with "the white accuracy" of their clothes and "their matter-of-fact ordinary faces" starkly differ from the predominantly female patients, described as "colourful and sloppily dressed ghosts." Yet the nurses are positioned as a kind of intermediary between the male doctors, embodying the group of oppressors and the oppressed group of patients. Later in the text, the "recognition that women as a *group* can develop an alternative way of seeing themselves by constructing a group identity based on their historical experience" (Friedman 76; emphasis in original) is taken up in a more personal manner by the narrator. While she positions herself, at least partially, outside the group of patients that looks for a way of creating their own identity, she later aims to become part of the group:

> Die Prozessionen der alten Frauen durch den Park haben wieder begonnen. Flankiert von den weißen Schwestern schlurfen sie in schwarzen und grauen Gruppen über die Wege, Schritt für Schritt, mühsam atmend, mit blassen Gesichtern. […] Stumm und ihrer Verkalkung ausgeliefert tragen sie sich durch den Frühling zu Grabe. Und doch möchte ich eine von ihnen sein, weil ich glaube, daß sie nichts empfinden.[155] (153)

As grim as the outlook of being part of the group of apathetic old women sounds, the narrator sees in her possible belonging to them a way out of the turmoil of having had to negotiate the historically and cultural imposed sense of being a woman and her own understanding of herself. The group of older women is triply marginalized – because of their sex, their age, and their mental state. And this is the group that the narrator most

[155] "The processions of old women through the park have started again. Flanked by the white nurses, they shuffle down the paths in black and gray groups, step by step, breathing heavily, with pale faces. […] Mute and extradited to their brain's calcification, they bury spring. And nevertheless I would like to be one of them because I believe that they don't feel."

wishes to belong to in her attempt to cope with double consciousness, an alienated sense of self, and the struggle between isolation and group identity.

Depressionen's oscillation between individualistic and collective paradigms of the self is representative of women's struggle to obtain subjectivity. Friedman points out that "[i]n taking the power of words, of representation into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor is it purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and the unique" (76). Muhr's account of her experience combines her suffering from depression and her grounding of this illness in the historicity of being Woman. Her sense of isolation, the estrangement and disconnect she experiences are part of the process of establishing her own sense of self: "[A]lienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation of an alternate self in the autobiographical act. Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech" (Friedman 76). In her interactions with various doctors, for example, the diary's narrator describes the silencing by patriarchy that she keeps on experiencing. Meeting with Dr. Ahmed, she finds herself unable to communicate her condition:

> Mein Versuch, mich diesem medizinischen Apparatschik mitzuteilen, muß sehr unzulänglich ausgefallen sein, denn er fuhr mich an, wenn ich nichts sagen wollte, könnte er mir nicht helfen. Es war mir unmöglich, etwas […] zu erzählen. [...] ich hätte es auch nicht ertragen können, ein lebendiges erschreckendes Stück aus meinem Leben in seinen kritzeligen Buchstaben aus blauber Tinte auf weißem Papier erstarren zu sehen.[156] (Muhr 102)

[156] "My attempt to communicate my thoughts to this medical apparatchik must have turned out as insufficient because he snapped at me that if I would rather not say anything then he cannot help me. It was impossible, to share […] something. [...] I would also not have been able to deal with seeing a living and shocking part of my life solidify on white paper in his scribbled letters composed of blue ink."

She no longer accepts being fixed by male speech, to have an identity imposed on her, and most importantly by an agent of an oppressive medical system, as the use of the term "Apparatschik" demonstrates. At the end of the same entry, she elaborates on the vital aspect of her own writing:

> Aber allein, daß ich dies alles wieder in mein liniertes Heft, wenn auch kaum leserlich, schreiben kann, daß ich in diesem trostlosen Gebäude überhaupt den Mut habe zu schreiben, gibt mir Hoffnung. Dieses Heft wird noch wichtiger für mich sein als bisher. Es wird eine Projektion meiner Insel-Existenz sein, mit der ich die Gewißheit beibehalte, daß ich nicht nur vegetiere wie ein krankes Tier.[157] (104)

Her diary writing represents the process by which she begins creating her own version of her self. The description of vegetating like a sick animal can be read as an allegory for being Othered as a woman, for being ascribed predetermined roles of passivity and weakness. While earlier in her journey she wished for a lethargic and vegetative state, she now strives to renounce such a condition and she reinforces her distancing move by placing herself above sick animals. She uses her writing to assure herself that she can forego her assigned position in society and venture to find her own self (Podnieks 62).

Drawing on literary and feminist scholar Sidonie Smith's 1987 argument in *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*, Podnieks explains how "twentieth-century female authors […] have defied concepts of an essentialist, unified self by writing through their multiple polyvocal selves" (Podnieks 64). Muhr's narrator's shattering of her self as imposed by society does not leave her with the discovery of her true inner self. Instead, the shattering confronts her with a multiplicity of selves; the

[157] "But the fact alone that I am again able to write all of this in my ruled notebook, even if it's barely legible, that I am finding the courage to write in this dreary building, makes me hopeful. This notebook will be even more important for me from now on. It will be a projection of my island-like-existence, with which I can be certain that I am not merely vegetating like a sick animal."

repetitiousness of her diary writing and the inherent performativity[158] of the act make her come to terms with an attempt to find her own version of her self. Muhr's search for a self, her efforts to become part of the group of numb older women, her attempts to fulfill her role as a housekeeper and good wife, her refusal to abide by the expectations of motherhood, her parallel refusal and embrace of mental illness, her rejection of being fixed in a passive female position, but also her constant struggle to live within the confines of normalcy all illustrate how her "diary may be illuminated as a playground of subjectivities." She "position[s herself] in the no man's land between margin and centre, negotiating between the self as other and as subject; between the self as absent and as present; […] and between the diary genre […] as raw outpouring and as constructed narration" (Podnieks 66-67).

4. Maria Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* as Feminist Confession

4.1 Feminist Confessional Literature

Even though Maria Erlenberger's text is not written in a traditional diary form, some of the genre questions related to Muhr's project also apply to Erlenberger's quest for a writing of the self. Her report is more than simply a report; it is a confession, a subgenre that is also explicitly named on the back cover of the book. The literary and cultural scholar Rita Felski provides the following features as determinative of the subgenre:

> [Confession is] a type of autobiographical writing which signals its intention to foreground the most personal and intimate details of the author's life. […] [T]he

[158] While terms such as self, identity, and subjectivity are not used critically in this chapter, the following two chapters will problematize them and take a more detailed look at how identity formation works, how versions of the self are to be understood and how performativity plays into the creation of identity and subjectivity.

> confessional text makes public that which has been private, typically claiming to avoid filtering mechanisms of objectivity and detachment in its pursuit of the truth of subjective experience. […] The questioning of self is frequently inspired by a personal crisis which acts as a catalyst […] [F]eminist confessional literature […] explicitly seeks to disclose the most intimate and often traumatic details of the author's life and to elucidate their broader implications.[159] (83)

Drawing on this 1998 definition of feminist confession and Felski's concern with "the logic of confessional discourse as such in relation to its recent appropriation by the women's movement [in order to] map […] out the ambivalent status of this pursuit of self-identity" (83), I will analyse Erlenberger's text and its potential for resistance as it corresponds to the specificities of this subgenre.

According to Felski, in the years leading up to the end of the 1980s, numerous feminists' texts were published, which strongly encourage reader identification and which blur the lines between clear demarcations of author/narrator, author/reader, fiction/reality. Referring back to Evelyne Keitel, Felski emphasizes that

> confessional literature […] is typically read as a truthful account of the author's experiences which is used as a springboard by readers from which to examine and compare their own experiences. The text is read less for its own sake, as a literary construct, than for its content in relation to its similarities and differences to the reader's own life. Reception, in other words, is strongly functional and often collective. (84)

This aspect is not surprising given the historical Othering of women and thus their need to gain strength from the collective of and solidarity within the group. As I have outlined in the analysis of Muhr's diary writing, the individualistic paradigm of self is an illusion but one that can be afforded when one is in a position of privilege. As women do not possess this privilege, they must build from the collective to forge a path toward self-definition. While neither Felski nor I are implying a homogenous group of women, there are shared

[159] Even though I do not analyze Caroline Muhr's text from this angle, her diary also classifies as confessional literature, based on this definition.

experiences that can be used in the process of resisting oppressive systematic structures. Or, as Felski puts it:

> Feminist confession exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality, and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience. […] [It] is less concerned with unique individuality or notions of essential humanity than with delineating the specific problems and experiences which bind women together. It thus tends to emphasize the ordinary events of a protagonist's life, their typicality in relation to a notion of communal identity. (84-85)

Felski furthermore underlines that "[t]he formal features of feminist confession are thus closely related to the social function which it is intended to serve, encouraging a particular form of interaction between text and audience" (86). Some of those features that foster a particular relationship between text and readership include the fact that the feminist confession

> self-consciously addresses a community of female readers rather than an undifferentiated public. This sense of communality is accentuated through a tone of intimacy, shared allusions, and unexplained references, with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. The implied reader of the feminist confession is the sympathetic female confidante and is often explicitly encoded in the text through appeals, questions, and direct address. (86)

One example of the creation of a communal spirit is the text's unashamed description of a masturbating female patient, where the narrator establishes her familiarity with the other woman's moves and undoes the taboo surrounding female masturbation by normalizing and universalizing the act, by rendering it a natural and logical act, and by not shying away from crude language when speaking about women's sexual desire, which deconstructs the myth of the coy and passive woman:

> Sie hat es getan. Sie hat es sich gestattet. Das Gesicht ist gelöst, und sie liegt mit geschlossenen Augen am Polster. Eine Hand ruht zwischen den halbgeöffneten nackten Schenkeln, und das Mädchen ist entspannt. Ich sehe sie, ich habe sie gehört. […] Ich träume zwar manchmal von Zärtlichkeiten und vom Ficken, aber meine Tage

> sind so satt und gefüllt, daß ich es lange ohne Fick aushalte. Eigentlich hält man es immer aus. […] Wenn sich eine günstige Gelegenheit bietet und man Lust hat, ist es hirnverbrannt, nicht zu ficken. Hat man Lust und es bietet sich keine Gelegenheit, so kann man es sich selbst machen. Das hält jeder so, von Kindesbeinen an.[160] (Erlenberger 62)

Despite her belief in the subversive potential and the importance of feminist confession, Felski does not neglect the guilt and negative feelings that are also part of feminist confession. She argues that "the very point of the feminist confession is to confront the more unpalatable aspects of female experience as general problems, not to present idealized images of women as positive role models. Nevertheless, such passages are an indication that the project of self-disclosure as a means to self-emancipation may be more fraught with difficulties than it first appears" (Felski 89). There a few isolated moments in Erlenberger's text in which she brings in guilt and and a certain level of shame:

> Ich sah mich aufgedunsen, knochig, kantig, gelblich und schlapp, ein elendes Bild eines erwachsenen Vogelembryos. Aus eigener Schuld. Die Ärzte haben so etwas noch nie gesehen, sie sind voller Spott und Hohn. [...] ein alles unter sich lassender nackter ekeliger Menschenhaufen, so sah ich mich. [...] Ich hatte sie alle verlassen, Robert, mein Kind, meine Mutter, mich, alle. Ich wollte nicht mehr nicht mehr nicht mehr.[161] (Erlenberger 44).

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[160] "She did it. She took the liberty. The face is relaxed and she is lying on the cushion with eyes closed. One hand rests between the half-open naked thighs and the girl is relaxed. I see her. I heard her. […] Even though I sometimes dream of affections and fucking, it's easy for me to go without fucking for a long period of time since my days are so replete and filled. In fact, one can always endure it. […] If there is a good opportunity and one is in the mood, it would be insane not to fuck. If one is in the mood and there is no good opportunity, one can masturbate. Everybody does it that way, from early on."

[161] "I saw myself: bloated, bony, edgy, yellowish and weak, a miserably image of a grown-up bird embryo. It was my own fault. The doctors have never seen something like that, they are full of mockery and derision. [...] I saw myself as a naked, disgusting human pile which buries everything. [...] I had left them all, Robert, my child, my mother, myself, all. I no longer wanted to be no longer no longer."

However, Erlenberger's narrator does not get stuck focusing on these negative feelings. Such moments are followed by spurs of action and I would disagree with accusations of her feminist confession "accentuat[ing] guilt rather than resolv[ing] it" (Felski 88).

4.2 Communality

In her progression from identifying others as "insane" to seeing herself as part of that community and embracing it, Erlenberger's narrator arrives at the "recognition that women's problems are not private but communal" (Felski 92). According to Felski, "open discussion of such experiences and of their broader implications exemplifies a shift of the problematic of 'femininity' from the private into the public domain" (92). Erlenberger's narrator used her private sphere as a starting point; more precisely, her critical reflection started with a refusal to eat. Her fasting served as the catalyst for a very open discussion of her experiences and brought her to the mental institution, which took her out of her private sphere of the home and into a communal setting, even if the institution is separated from the world of apparent normalcy. It is true that her emaciated body was visible in the public domain, before she was admitted to the institution. But people refused to acknowledge and actually see her resistance:

> Mein Zustand erschien mir sonderlich, aber der Umwelt fiel ich noch immer nicht auf. Ich bin nicht aufgefallen, solange ich meine Arbeiten leisten konnte. Ich war nur verlangsamt, und so manchem fiel meine Zerstreutheit auf, aber man sah sie nicht. Nichts, nur meine total ausgemergelte Gestalt, mein totenähnlicher Kopf, der machte mich zu einer Attraktion, so daß man hinter mir zu tuscheln begann: 'Sicher krank,' 'Sieht ungeheuerlich aus,' 'Sollte sich schonen,' 'Tapfere Frau.'"[162] (Erlenberger 205)

[162] "My condition struck me as odd, but I still did not stand out to the people around me. I did not stand out as long as I was able to perform my tasks. I was only slowed down and some people noted my absent-mindedness, but no one saw it. Nothing, only my completely emaciated shape, my dead-like head, which turned me into an attraction so that people

Her attempt to make herself visible by diminishing herself results in a circulatory collapse and a subsequent confinement to the secluded, albeit communal, sphere of the mental institution, where she takes up writing in order to make her experiences known. Like other feminist confessional texts, she "uses her personal experience as a basis for analyzing such gender-based issues as the politics of housework and the treatment of women by the medical profession" (Felski 92). But she also writes in order to tackle the dichotomy between insanity and mental stability, prescribed beauty and health standards, as well as the role of motherhood and sexuality.

The genre of her text can be understood in the context of "a general supposition underlying feminist confession that the process of self-examination is necessary, even obligatory, for women, a politically significant act in relation to a projected community of female readers who share a consciousness of the silence which has been imposed upon women over the centuries" (92). The back cover of the book evokes the implied community of female readers and highlights the loss of an individualistic self that accompanies the claiming of one's female voice: "Daß sie […] mit dem Verlust ihrer Existenz im bürgerlichen Sinne bezahlen muß, ist die Anklage, die dieses Buch vorbringt. Diese erreicht uns nicht als Außenstehende, sondern als Betroffene: Zu nahe kommen sich Autorin und Leser in dem, was sie wünschen und was sie fürchten müssen"[163] (Erlenberger). The choice of the word "Anklage" (*accusation*) brings the narrator's private experiences into the public sphere, as

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began to whisper behind my back: 'Surely sick,' 'Looks monstrous,' 'Should rest,' 'Brave woman.'"

[163] "The fact that she has to pay with the loss of her existence as a citizen is the accusation that this book puts forward. This accusation does not reach us as outsiders but as affected persons: Author and reader approach each other too much with regard to their wishes and their fears."

it is not simply a private "reproach" but an accusation that comes with an official charge along the lines of a "j'accuse." In the act of making this accusation, the narrator brings to light some of the most private parts of her life and thereby risks her status as a subject through her accusation. She disregards societal taboos around female sexuality and motherhood, among others, and in that sense confesses some of her most private thoughts, which serves as the basis for an uncovering of the societal implications of these feminine roles. Clarifying that we as readers do not receive this accusation as outsiders but as affected persons implies a solidarity of a female readership, a community of women who are affected by the looming loss of full recognition and existence as citizens but it does not absolve us of all responsibility. However, the blurb does not explicitely name an all-female readership. While the author is clearly marked as female via the addition of the ending –in, the readership is referred to in the plural form that stems from the masculine noun, which, at the time of the book's publication, connotes a general reading public and does not make a gender distinction. It may have been too radical to specify the readership as all-female, since the construction of solidarity and unquestioned comprehension already marks the text's recipient as female.[164]

4.3 Risk and Potential of Feminist Confessional Literature

The German literary critic Sigrid Weigel, who has also written specifically about Erlenberger and Muhr, is more critical of the potential of feminist confessional literature. Felski brings up Weigel's argument against the subversiveness and power of feminist confession since, according to Weigel, it "generates the illusion of a 'natural' female self and

[164] The use of the masculine form for reader could also stem from the fact that these blurbs are often written by editors, who have not always read the book in its entirety.

is both aesthetically and politically naïve, confirming the existing prejudices of readers rather than challenging them. […] [F]eminist confession typically results in cathartic self-reproach rather than critical self-analysis and is essentially harmless, 'without any transformative social impact'" ("Woman Begins Relating" 82). While this may be true for some works of the genre, I argue that it does not apply to Erlenberger's confession. Erlenberger's text challenges prejudices from multiple spheres and deconstructs claims of naturalness or essentialness. The confession is void of serious self-reproaches and instead full of humorous, critical analyses with the goal of transformation originating in the narrator's corporeality.[165]

Just as the reappropriation of injurious language has the potential to subvert and to fail, "it becomes difficult to pronounce any one final judgment upon feminist confession as a genre, either to celebrate it as radically subversive or simply to reject it as self-indulgent and naïve" (Felski 93). Moreover, the "feminist confession can at times reproduce images of women uncomfortably close to the stereotypes feminist theories are attempting to challenge. […] Against this, however, it can also be noted that the dividing line between a repressive stereotype and an empowering symbol of cultural identity is often a very narrow one" (93). What can furthermore not be neglected is the fact that, just as language does not exist in isolation but in context, genre also does not exist in a vacuum. Feminist confession cannot be separated from the social and political context and movements in which it was written. Erlenberger's text emerged during a time in which feminist writers were working towards identifying and naming the alienating aspects of their existence and looking for ways in which to lead a life not determined by patriarchal oppression but

[165] Chapter 4 takes a close look at the relationship between subjectivity and the narrator's corporeality and illness.

liberated from it. It was within the spirit of that time to write first-person, autobiographical texts that made the personal political and that worked through what it could mean to embrace a 'female self,' not in an essentialist way but in an empowering manner.[166] Feminist confession exemplifies and contributes to a call for reform, keeping in mind that the "anxious, often uneasy struggle to discover a female self [is] a struggle which is by no means free of contradiction but which constitutes a necessary moment in the self-definition of an oppositional community" (Felski 94).

5. Deconstruction of Phallogocentrism, Temporality, and Voicelessness

5.1 Resignification of Dissolution

Similar to Caroline Muhr's struggle with a stigmatized illness and her critique of labels such as sanity/insanity, Erlenberger's account of her time in a psychiatric institution and her experience of anorexia provide important insights into questions of female voicelessness, hysteria and illness, gender expectations, the therapeutic function of writing, and corporeal forms of resistance. The supposedly[167] autobiographical and confessional report takes the reader into the depths of psychiatric institutions, the progression of the protagonist's anorexia, the fundamental question of binary categorizations such as "normal" and "insane," and the critique of predominant and existing conceptualizations of femininity.

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[166] See Plowman, *The Radical Subject: Social Change and the Self in Recent German Autobiography;* Kramer, *The Politics of Discouse: Third Thoughts on "New Subjectivity."*

[167] Bianca Sukrow critiques the unquestioned association between author and narrator that has taken over the literature about Erlenberger's report. I would like to maintain the distinction between author and narrator and focus on the report's narrator and the literary value of the confessional report while not completely disregarding the publishing house's advertising of the authenticity of the text.

According to Weigel, the deconstruction of 'femininity' in *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* extends to mental illness, voicelessness, and phallogocentrism: "Die Literatur als experimentelle Abbarbeitung von 'Weiblichkeit' kann die Zerstörung des Frauenbildes in der Fiktion betreiben. Doch auch sie ist mit einer dabei zum Vorschein kommenden Leerstelle konfrontiert: die neue, befreite Frau ist noch nicht vorstellbar"[168] (*Verborgene Frau* 120). Erlenberger's project, which has been advertised as an authentic and factual report, shows similarities to Jelinek's fictional project of deconstructing phallogocentric pornographic language and patriarchal structures. Both Jelinek and Erlenberger illustrate that de(con)struction is necessary for the possibility of a new order to emerge (but this new order does not automatically follow as it is still unthinkable in the stage of breaking down existing structures). Again, the only option for resistance is when it is conducted from within the existing structures/order, which entails that there is no clear-cut distinction between challenging and complying with oppressive patriarchy. In short, failure always haunts attempts at resignification in feminist confession.

It is striking how many references there are to nothingness, to emptiness, to dissolution in Erlenberger's text, of which "Ich wollte mein Leben auflösen"[169] (7) is just one example. The confession points to dissolution as the necessary first step for building something new. It is not only Erlenberger's own project of anorexia that illustrates this dissolution but also the talk of the other patients, which "ist nicht ohne Ziel, auch wenn sie häufig (zunächst) ins Nichts führt"[170] (Weigel, *Verborgene Frau* 118). Erlenberger often

[168] "Literature, as an experimental processing of 'femininity,' can engage in the destruction of the image of women in fiction. But literature too is confronted with a thus resurfacing void: the new, liberated woman is not yet conceivable."
[169] "I wanted to dissolve my life."
[170] "is not without goal even if it often (initially) leads to nothing."

emphasizes the blabbering aspect of the other patients' speech and how strenuous it is to listen to it: "Wenn man einer Patientin zuhört, wird eine endlose Gedankenwurst daraus, es wird einem das Zuhören immer mühsamer. […] das Lamento des Lebens ist oft mühsam anzuhören"[171] (13). Her critique of the other patient's 'tiresome laments' demonstrates the intricate relationship between resistance and complicity. In these moments, she herself participates in a system that renders the voices of the Other silent, in depriving them of value, of dismissing them as too much. But the choice of the word "mühsam" (*strenuous*) does suggest that it might be worth making the effort to listen even if such an act will necessarily be very laborious. Moreover, the fact that the narrator writes down these experiences does allow for the 'voices' of other women to be heard, however summarily. While still a part of a system that does not listen to these voices, Erlenberger writes as if aware of the necessity to listen to the "lament of life."

5.2 Denormativizing Time

Throughout Erlenberger's account, the readers are given glimpses into the other patients' efforts to find a voice of their own:

> "Wissen Sie, wo Sie hier sind?" fragt der Arzt die stille Frau mit den rötlichen langen Haaren. Sie gibt langsam zurück, in wohlüberlegtem Ton: „Ich habe so viel Zeit gehabt." „Wissen Sie, wo Sie hier sind?" „Ich habe so viel Zeit gehabt." Langsam wiederholt sie es, sie betont es. Ich spüre, sie weiß, was sie sagt, und sie möchte, daß es auch gehört wird. Sie meint, was sie sagt und in ihrem Tonfall liegt die ganze Gedankenschwere.[172] (121)

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[171] "An endless stream of thoughts follows from listening to a patient. Listening to her becomes more and more strenuous. […] to listen to the lament of life is often quite tiresome."

[172] "'Do you know where you are?' the doctor asks the silent woman with the reddish long hair. She replies slowly, in a well-reflected tone: 'I had so much time.' 'Do you know where you are?' 'I had so much time.' She repeats it slowly, she emphasizes it. I can tell that she

Episodes like these illustrate the disconnect between the patient's attempt to be heard and the doctor's undertaking of treating the patient. Both interlocutors repeat their respective question and response in order to appropriate the course of the conversation. According to the narrator's description, as out-of-context as the patient's answer might seem, her reasoning is exactly what she means to say. Despite the doctor wanting to make her aware of being a patient in a psychiatric ward, she manages to refuse being brought into that mental sphere for a short moment and succeeds in claiming her voice momentarily. However, her resistance to letting her words be subjected to the conventions of the medical consultation does not last and after additional insistence from the doctor, she gives in and "[j]etzt ist sie da. Sie wollte es so. […] Sie hätte bleiben können, wo sie war und sich gleich dort finden können"[173] (121). The narrator offers an explanation for why the patient's words were not heard and received: "Sie hat ihre ganze Geschichte erzählt und die Fragen des Arztes beanwortet. Aber sie hat es nicht im richtigen Zeitmaß getan. Sie hat einen anderen Denkrütmus und die beiden sind aneinander vorbeigefahren wie Züge auf verschiedenen Gleisen"[174] (121-22). Emphasizing the significance and omnipresence of rhythm throughout the account, the narrator appropriates the spelling of the word right from the start with the simple explanation that she prefers Rütmus to R-hyt-h-mus (8). She then uses this spelling over and over again, creating her own connection between flows of words, patterns, and time. As for the "quiet woman's" earlier response to the male doctor, it

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knows what she is saying and that she wants it to be heard. She means what she says and all the heaviness of her thoughts lies in her tone of voice."

[173] "[n]ow she is here. That's what she wanted. […] She could have stayed where she was and she could have found herself there."

[174] "She told her whole story and she replied to the doctor's questions. But she didn't do so with the right timing. Her rhythm of thinking is different and the two of them passed each other like trains on different tracks."

evokes an understanding of time not as scarce and needing to be sped up but one that weighs down. The patient-doctor interaction can be understood as an attempt on the patient's part to undertake a "denormativization of temporality" (Freccero 489). In her emphasis on having had so much time, the female patient is ignoring the insistence on the expediency of time and pointing to an opening in patriarchal constructions of temporality.[175] To use Carla Freccero's words, she is "queering temporality" in the sense that she is "critiqu[ing] (temporal) normativity" (489). The narrator's conclusion that the female patient did not have the "right timing," is itself an indication of a normative understanding of "time" and can to some extent be read as an example of resignification because it repeats male constructions of temporality as supposedly the 'right' ones.

5.3 Claiming a Voice of One's Own

The narrator's reflections about her own interactions with the doctor thematize the nature of interpersonal communication:

> Ich höre, was jemand sagt, ich beschäftige mich damit, ich möchte es gern hören. Mein Gehirn arbeitet, und der andere spricht weiter, was ihm so durch den Kopf geht. Ich denke weiter, was mir so durch den Kopf geht, und unsere Worte fließen mechanisch aus dem Mund, während Gedanken, unzählige Gedanken im Hirn ihren

[175] The episode is reminiscent of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1892 short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," a story about a woman suffering, according to her husband and brother, both physicians, from a "temporary nervous depression" (Gilman). The story narrates the descent into hysteria due to her husband's prescription of rest in order to get better and of finding herself not allowed to "stir without special direction" (Gilman). The story explains that the narrator's illness is not an 'inherent female trait' but that it stems from her confined position in society and her being treated as an object-like other that is to be watched over by the knowing men in her surroundings. The reader of *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn* is exposed to a similar dynamic, leading to the conclusion that the "silent woman with the reddish long hair" who has already been brought to the institution because of her finding herself constrained to inactivity and boredom is now facing a similar destiny as Gilman's narrator; her condition will not improve but will worsen due to the surrounding patriarchal inability to listen to and hear her voice.

> Weg nehmen. Ich denke nicht daran, sie auszusprechen. Der andere denkt nicht daran, zu sagen, was er denkt. Worte sind dazu da, um die Grenze abzustecken, innerhalb der man miteinander verkehren will. [...] Ich habe so viel Zeit gehabt. Ich habe so viel gedacht, während ich etwas anderes getan habe. Gedanken sind nicht da, um sie zu tun. [...] Ich bekenne mich zu meinen Worten, die ich spreche, die ich nicht spreche und zu denen, die ich hier schreibe.[176] (Erlenberger 122)

By repeating the other patient's statement about having had so much time, the narrator aligns herself with a wider circle of women. But her admission about wanting but being unable to hear what another person says suggests the existence of an inevitable disconnect in verbal communication, thus removing some of the responsibility of oppressive social dynamics from the narrator and ascribing this disconnect more generally to human psychology. Her move is comprehensible as she herself, despite her claim of wanting to hear others, only hears them in relation to herself and not for the other person in her or his subjectivity. Unlike in Caroline Muhr's diary, other patients in the story do not function as autonomous subjects, but rather as secondary characters, who prompt the narrator's self-reflections and reminiscence about her past (Sukrow 187). This is exemplified in the following quote in which Erlenberger's narrator describes being confined with other patients: "Ihre Augen dürfen mich sehen, ihre Sorgen und Trübseligkeiten sind ja meine, ihre Ausbrüche, Schreie, Hysterien, ihre Angst und Gemeinheiten sind meine. Wer mir hier entgegenkommt, der bin immer nur ich in meinen unzähligen Stimmungen und Gefühlen

[176] "I hear what someone says, I deal with it, I would like to hear it. My brain works and the other person keeps on talking, telling me what's going on in his head. I keep on thinking what's going on in my head and our words automatically flow out of our mouth while thoughts, uncountable thoughts make their way in the brain. I do not even consider voicing them aloud. The other person does not consider saying what he thinks. The purpose of words is to delineate the area within which one would like to socialize […] I had so much time. I thought so much while I did something different. The purpose of thoughts is not to execute them […] I affirm my words, the ones that I speak, the ones that I don't speak, and the ones that I write here."

übereinander-aufeinmal-durcheinander“[177] (75-76). Given that the narrator’s project is one of finding a voice for herself as an individual, it is not surprising that the other patients are not granted their own voice. In this sense, the report can be read as a further perpetuation of removing individuality of people in marginalized groups and thus overly emphasizing the problematic heteronomous aspect of subject-formation for marginalized people. At the same time, the narrator also evokes the strength of solidarity by aligning herself with the people around her and thus challenges the norms of a fixed, clear-cut, and consolidated self by pointing to the polyvocality of female subjectivity (Podnieks 64). The equalization of her and the other patients does not have to be understood as an assertion of the narrator in the center; instead, it can reveal the fragmentation of a duBoisian double consciousness.

Erlenberger’s narrator deems the writing of her confessional account therapeutic but there is also a utilitarian side to the production of her feminist confession. Instead of immersing herself in what are deemed typical female activities such as sewing, she enacts defiance and resistance, disguised as compliance, by taking up writing:

> Heute hat sich der Arzt vor mein Bett gestellt, er hat mich angesehen und gefragt: „Wollen Sie sich nicht beschäftigen? Es wäre gut für Sie. Ich kann Sie in die Nähstube einteilen lassen, wie steht es damit?“ Ich habe nichts gegen Nadel und Zwirn, so gehen meine Gedanken, und ich wähle rasch. Ich könnte ein bißchen malen, aber ich habe keine Farben. Ich entscheide mich für das Schreiben. [...] Niemand wird mich kontrollieren, niemand wird mich einteilen. Ich werde sitzen und schreiben, und ich werde den Wunsch des Arztes erfüllen.[178] (Erlenberger 7-8)

[177] “Their eyes may see me, their griefs and sorrows are mine, their outbursts, screams, hysteria, their fear and viciousness are mine. Whomever I meet here, is only me in all my uncountable moods and feelings one-above-the-other–at-once– upside-down.”

[178] “Today the doctor came to my bed, stood in front of it, looked at me and asked me: ‘Would you not like to keep busy? It would be good for you. I can assign you to the sewing shop, what do you think about that?’ I have nothing against needle and thread, is what I am thinking, and I make a quick decision. I could paint a bit but I don’t have any colors. I decide for writing. […] No one will check on me, no one will assign me to something. I will sit and write and I will fulfill the doctor’s wish.”

Under the cloak of satisfying the doctor's request that she 'keep busy,' she opens up a space of resistance for herself. She has managed to complete a double-transgression into a possibly subversive space: first, by entering the world of the psychiatric institution, where, according to her account, societal constructions of gender and sanity break down and where, it seems, her behaviour and her illness are generally less scrutinized than in the outside world; and second, by writing and so entering a liberating, albeit marginalized, space, beneath the radar of institutional surveillance.[179]

In addition to creating a space away from observation, the narrator describes her project as a writing and constituting of her self: "Ich finde mich, indem ich mich suche. Ich schreibe mich auf in mein großes Heft, ich trage mich ein. Vielleicht trägt es mir irgend etwas ein"[180] (189). Unlike the doctors, who simply note down what they are being told in order to fill in medical forms, the narrator engages in the task of finding and creating herself. She uses language with the purpose of claiming subjectivity via writing. Her wondering about the result clarifies that she is still in the process of subject-formation, of trying to claim subjectivity. No matter the outcome, she at least tries to break out of her predetermined position and to construct a more self-determined version of her own being. The fact that she writes herself, that she enters herself into the blank white pages also clarifies her awareness of subjecthood not as a given but as a construction. Her account

[179] Writing of course never escapes language's inherent sociality and is generally subjected to scrutiny and policing, especially writing outside the status quo. However, similar to the subversive potential of diary-writing, Erlenberger's text's genre as feminist confession opens up a space of alterity to recount personal, intimate, and tabooed problems and calls on the implied community of sympathetic female readers (see discussion of genre of feminist confession above), gaining strength in the shared experience as marginalized group within patriarchy.

[180] "I find myself by looking for myself. I write myself down in my big notebook, I record myself. Maybe I get something out of it."

works to undo the subjectivity she had been assigned by society and begins the search for a more autonomous position away from oppressive societal structures. It should however be noted that even as it critiques the constraints of patriarchy, the text simultaneously upholds a phallocentric notion of an individual writing herself into existence. Unlike Muhr's diarist, who seeks empowerment within community, Erlenberger's narrator engages in a distancing move and represents a more "individiualistic paradigm of self." [181] The paradox in Erlenberger's text is a recurrent problematic in these kinds of works from the 1970s when writers often did not seem to have found a way of going beyond a shattering and distancing from oppressive structures towards a less isolationist path.[182]

5.4 Tackling the Role of Creator

As part of her critique of the shackles of patriarchy, Erlenberger's narrator deconstructs the creation myth according to which woman was made after man and so had no possibility of being a creator herself. She turns this myth upside down by taking on the position of an originator: "Ich lasse den Stift gleiten und die Sätze erfüllen sich. […] ich lasse die Feder weitergleiten und die Bilder wachsen vor meinem Gehirn […]. Ich handle nur mit

[181] Bianca Sukrow argues for the correlation between the narrator's physical dissolution via anorexia and her physical act of writing and filling pages and thus of creating herself. She suggests that while the experiencing I is being produced in the story, it also has to disappear in order to bring about the narrative (190). I would go further and argue that in order to take a path towards claiming her own subjectivity, the narrator's societally constituted subjectivity needs to be dissolved before she can find a way to reclaim subjecthood.

[182] See Leal, "The Politics of 'Innerlichkeit': Karin Stuck's *Klassenliebe* and Verena Stefan's *Häutungen.*"

Bäumen, die von selbst wachsen, und ich bin es, die sie formt"[183] (Erlenberger 163). The quote contains three instances in which a flash of authorial agency sets something in motion or steers an otherwise autopoetic process. Thus, while she takes on the traditionally male-occupied role of the creator, she is not simply imitating the male's position. The narrator goes beyond the male creator role by adding a dimension of nurturing and mothering. While she is forming the trees, she grants them the liberty to grow by themselves, to evolve, to go beyond a limited, pre-given form. The whole passage plays with the dichotomy between reality and dreams, or, in a wider sense, between reason and emotion, and thus male and female:

> Es ist ihr Irrsinn, zu glauben, daß Träume sich erfüllen müßten. Träume haben kein Ziel, sie sind nur Träume. Es war ihr halbwaches, gehetztes Gehirn, das den Ast in den Griff bekommen wollte. Sie wollte ihn herüberzerren in die nackte Zone der "Realität." Doch soviel ich weiß, halten sich Traumpflanzen in diesem Klima nicht gut, und der Ast wäre sicherlich abgebrochen und der Baum eingegangen.[184] (163)

On the one hand, the narrator recommends not crossing over to the more-valued side of reality and trying to fit into the male sphere. Her description of the withering of the dream on the side of reality can be read as an allegory of the situation of women and their oppression in the patriarchal order. On the other hand, unlike her other projects of de(con)struction, the narrator here does not take the next step with regard to a possible productive outcome of the destruction of the tree. She stays confined to the binary of the two worlds, of dreams and reality, and advocates for remaining in the female-associated

[183] "I allow the pencil to slide and the sentences fill themselves. […] I let the feather slide on and the images grow before my eyes. […] I only deal with trees that grow by themselves but I am the one who shapes them."

[184] "It is their insanity to believe that dreams have to come true. Dreams do not have a goal, they are only dreams. It was her half-awake, rushed brain that wanted to get a grip on the tree branch. She wanted to drag it over to the naked zone of 'reality.' But as far as I know, dream plants do not survive in this climate and I am sure the branch would have snapped off and the tree would have died."

world of "unreality." Yet she points to a possible resistance within this dream space when she gives the following advice: "Den Baum kannst du nicht fassen, aber laß dir die Nüsse, die am Boden liegen, schmecken"[185] (163). The reference to what falls from the tree, even if in the dream space, hints at a way of resistance. There is nothing that can be done about the destruction of the tree in the initial scenario, but that destruction does not mean there is no way forward. If one changes the perspective and looks for the 'nuts' or seeds of resistance, there may be a way to make the 'unreality' real.

The multiple references to a tree can also be read as a re-writing of the fall into sin by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.[186] The other patient's attempt to bring the tree dream into the sphere of reality can be understood as a parallel act to Eve's thirst for knowledge, which caused her and Adam to be banished from paradise. Similarly, the patient lost her dream tree. The passage in Erlenberger ends with multiple references to evil, just as in the story of the fall of man and Eve's desire to know the distinction between good and evil. Furthermore, Erlenberger's narrator lists apples, oranges, and figs in her enumeration of what will be contained in the little St. Nikolaus bags, which evokes the fruits of paradise in the creation myth. The ambivalence in the Latin translation of the Bible with respect to the word "malum," which in the book of Genesis refers to the forbidden fruit, can be translatated as both evil and an apple, which is why people often associate the forbidden fruit with the apple. However, since the fruit in Genesis 3.6 is not specified, it could also be a fig, the same fruit whose leaves Adam and Eve later use to cover themselves

[185] "You cannot get a hold of the tree but relish the nuts that lie on the floor."
[186] There are several passages in the account where the narrator makes reference to the story of Adam and Eve. See p. 17, where she talks about the words of the bible and the distinction between good and evil; see p. 52 where she writes "The apple of knowledge was the first law. Is there an entry into paradise with the apple core in hand?;" see p. 74 for references to the snake.

after their fall into sin. Erlenberger's narrator plays with this ambivalence and clearly endeavours to take on speaking authority, to find her own and women's voice in writing, and to re-write the history of female oppression by working through the trauma of patriarchy, beginning with the very first story of Western civilization that dictated enmity between the sexes and the inferiority of women.

6. Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the ways in which the two selected texts by Caroline Muhr and Maria Erlenberger critique and deconstruct the binary categories of 'normality' and 'abnormality.' It examines Muhr's appropriation of the genre of the diary, which provides a space for female writers to address personal subjects and bring them into the political realm. Similar to Muhr's use of the diary space, Erlenberger's account appropriates the genre of autobiography and uncovers the discursive mechanisms of the category of madness in her feminist confession. Both texts expose the power bestowed upon the medical profession over patients in the clinic or the mental institution and show how the category of the 'insane' is maintained in order to ensure the workings of the status quo.

The question of who is accorded the power to name and classify also plays into the interrelatedness between language and subjectivity. Muhr's diary about depression uncovers the loss of subjectivity that comes with the loss of the ability to speak. Her act of taking up writing serves as a way to cope with the experienced loss of subjectivity, which is the result of her becoming an object of medical scrutiny. She is trying to write her version of herself, not one that is strictly individualistic but one that builds on alignment with a community of other women, who have also been cast to the margins of society. While

Muhr's diary ends with a (possibly temporary) return to the domain of 'normalcy,' Erlenberger's project is marked less by a desire to return to the side of 'blissful ignorance of normality' and more by a reappropriation of and empowerment in the denomination as 'insane.' By re-signifying and re-appropriating the otherwise hors-societal sphere of insanity, Erlenberger's confession presents a written account of how one can use the imposed subject position to one's advantage. Erlenberger actively risks her subject status and makes use of it in order to break out of the societal confines she experiences in her position of being Woman in a patriarchal society. Her crossover into the space of the mental institution does not fix her in the subject position of the insane, but rather provides a space in which she can make use of her alterity to write through subjugation and to create a way out of the oppressive models of femininity. Like Elfriede Jelinek's works, her narrative sheds light on the ways in which injurious and interpellative language can be re-appropriated and reclaimed. Erlenberger's account shows how deconstruction of dichotomies and a rewriting of the myth of the male creator and creation can open up ways of resistance even in an alleged position of powerlessness. Unlike Muhr, though, she is less interested in the potential of the community of the mental institution and works more within an individualistic paradigm of self, a tension that is omnipresent in her feminist confession and which is symptomatic of numerous similar works of the time.

Overall, the critical examination of these two feminist accounts shows that resistance to and complicity in oppressive power structures border each other closely and the line between them cannot always be dichotomously drawn. Nevertheless, both 1970s texts point to the potential of setting out towards liberation from patriarchal constructs and societal norms. They reveal the problematic construction of dichotomies such as 'sane'

and ‘insane,’ and challenge the ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ via a reappropriation of the genre of the diary and autobiography. They furthermore uncover the relation between subjecthood and discursive power. Both texts, like Jelinek, engage with the method of reappropriating discursive subjugation. This chapter as well as the previous one demonstrated the vital role language plays in these questions as well as the potential it possesses when it comes to resisting subjugation. However, there are other forms of resistance besides linguistic possibilities, which will be the subject of the next two chapters. While this chapter explored the precarious state of subjectivity when it comes to language and writing, the following one will take a closer look at how subjectivity is related to gender performativity and the gendered body.

Chapter 3
The Gendered Body, Gender Performativity, and Subjectivity

> Gendering […] involves a process of disassembling (emptying or gutting out the body of material that counts in the project of the self; detaching the pain from the body) and re-assembling materials (attaching the flesh of the hurting body to the idea of gender).
> –Valérie Fournier, "Fleshing Out Gender"

1. Introduction

Although the understandings of masculinity and femininity have undergone and are still undergoing change, there is a consensus about the social constructedness of these categories (Connell and Messerschmidt 35). While genetic biology and the cognitive sciences reify at times sexual difference, gender studies continues to fiercely critique the notion of a "fixed" sexual body. In light of the poststructuralist emphasis on "gender as fluid, negotiable, and created through repeated performances rather than as fixed and innate" (45), finding a way back to the body is particularly difficult. But the physical body plays a role in the performativity of gender as a site for cultural inscriptions.[187] Therefore, it is indispensable to look at the conceptions of the material and sentient body when analyzing the work of Jelinek, Muhr, and Erlenberger.

This chapter begins its analysis of the interrelatedness between gender, the sentient body, and questions of subjectivity by engaging with the construction of gendered bodies in

[187] Over the course of her oeuvre, Judith Butler has been criticized for not paying enough attention to the body as a physical corporeal entity, a neglect that has been addressed both by her and by new material feminists.

Elfriede Jelinek's two novels. Her texts challenge the established dichotomy of the indestructible male body and the soft, vulnerable female body and undermine normative depictions of physical boundaries to subvert the assigned meanings they carry. Albeit less elaborately, Maria Erlenberger's report explores the experience of the 'lived body' of her protagonist, revealing deep-rooted associations with corporeality and gender performativy. It is important to understand the body as both subject and object, as both acting and being acted upon, when considering the position of the protagonists in the personal accounts of Erlenberger and Muhr as well as the female characters in Jelinek's *Lust* and the repetitive, schematic world in *women as lovers*. In these texts, the lived body is very much a sentient body, embedded with cultural inscriptions and the site of much pain, revealing the extent to which the gendering process is intrusive and painful. As the ultimate finality, death represents the point at which claiming and writing female subjectivity in an androcentric world both begins and ends.

2. The Body and Gender Performativity

2.1 The Gendered Body in Elfriede Jelinek

From within a heteronormative, patriarchal setting, Elfriede Jelinek's writing brings to light the workings of oppressive mechanisms. As discussed previously, her technique is one of resignification via a critical repetition of the status quo. Her texts not only undo perceptions of a 'fixed' set of language structures but they also tackle deep-rooted notions of male and female bodies as well as gender expectations. One established association Jelinek dismantles is that of the juxtaposition between hard, resilient, and active male bodies in opposition to soft, vulnerable, and passive bodies of the Other.

Her novel *Lust* abounds with references to these binary depictions with the male body understood as indestructible and the body of the Other, in this case, the body of the woman, as a source of "anxiety" due to its fleshiness and softness (Bordo, *Male Body* 48). According to cultural historian and feminist scholar Susan Bordo, "[w]e live in a culture that encourages men to think of themselves as their penises, a culture that still conflates male sexuality with something we call 'potency' [...]" (36). Throughout the novel, the director's penis is depicted as a machine – "Sein Gemächte hat sie wie einen Mähdrescher gegen den Badewannenrand schlagen hören"[188] (*Lust* 26) – or a weapon – "Die Waffe trägt er unterm Gürtel. Jetzt ist wieder ein Schuß herausgeknallt"[189] (21). The never-sleeping and omnipresent penis of Hermann – note the wordplay with "Herr Mann," i.e. Mister Man – makes it impossible to read him as anything but the potent and subjugating male penile sexuality:

> Sein Geschlecht ist ihm schon fast zu schwer zum Heben. Die Frau soll's jetzt ein bißchen tragen. Schon morgens, im Halbschlaf, tastet er sich in die Furche ihrer Hinterbacken vor, sie schläft noch, […]. Zuerst, wie Kinder gehorchend, kommen zwei Finger in die Frau, dann wird das kompakte Brennstoffpaket nachgelegt. […] Der Mann ergreift seinen ruhigen Binkel mit der Hand und drängt damit an die erstaunten Hintertüren seiner Frau. Die hört seinen Lendenwagen schon von fern kommen. […] Da geht der schwere Genitalienhaufen hinein, […] Wie blind kassiert die Frau Geborgenheit aus dem spuckenden Spender des Mannes, der ihre Brüste melkt. […] Der immergrüne Mann […] unsere Geschlechtsteile, die darüber klaffen wie die Klippen über dem Strom. […] [der Mann] röstet seine schwere Wurst im Blätterteig von Haar und Haut in ihrem Ofen.[190] (*Lust* 31-32)

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[188] "She's heard his private parts slapping like a harvester against the rim of the bath" (*Lust* 23).

[189] "He carries his weapon below his belt. Right now he has fetched his pistol out; out it has come like a shot" (*Lust* 19).

[190] "Already his sex is almost too heavy to lift. His wife can carry it for a while. In the half sleep of the mornings, he's already fumbling at the furrow in her rear while she is still sleeping, […] First, obedient as children, in go two fingers, into the woman, and then the compact firelighter package is stuffed in to follow. […] The Man takes hold of his wooden ding-a-ling and batters at the woman's astounded rear entry. She can hear the engine of his loins roaring closer from afar. […] And into the boot goes the heavy genital load, […] Blindly

This passage portrays his member as extremely heavy – hinting at its above average size – and always ready to attack. Even if there are no direct descriptions of his penis' firmness, associations with "Binkel" (*bulge*) or "Klippen" (*cliffs*) emphasize its erect and impressive state. At the same time, Jelinek juxtaposes these almost supernatural attributes with a hint at the "Blätterteig von Haar und Haut" (*flaky pastry case of hair and skin*), which implies a certain fragility. Despite his overly tough and penetrating member, he is not immune to possible destruction, as skin can easily be injured, hair can easily be cut or pulled, and puff pastry can disintegrate and crumble. The effect of this juxtaposition is even more intensified due to the fact that his penis is never soft. His member is always ready for intercourse and thus exemplifies that "[t]he erect penis is often endowed with a tumescent *consciousness* that is bold, unafraid, at the ready" (Bordo, *Male Body* 45; emphasis in original) – a fitting metaphor for the Man himself.

In *women as lovers*, Jelinek similarly plays with and distorts the depiction of the typical male body as hard and indestructible. Despite his "körperfülle" [191] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 47), heinz's body is not impressive and does not take up space with its strength and muscles. The reference to "schwammige[m] heinzbauch"[192] (47) suggess that he is soft and flabby, apparently pudgy and cumbersome to the extent that "nichts deutet darauf hin, daß noch leben in diesem koloß ist" [193] (47). Given Jelinek's pervading

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the woman cashes in her security from the Man's spitting dispenser. He is milking her breasts. […] The evergreen Man, […] our genitals, which gape wide above it like crags above a torrent. […] [the Man] roasts his hefty sausage in her oven, in its flaky pastry case of hair and skin." (*Lust* 27-28).

[191] "body weight" (*women as lovers* 54).

[192] "heinz's bloated stomach" (*women as lovers* 54).

[193] "there is nothing to suggest that there is still life in this colossus" (*women as lovers* 54).

awareness and critique of the remnants of fascist ideology,[194] this portrayal of the male body can be understood as a deconstruction of normative masculinity that deploys the connotations of the body of the Other, which, in propaganda Nazi literature, was that of the "Jewish man […] [whose] body is bent, wilted, he grovels" (Bordo, *Male Body* 49). Not only is he wobbly and lacks vitality, heinz is portrayed as animal-like when engaging in intercourse since he "grunzt und wälzt sich"[195] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 48). The animal reference to pigs negates his masculinity since he is portrayed as a grunting pig that wallows in its own dirt and seems bulky and cumbersome. The idealized notion of male savagery is both distorted and challenged in Jelinek's novels.

Bordo identifies the so-called "double-bind" of masculinity that emerges from irreconcilable expectations set for "boys who succeed in our ritual arenas of primitive potency, and […] whose sexual aggression quota […] [matches] up to those standards" and "at the same time, […] want male aggression to bow to civilization when a girl says 'no' and to be transformed into tender passion when she says 'yes'" (*Male Body* 242). This quandary can be understood in the context of a return to favouring non-constraint and impulses. Bordo gives a concise overview of how industrialization played into notions of ideal manhood and how the correlating demands of discipline triggered a yearning for a return to a more 'savage' conduct:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, Europeans began rethinking their attitudes toward the primitive "savage," not out of any sense of morality or political correctness, but because the primitive savage was beginning to be seen as having something the European gentleman lacked and needed. […] Being a "civilized gentleman" didn't get you very far in the competitive jungle of the marketplace. At the same time, "civilization" itself was increasingly being viewed as a source of

[194] See Lorenz, "Gender, Pornography, and History in the Fiction of Albert Drach and Elfriede Jelinek" 363; Wilke, "Kritik als Mimesis ans Verhärtete" 90.
[195] "grunts and wallows" (*women as lovers* 54).

> human "discontent" […] responsible for numerous new nervous disorders seen as being caused by the stresses and strain of modern industrial life.
> […]
> In this context of growing concern and anxiety about the repressive effects of civilization and its "softening" of men […], fantasies of recovering an unspoiled, primitive masculinity began to emerge, and with them, a "flood of animal metaphors" poured forth to animate a new conception of masculinity. (248-9)

The director in *Lust* is a prime example of a return to a 'primitive masculinity.' Not only does he indulge in his never-ending sexual voracity, but he also exploits his workers and displays traits of what would be considered 'savage.' He is portrayed as aiming for a certain level of 'savageness' since "[…]er sieht sich als schöner Wilder, der in der Fleischbank seiner Frau einkaufen geht"[196] (*Lust* 30). The ironic juxtaposition between the 'savage' and the female-gendered act of going shopping uncovers the fabricated ideal of wild and untamed masculinity. Despite the emphasis on the constructedness of 'savagery,'[197] there are also numerous moments when the director is described as an animal, and more specifically, as a predator – "achtlos wird ihr mit seinen Zähnen etwas von ihrem Bauch gerupft"[198] (18) –, a territorial animal – "Der Mann hebt das Bein in seinem eigenen Garten, dann geht er hinaus und hebt es an jeder weiteren Ecke"[199] (19) –, or an otherwise very strong and impressive animal - "dieses riesige Pferd, das seinen Karren mit verdrehten

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[196] "The Man sees himself as a Noble Savage. Buying his meat at the woman's counter" (*Lust* 26).
[197] See for example passages such as the following: "Michael hat endlich vor einer Wildfütterung geparkt. Ja, die Mächtigen und ihre Forstbeamten verfertigen gern künstliche Paradiese, in die die Natur dann, ungeschickt und plump sich überall anstoßend, eintreten darf" (*Lust* 101). ["At last, Michael has stopped his car at an enclosure where you can feed the game. She's game. The powers that be and their forestry workers like to lay out these enclosures, each a manmade paradise where Nature, clumsy, all thumbs, can enter in" (*Lust* 85)].
[198] "His teeth pluck at her belly regardless" (*Lust* 16).
[199] "The Man lifts his leg in his own garden and then off he goes and lifts it at every corner he comes to, too" (*Lust* 17).

Augen und Gischtflocken am Gebiß in den Dreck zerrt"[200] (25). Despite his supposed strength and impressive animality, the depictions of masculinity are rife with contradictions, which produces a notion of manhood as something almost ridiculous and obsessively occupied with trying to maintain its fabricated airs of superiority and might. The text does not grant the men 'pure' 'savagery' or strength through self-control but subverts these ideals by exaggerating and distorting them.

women as lovers also plays with the purported ideal of male savagery. paula's love interest, erich, is endowed with animalistic attributes, which make him stand out positively according to his future wife: "[…] die pechschwarzen haare und augen, eine fremdartige, gefährliche gestalt wie ein panther, ein wenig wie ein panther. paula hat einmal über bestimmte männer gelesen, die in einer gewohnten umgebung wie die panther in einem dschungel gewirkt haben"[201] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 41). erich is attributed with features of a strong, elegant, and deadly animal, exoticized as an ideal of dangerous and impressive Otherness that adds to notions of strength. In addition to his looks, he is also portrayed as wild and untameable due to his profession as a lumberjack. He represents demanding physical labour in nature, and his hard and dangerous job frees him from having to control his desires. Lumberjacks enjoy "ihr leben unheimlich, solange sie jung sind, ab 13 ist kein mädchen mehr sicher vor ihnen, das allgemeine wettrennen beginnt, und die hörner

[200] "this enormous horse, eyes rolling, foaming at the mouth, driving the cart right into the dirt" (*Lust* 22).
[201] "the jet-black hair and eyes, an exotic figure like a panther, a little like a panther. paula once read about certain men, who in ordinary surroundings seemed like panthers in a jungle" (*women as lovers* 46).

werden abgestoßen"[202] (15). According to Bordo, "the notion that men are passionate beasts by nature, who cannot and should not be expected to control themselves, gained cultural cachet" (*Male Body* 251). But erich is not granted the status of ideal masculinity because his intellectual capacities are seen as lacking: "so rassig und schwarz du bist, erich, so wenig hast du in deinem gehirn"[203] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 41). His intelligence deficit reduces his claims to manliness and he thus appears to be nothing more than a sort of empty shell of a man.

2.2 Hollow Spaces, Disgusting Bodies in Jelinek

The depiction of erich's body as an empty shell is significant in the sense that it can be read as a subversion of dominant conceptions of the female body as hollow and of femininity as a kind of emptiness. In her 2014 chapter "Verletzte Hüllen, fehlende Häute," gender studies and Jelinek scholar Julia Reichenpfader argues that "[d]er weibliche Körper wird als Hohlraum imaginiert, dessen Hülle und Begrenzung, also die Haut, als Folie für die Codierung von Weiblichkeit dient. Würde man diese Hülle entfernen, die Frau häuten, bliebe nichts von dem Behälter übrig"[204] (334). She analyses the cultural significance of the skin and corresponding expectations of femininity and masculinity. According to Reichenpfader, human skin serves as a border whose transgression uncovers societal

[202] "their life tremendously, as long as they are young, from 13 upwards no girl is safe from them, the universal race begins, and wild oats are sown and young men lock horns" (*women as lovers* 13).
[203] "as good-looking and dark as you are, erich, you haven't got much in your head" (*women as lovers* 46).
[204] "[t]he female body is portrayed as an empty space whose casing and demarcation, i.e. the skin, serves as coding for femininity. If the casing were to be removed, if the woman where skinned, nothing would remain of the container."

borders in the sense of taboos. In addition to presenting Gerti's body as a hollow space,[205] the text breaches the taboo of the skin concealing gender wounds. With reference to sociologist Martina Löw, Reichenpfader explains that

> [e]ine Entkleidung der Frau aus ihrer Haut würde den Mythos des Andersseins grundlegen zerstören. Auf der Haut ist die Frau und im Inneren ihres (Unter-)Leibes auch. Die Schichten dazwischen sind mit einem Tabu belegt – insofern sie "Wunde" sind – […]. Die Frau soll als das "verwundete" Geschlecht bestehen bleiben; die Haut bleibt Fetisch und Schleier, die notwendig das verhüllt, was sie nicht offenbaren darf.[206] (334)

On multiple occasions, *Lust* refers to female wounds, such as "aufgequollen [ist] die Wunde der Frau"[207] (123) or "[d]ieser lebende Abfallhaufen, wo die Würmer und Ratten graben"[208] (57). Gerti's skin does not conceal her physical 'wounds' and her body is full of openings that leak, that are swollen, ripped, and that attract vermin.[209]

These openings contradict the ideal of impermeable, uninjured, young, wrinkle-free, firm skin that serves as a border to the self (Reichenpfader 333). Jelinek's women are not equipped with this kind of skin; instead, they have skin that is injured – "während der Mann sie […] ein wenig mit Nadeln sticht"[210] (*Lust* 56) – old – "was stört, ist die Zeit, die seit

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[205] See Jelinek, *Lust* 101 (German edition; p. 85 in the English translation).
[206] "A 'striptease' of the woman from her skin would fundamentally destroy the myth of being Other. Woman is on the skin and on the inside of her (lower) body. The layers in between are taboo – insofar as they are 'wounds' – […]. Woman has to remain the 'wounded' gender; the skin remains fetish and veil, necessarily covering that which may not be revealed."
[207] "The woman's wound is throbbing and swollen" (*Lust* 102).
[208] "A living heap of garbage. Where worms and rats go burrowing" (*Lust* 48).
[209] Even though Reichenpfader refers to the symbolic wounds of gender that are concealed beneath the skin, rather than actual wounds, Jelinek's text leaves the options of reading Gerti's wounds both as symbolic and as physical. Jelinek's typification of her characters allow for a more symbolic reading, while her focus on carnal wounds also allows for a more literal reading.
[210] "While the Man […] prickles her a little with pins" (*Lust* 47).

ihrer Geburt schon vergangen ist!"[211] (187) – flawed – "Frauen, durch braune Streifen vom Aufenthalt ihrer Kinder in ihnen gekennzeichnet"[212] (35) – wrinkled – "Gottes tektonische Verwerfungen an ihren Oberschenkeln"[213] (24) – and also full of leaky openings "[w]ie einen Faden soll diese Frau ihre Gerüche nach Schweiß, Pisse, Scheiße hinter sich herziehen" [214] (57). Such skin deconstructs the idealization of the female body (Reichenpfader 333).

By pushing past the norms of bodily hygiene, Jelinek's text further exposes constructions of feminity while also interrogating norms about the male body. Gerti's body is a site of disgust and filth, instead of the normalized 'location of cleanliness' (335), and so it can be read as a refusal of expectations of femininity. However, Gerti stops washing because her husband commands her to do so; he forbids her from indulging in what is considered standard hygiene in order to exercise his control over her. She is not "free" to be filthy. Moreover, the novel does not fall into the binary of the female body as 'disgusting' Other and the male body as civilized, hygienic, strong and potent (337). While there are references to Hermann's body as strong and muscular, albeit immobile – "[die] starren Muskeln ihres Mannes"[215] (Jelinek, *Lust* 231) – it is very often leaking and disgusting itself: "Sie ist vollgeschüttet und vollgeschissen von ihm, muß […] den Mann […] von sich und dem Schleim, den sie hervorgerufen hat, […] säubern"[216] (76-77). Jelinek's text refuses associations of decay and aging with the deviating female body. The male body is just as

[211] "the problem is the way she is, her years, how she looks" (*Lust* 153).
[212] "The women, stretchmarked by their children's sojourn inside them" (*Lust* 31).
[213] "God's tectonic faults on her thighs" (*Lust* 21).
[214] "He wants her trailing a banner of sweat, piss and shit scents" (*Lust* 48).
[215] "the rigid muscles of her husband" (*Lust* 188)
[216] "She is flooded and shat full of him, she has to […] clean the Man, […] of himself and the slime that she has caused him to emit" (*Lust* 65).

disgusting and leaky, ejecting liquids such as sweat and sperm: "Die Tropfen fallen noch vom Mann herab, Schweiß und Sperma"[217] (250). Refusing norms of feminine cleanliness but also of corporeal impermeability, Jelinek destabilizes patriarchy's othering of Woman, as well as the cult of the male body.

A similar deconstruction of social norms around gendered bodies can be found in *women as lovers*. For example, in the following scene, brigitte has "den rammler heinz an ihrem leibe hängen wie einen blutegel"[218] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 54), creating an image of heinz's body as soft, disgusting, and almost reminiscent of a blood sausage. The description of his penis as a "pumpenschwengel"[219] (54) destabilizes the reader since the image is one of a metal pipe and so hard to break, but it is not a powerful weapon. In addition, the comparison of sperm to water lowers heinz's virility as watery sperm would inhibit his reproductive capacities. In addition, brigitte is often disgusted by heinz's body: "während sich brigittes magen um und umdreht, läßt heinz nicht mehr los, krallt sich fest, haucht fauligen schlechtezähneatem in gittis empfindliche nase und sprüht speicheltröpfchen freigiebig über die vor ekel zusammengekniffenen augendeckel"[220] (54-55). brigitte wants nothing more than to rid herself of this leech-like body, which poses a serious threat to her bodily borders. However, since the act of copulation with heinz entails the prospect of her securing a socially accepted position as wife, she is determined to endure his encroaching upon her. In extending the 'disgustification' of the female body (Reichenpfader 338) to the male body, the text disrupts the unquestioned perpetuation of patriarchal structures.

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[217] "The droplets fly from the man, sweat and sperm" (*Lust* 203).
[218] "she already has heinz the rutter clinging to her body like a leech" (*women as lovers* 62).
[219] "pump handle" (*women as lovers* 62).
[220] "as brigitte's stomach turns and turns, heinz does not let go again, holds on tight, breathes rotten bad teeth breath up gitti's sensitive nose and sprays drops of spittle generously over eye-lids screwed up in disgust" (*women as lovers* 62-63).

Besides challenging gendered notions of disgust, the novel avoids the common trope of male ejaculate as the "driven, supercharged sperm racing to be the first to penetrate a waiting egg" (Bordo, *Male Body* 247). In the previous example, sperm was compared to water. In *Lust*, it is depicted as rubbish, thus something to be discarded, a bodily fluid with which one does not want to have contact, let alone have inside oneself.[221] The descriptions of the director's sperm range from "[…] seine Abfälle läßt er ihr da. […] Der Mann hat sich heiter ergossen und geht, während Schlamm aus seinem Mund und seinem Genital austritt, sich vom Genuß seines Tagesgebäcks säubern"[222] (Jelinek, *Lust* 21) to "[d]ie Vagina dieser Frau ist vollgesogen mit dem gärenden Produkt ihres Mannes. An ihren Schenkeln klebt unter der Strumpfhose Schleim von den tagtäglichen Gewohnheiten des Direktors. Der setzt gern ein Zeichen, daß er sich vervielfältigen könnte, auch wenn die Tinte schon knapp wird"[223] (165). Despite referring to the act of ejaculation as active,[224] the descriptions do

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[221] Jelinek portrays male ejaculate as something that acts as a polluting force, threatening the identity of the person who is being 'flooded' by this fluid. In this sense, Jelinek's novel works against Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject, which does not include sperm in the list of fluids from which one needs to separate oneself in order to maintain the notion of boundaries needed for a sense of identity. In Jelinek's works, sperm is instead placed on the level of vomit, excrements, (menstruation) blood, etc., which counters its otherwise glorifying portrayal (see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 71). The notion of the abject will be discussed in more depth in chapter 4.

[222] "[…] leaving his waste behind. […] The man has poured forth his joy and now, the slush dribbling from his mouth and genitals, goes off to cleanse himself of the day's toil" (*Lust* 19).

[223] "This woman's vagina has been pumped full of her husband's fermenting product. Her thighs under the panty-hose are sticky with the Direktor's daily slime. He likes to show that he could duplicate himself if he wanted, even if there was not much ink in his machine any more" (*Lust* 135).

[224] Jelinek's writing tackles the preconception of "males as 'active' and females as 'receptive' in the act of conception," which has been around since at least Aristotle and which continues to dominate popular culture despite its biological inaccuracy (Bordo, *Male Body* 246-7). While *Lust* does ascribe active attributes to the male member and passive attributes to female genitalia – see, for example, depictions of the penis as can opener and the vagina correspondingly being the hollow box waiting to be opened and penetrated

not grant seminal fluid the status of conqueror of the female egg. On the contrary, adjectives such as "fermenting" or "soggy" denote stagnation rather than progress or motion. The reference to fading fertility diminishes the male's potency further and refuses the symbol of sperm as heroic activity.

2.3 Hollow Spaces in Erlenberger

While Jelinek's novels emphasize both hollow and disgusting bodies, Maria Erlenberger's report reveals the emptiness that remains once the female skin as veil is peeled away (Reichenpfader 334). The feminist confession is full of evocations of the female body imagined as an empty space. The protagonist often refers to her body as having no substance inside: "In meinem Bauchinneren fehlte es schon so an Fleisch, daß es sich beim Ficken wie ein Hohlraum anfühlte"[225] (Erlenberger 9). She feels detached from her body, which can be understood as a sign of the double bind of womanhood, that of being caught between the experience of one's body and society's perception of that body: "Mein Körper lag lose und doch starr. Er war wie getrennt von mir. Ich war leer, hohltönend und unendlich. Ein leerer Kopf, der mein ganzer Körper war und ein Loch darin, das war dieses Auge, das in einen Raum starrte, der gleich meinem hohlen Kopf war"[226] (24). She even voices her past wish of being obliterated:

> Ich kann mich an den Hautklumpen erinnern, der ich war, wie ich mich zu Tode erschrocken im Spiegel sah. Die Adern tiefblau schimmernd durch rot angelaufene

(*Lust* 37, 39) – the novel does not remain within this gendered dichotomy but departs from and subverts it.

[225] "The insides of my belly were already so deprived of flesh that it felt like a hollow space when fucking."

[226] "My body was lying loosely and nevertheless stiff. It felt detached from me. I was empty, hollow-sounding, and infinite. An empty head, which was my whole body, with a hole in it, which was this eye that stared into a room, which was equal to my hollow head."

> Haut. Wie ein Netz, das mich zusammenhält. Ohne Inhalt. Ein kraftloses Gerüst. Ein faltiges Gesicht. Wie eine Maske sah es mich an. Ich wollte nicht mehr sein. Ich wollte mich nicht mehr sehen, ich wollte es auslöschen lassen.[227] (106)

This passage perfectly illustrates the representations of the female body as an empty shell and additionally evokes the failure of the protagonist to abide by the beauty standard of firm, impenetrable, clear skin. She evokes the feeling of detachment and speaks of her longing for effacement, which may be the effect of her position as a woman in a patriarchal society that does not grant visibility and recognition to the female subject.

Even when male patients are described as experiencing emptiness – "Ein junger Mann klopft sich an den Kopf und sagt: ' Es tönt so hohl.'"[228] (51) – the text does not imply that there is nothing but emptiness inside. The man the narrator is describing is a spastic patient and is thus associated with convulsive movements, which suggests the existence of an underlying fleshy and muscled mass that executes the movements. Associations and representations of the skin and the underlying corporeal insides codify masculinity and femininity. But the text does not always remain within this binary and normative framework. Near the end of the report, the protagonist breaks out from this dichotomy and seems to find herself once she starts deconstructing binary oppositions and fixed boundaries:

> Ich bin in Bewegung. In mir bewegt es sich. Ich bewege mich. Außen bewegt es sich und innen. Wo sind Wände? Was erfüllt mich? Oder bin ich die Füllung? Oder gibt es keinen Raum, der leer ist? Die Leere ist selbst in Bewegung und sie erfüllt sich in kleinen Teilen, die durch ihre kleinsten Bestandteile bewegt werden. […] ich bewege meinen Körper – er ist eins – es ist Bewußtsein – es ist Auflösung der Grenzen, die

[227] "I can remember the skin clump I was, how I looked at myself in the mirror, utterly terrified. The veins shimmering deep blue through tarnished red skin. Like a net that holds me together. Without content. A feeble scaffold. A wrinkled face. It looked at me like a mask. I did no longer want to be. I did no longer want to see myself, I wanted to have it wiped out."

[228] "A young man knocks on his head and says: 'It sounds so hollow.'"

> eins vom anderen unterscheiden lassen. Ich muß nicht trennen, ich kann mich ganz sein lassen. Ganz nichts, ganz im Nichts. Das bin ich – das ist eins, mein Körper, mein Geist.[229] (231)

The skin as strict barrier between the inside and the outside is broken down and the transcendence allows the protagonist to experience a new way of being. The nothingness and emptiness do not eliminate her existence; instead, she embraces them and finds a sense of self, breaking out of the confines of patriarchy and constructed binaries. She appropriates the hollowness for her own means by breaking down the dichotomy between emptiness and fulfillment and is able to claim a subject-position in this way.

3. 'Topographies of Flesh'

3.1 The 'Lived Body' in *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*

When analyzing constitutions, representations, and experiences of the body, it is indispensible to engage with both material corporeality and its connection to social and political questions. To further examine the materiality of gendered bodies in Erlenberger's work, I will draw on philosophy professor Jennifer McWeeny's 2014 notion of "topographies of flesh" that exmphasizes the "embodiment of connection and difference" (269). McWeeny calls for "a new kind of ontological project that is mindful of the dangers of essentialism and homogenization while nonetheless centering the embodied experiences and materiality of oppressed/resistant beings" (270). Her approach is phenomenological

[229] "I am in movement. There is movement inside of me. I move. It moves both outside and inside. Where are walls? What fulfills me? Or am I the filling? Or is there no room that is empty? Emptiness itself is in movement and it fulfills itself via little parts which are being moved through their smallest components. […] I move my body – my body is one – it's awareness – it is dissolution of boundaries which distinguish one thing from the other. I don't have to separate, I can let myself be completely. Totally nothing, completely in nothingness. This is me – this is one, my body, my mind."

and thus prioritizes "lived experience" (271). Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories, McWeeny asserts that flesh "is a relational medium that is capable of holding ambiguous aspects of experience like subjectivity and objectification, mind and body, and continuity and difference together at the same time" (271). Foregrounding contradictory facets of embodied experience, she emphasizes "connection […] amid radical difference" (271), which is essential when trying to examine, for example, the experience of Erlenberger's protagonist.

The mind/body problem is one way in which the protagonist describes her experiences. At the beginning of the report she still emphasizes the distinction between mind and body: "Meine Gedanken waren von meinem Körper gelöst. Bewegte ich den Mund, so fand ich die Lippen entspannt aufeinanderliegen"[230] (Erlenberger 13). She conceptualizes her body and the medical apparatus's view of her emaciated and famished body "as an object for science made up of mechanisms, organs, and biological capacities" (McWeeny 275). Despite this biological view of her own body, she sees through the codification of the medical sphere, that not only reduces her to her illness but does so without even trying to ameliorate her situation: "Langsam bemerkte ich, daß in diesem Betrieb hier alles völlig unzusammenhängend verlief und die Untersuchung des Arztes nichts bewirkte. Eine leere Maschine, ein hohles Gehäuse, in dem die Ärzte und Schwestern ihr Geld verdienen, und als Material benützten sie Kranke [...]"[231] (Erlenberger 31). Over the course of the report, Erlenberger's protagonist arrives at a more encompassing

[230] "My thoughts were dissociated from my body. When I moved my mouth, I found my lips resting on each other leisurely."
[231] "I slowly realized that everything took place totally disjointedly in this enterprise here and that the examination of the doctor did not produce any effects. An empty machine, a hollow casing, in which doctors and nurses make their money, and patients serve as their material."

understanding of her embodiment. She begins to grasp her experience in terms of a "'lived body' […] which refer[s] to the body as it is lived and experienced by particular individuals in concrete moments and contexts" (McWeeny 275). The previous separation between body and mind is left behind and she sees her mind and body as interrelated, intrinsically woven into each other: "Sie werden eine Gestalt, sie sind geformt, sie sind meine Gedanken, sie sind mein Körper, […]. Mein Körper und mein Geist ist die Ausgeburt meiner Gedanken"[232] (Erlenberger 217). In the place of mind-body dualism is a more productive understanding of embodiment. However, she does not discard her 'objective body,' i.e. her body as it is perceived as an object by and for fellow human beings, since this would subtract from a more all-encompassing comprehension of her experience. Rather, to that objectifying aspect she is able to add that part of the 'lived' body, which is a "subject for herself" (McWeeny 276). In order to understand her existence, she needs to come to terms both with the role her body plays for others and the role it plays for her own subjectivity.[233] Only then can she comprehend the role of embodiment in the constitution of her being/subjectivity.

This progression is exemplified not only in the way she conceptualizes her body, but also in the way she positions herself with respect to others. At the report's onset, she marks her existence as distanced from the people surrounding her, her experience as isolated: "Ich war so herausgehoben aus der Gesellschaft"[234] (11). At the end, the separation is

[232] "They become one shape, they are formed, they are my thoughts, they are my body, […]. My body and my mind are the spawn of my thoughts."
[233] The protagonist in Muhr's *Depressionen* is also quite aware of the contradictory facets of the female experience when she writes "Die Kluft zwischen objektivem Befund und subjektivem Befinden klafft weit auseinander" (53). ["The gap between objective findings and subjective condition diverges quite a lot"].
[234] "I was so singled out from this society."

broken down and she forms part of a larger collective:[235] "Ich bin jeder, Wir sind ineinanderfließende Bewegung und jeder trägt jeden in sich. Jeder zu jedem, jeder dasselbe"[236] (231). While this statement may appear homogenizing, her reflections highlight the need to recognize one's interconnectedness with others if one is to make sense of one's existence without everybody being the same. This further shows that even though Erlenberger's report is more generally marked by an individualistic paradigm of self, there is no clear-cut refusal of the strength of communality. Even though she often pursues a more individualistic construction of self-hood, there are moments of embracing and finding strength in communality and a 'multiplicity of selves.'

3.2 Intercorporeal Relations in Caroline Muhr's *Depressionen*

In her article, McWeeny carefully accounts for the specificities of lived experiences and compares men's and women's experiences and behaviour in different settings. To do so, she develops the concept of the "topography of flesh," which is formed by "multiple lines of bodily relations" and is a "three-dimensional landscape of the social, material, and economic relationships present in a given locale at a particular point in time" (McWeeny 271). According to McWeeny, a phenomenological concept of the flesh is necessary to understand the "relationality and complexity of lived experience, which does not present beings as either mind or body, active or passive, self or other, oppressed or privileged, but as both of these aspects at the same time" (277). Her approach complicates a too simplistic gender binary that views women as the sole victims of oppression and exploitation. At the

[235] See chapter 2, section 4.2 for more details about her relation to the other patients in the institution.
[236] "I am everybody. We are coalescing movement and everybody carries everybody inside. Everybody to everybody, everybody the same."

same time, she explains that oppression cannot be reduced to one single form. Rather, her "topography of flesh" acknowledges "that the harms of oppression do not affect all bodies equally" (277). At the heart of McWeeny's 'topography of flesh' is the notion of 'intercorporeality,' which she divides up into three possible forms: first, exchange, i.e. when bodies are "alternately used to serve the same function;" second, substitution, i.e. when "one body […] [is] used in a way that is normally reserved for another;" and third, asymmetry, i.e. "when a line of exchange between two bodies is inoperative and thus unimaginable" (280). These intercorporeal relations are not based on bodily features but rather on "bodily proximities" (281), meaning that it is of interest what the bodies experience and what is being done to them or what they are doing instead of how they are composed. For McWeeny, the concept of flesh allows for "holding […] two seemingly opposed aspects of experience together at the same time. […] Flesh is capable of both touching and being touched, seeing and being seen, moving and being moved, […]. [The essence of flesh is] transitivity between seemingly contradictory perspectives" (276). Drawing on Beauvoir to assert "that a woman experiences herself as a contradiction in sexist society, for she is both a subject for herself (a lived body) and an object for others (and objective body) at the same time" (276), McWeeny provides a non-dualistic feminist framework for analyzing the workings of oppression, difference and connection, and their resulting subjectivities:

> Beauvoir describes sexism as a situation where "woman is an existent who is called upon to make herself an object" (Beauvoir 1953, 428). *Flesh* (*la chair*) is the term that Beauvoir uses to refer to this multiple self-experience. Of the child's experience of puberty, she writes: "The child's body is becoming the body of a woman and is being made flesh… [I]n the development of her breasts the girl senses the ambiguity of the word *living*… Under her sweater or blouse her breasts make their display, and this body which the girl has identified with herself *she now apprehends as flesh*. It becomes an object that others see and pay attention to" (323-24; emphasis added).

> The young girl becomes flesh at the moment when she discovers that her body is hers and not hers, since it takes on importance only in virtue what it does for others. (276)

The fusing of the disparate experiences and perspectives constitutes a crucial element of the experience of the oppressed subject.

Similar to Erlenberger's report, Caroline Muhr's diary is characterized by the seemingly contradictory experience of being a lived body and an objective body: "Er [der Arzt] schätzt meinen Zustand von außen ein, ich lebe ihn von innen"[237] (137). Muhr's text does not openly critique this contradictory experience, since immediately following the previous quote she states that "dazwischen gibt es nichts"[238] (137). Moreover, there are moments when the narrator experiences two simultaneous and contradictory facets of her "lived body." In the scene in which Dr. Svenn molests the narrator, it is not only his gaze and touch that act upon her in her dormant state; she also calls attention to seeing him while being gazed at by him (81-82). In this way, she is both inside her body and outside of it, experiencing her "flesh" while gazing at it from afar.

McWeeny's 'topography of flesh' is also a useful concept for examining numerous intercorporeal relationships in the diary. For example, the protagonist identifies with a pig's head and thus aligns herself with a farm animal, meant to be consumed by meat-eaters. This suggests that the flesh of female bodies can be exchanged with that of consumable animals (McWeeny 274). In addition, female bodies are described as prey. The discrepancy between male and female bodies becomes evident when the protagonist reminisces about Jacques, the man with whom she had her first sexual encounter:

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[237] "He [the doctor] assesses my condition from the outside, I live it from the inside."
[238] "there is nothing in between."

> Er war Arzt, aber das war er nur nebenbei. Im Hauptberuf war er Jäger. Er erlegte junge Frauen und Mädchen mit einer Begabung zur Promiskuität, die nur durch die geheimnisvollen Gesetze der geschlechtlichen Anziehungskraft in gewissen Schranken gehalten wurde. Immerhin waren diese Schranken so großzügig, daß sich Stupsnasen und edle Profile, füllige Ammenbrüste und kleine Marmorhügel, ausladende Hinterfronten und knabenhafte Hüften, kraftstrotzende Rubensarme und staksige Mädchenbeine dahinter versammeln konnten. [...] Und eine unumgängliche Bedingung stellte er: seine Beute mußte Stöckelschuhe tragen.[239] (Muhr 95)

The female bodies are broken down into pieces meant to sexually please the male hunter. They are further objectified by being depicted as artworks or 'milking machines' instead of embodied corporeality and by being reduced to normative beauty standards.[240] By placing women on the same level as animals to be hunted and consumed, the discourse exonerates the male hunter from his role in oppression. Even though Muhr's narrator condemns the doctor's exploitative deeds, she later describes him as an animal himself – but instead of as prey, as one bursting with strength: "Er war ein Prachtexemplar, und wenn er ein Stier gewesen wäre, hätte man ihn mit den höchsten Preisen bedacht und als Zuchtbulle verwendet"[241] (Muhr 95). The text's dynamic is two-fold. On the one hand, Jacques is the opposite of the female prey; he is accredited as male and positively connoted with strength

[239] "He was a doctor, but he only did that on the side. His main profession was hunter. He hunted down young women and girls with a talent for promiscuity, which was only kept under a certain kind of control by means of the mysterious laws of sexual attraction. At least this control was quite liberal, so that snub noses and elegant profiles, voluptuous wet nurse breasts and little marble hills, protruding rear façades and boyish hips, vigorous Rubens arms and spindly girl legs, were all permitted. And he had one unavoidable condition: his prey had to wear high heels."

[240] Because it evokes a correlation between women's oppression and the domination over nature and animals, Muhr's diaristic novel can be read from an ecofeminist perspective. In line with feminist and animal rights advocate Carol J. Adams' work, McWeeny argues that ecofeminism targets sexism and speciesism that "construct an inferior ontological status for women and nonhuman animals so that the 'subject/agent/perpetrator of violence' can be absolved" (McWeeny 273).

[241] "He was a splendid specimen, and had he been a bull, he would have been distinguished with the highest honors and used as a breeding bull."

and power. In this sense, he is located in opposition, or as McWeeny would categorize it, asymmetrically, to the female bodies. On the other hand, the comparison of Jacques to a bull, and more specifically, to a breeding bull, associates him with an animal exploited for his reproductive power. The text thus breaks with the normative gender system by aligning the male body with what McWeeny with recourse to animal rights advocate Karen Davis denotes as being "farmable," which is "to have your reproductive system exploited again and again in the service of others, at the mercy of others, and as the property of others" (274). It thus provides a more complex picture of the gendered body as flesh.[242]

3.3 Intercorporeal Relations in *women as lovers*

The exploitation of the body, be it for reproduction or service use, is an integral part of Elfriede Jelinek's *women as lovers*. Working bodies in the novel are constituted in relations of exchange where "there is little regard for the particularity of workers as long as they perform the desired tasks" (McWeeny 280). The narrator maps out how the female workforce functions in the novel:

> die frauen bleiben bis zu ihrer heirat verkäuferin oder hilfsverkäuferin, wenn sie geheiratet worden sind, ist es aus mit dem verkaufen, dann sind sie selbst verkauft, und die nächste verkäuferin darf an ihre stelle rücken und weiterverkaufen, der wechsel geht fliegend vor sich.
> so ist im lauf der jahre ein natürlicher kreislauf zustande gekommen: geburt und einsteigen und geheiratet werden und wieder aussteigen und die tochter kriegen, die hausfrau oder verkäuferin, meist hausfrau, tochter steigt ein, mutter kratzt ab, tochter wird geheiratet, steigt aus, springt ab vom trittbrett, kriegt selber die

[242] There are additional passages in *Depressionen* that describe men as domesticated animals, even though women are usually the target of this normative, gendered association. Earlier in the text, a male patient is described as a docile dog, who is being raised and utilized by his master, Dr. Hartmann (Muhr 63-64). Once again, the body is constituted in contradictory terms: strong, muscular, and full of stamina, but simultaneously obedient, workable, devoted, and docile, i.e. serviceable.

> nächste tochter, der konsumladen ist die drehscheibe des natürlichen kreislaufs der natur […].[243] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 15)

The interchangeability of the female workers mirrors the turnover of bodily exchanges, including its speed, arbitrariness, and lack of discernibility of individuality. The speed at which these exchanges take place also refers to the idea of an inner biological clock, which is imposed on women with regard to their reproductive functions. Women are told not to take too much time, not to wait too long, not to stop to think so that they do not miss their chance to experience motherhood, which is exemplified in the giddy portrayal of the 'natural cycle' in Jelinek's novel. In addition, the passage makes the reader dizzy with its rapid enumeration of mothers producing daughters becoming mothers who produce daughters, and so forth. It is hard to keep track of how many generations are packed into this short passage, which suggests a mass-production of serviceable and exploitable women, which is further intensified by the breathless run-on sentence. Just like there is an endless supply of goods that are sold by these women, there is a perpetual stockpile of new women serving as sales assistants, The correlation between the products that are sold by the women and the women themselves becoming sold products upon their entry into marriage additionally increases the velocity and indistinguishability of female bodies.

In this 'topographical aggregate,' the women share the same destiny. Moreover, their bodies are exchangeable in both the workforce and the home. It is a gender-specific

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[243] "the women remain sales assistant or part-time sales assistant until their marriage, once they're married, that's the end of selling, then they are sold themselves and the next sales assistant can take her place and go on selling, the substitution is made without a hitch.
so over the years a natural cycle has come into being: birth and starting work and getting married and leaving again and getting the daughter, who is housewife or sales assistant, usually housewife, daughter starts work, mother kicks the bucket, daughter is married, leaves, jumps down from the running board, herself gets the next daughter, the co-op shop is the turntable of the natural cycle of nature, […]" (*women as lovers* 12-13).

exchange restricted to the household, or selling, or producing lingerie on the assembly line, like brigitte's profession, where she is "austauschbar und unnötig"[244] (12). The narrator continuously emphasizes that one component of a woman's life can easily be replaced by another component of another woman's life: "brigitte ist nichts, was nicht andere ohne mühe genauso sein könnten"[245] (12). Indeed, at the end of the novel, paula has taken brigitte's place since brigitte managed to "durch heirat und kindesgeburt ausscheiden"[246] (9), which was her goal from the beginning. Since paula did not play her cards right, she "hat dort geendet, wo brigitte auszog"[247] and now she "arbeitet hier als ungelernte näherin am fließband"[248] (155). The novel operates within a universe in which all female bodies are seen as alike. Again, brigitte is used as an example of an indistinctive, deindividualized body: "außer brigittes körper werden zur gleichen zeit noch viele andre körper auf den markt geworfen. das einzige, was brigitte auf diesem weg positiv zur seite steht, ist die kosmetische industrie. und die textilindustrie. brigitte hat brüste, schenkel, beine, hüften und eine möse. das haben andre auch, manchmal sogar von besserer qualität"[249] (13). Reduced to breasts, thighs, vagina, brigitte's body serves to satisfy the desires of others; it

[244] "replaceable and unnecessary" (*women as lovers* 9).
[245] "brigitte is nothing which others could not also be without any effort at all" (*women as lovers* 9).
[246] "drop out because of marriage and childbirth" (*women as lovers* 6).
[247] "paula has finished up in the place from which brigitte set out" (*women as lovers* 191).
[248] "works here as an unskilled seamstress on the assembly line" (*women as lovers* 191).
[249] "apart from brigitte's body many other bodies are flooding the market at the same time. the only thing that positively stands by brigitte on this path, is the cosmetics industry. and the textile industry. brigitte has breasts, thighs, legs, hips and a snatch.
others have that too, sometimes even of a better quality" (*women as lovers* 10).

exists only in relation to what it can do for others, be it their nutritional, reproductive, physical, or other needs.[250]

In numerous instances, the woman's sole *raison d'être* is to serve others. paula also learns during puberty that her body's purpose is to be serviceable; it is acknowledged only in relation to others who benefit and profit from it: "sie ist 15 jahre alt. sie ist jetzt alt genug, um sich überlegen zu dürfen, was sie einmal werden möchte: hausfrau oder verkäuferin. verkäuferin oder hausfrau. in ihrem alter sind alle mädchen, die so alt sind wie sie alt genug, um sich zu überlegen, was sie einmal werden wollen."[251] (14). paula learns about the 'ambiguity of living' from her mother when she voices an interest in learning a profession. Her mother reminds paula of a woman's reason for existing, reinforcing the cycle of servitude out of which paula is not allowed to break:

> die mutter sagt: paula, du MUSST verkäuferin werden oder hausfrau. paula antwortet: mutter, es ist gerade keine lehrstelle als verkäuferin frei. die mutter sagt: dann bleib zuhause, paula, und werde hausfrau und hilf mir bei der hausarbeit und im stall und bediene deinen vatter so wie ich ihn bediene und bediene auch deinen bruder, wenn er aus dem holz kommt, warum sollst du es besser haben als ich, ich war nie etwas besseres als meine mutter, die hausfrau war, […]
> und [mein vater] hat gesagt, ich soll zuhause bleiben und der mutta helfen und ihn bedienen, wenn er aus der arbeit kommt und das bier holen vom wirten, […] und warum sollst du, meine tochter, es besser haben?[252] (18)

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[250] Even though the textual examples speak more about the labouring female body rather than 'flesh' in the sense of oppositional experience, the enumeration of breasts, thighs, vagina, and so on exceeds the domain of labour.

[251] "she is 15 years old. she is now old enough to be allowed to think about what she wants to be one day: housewife or sales assistant. sales assistant or housewife. at her age all girls, who are as old as she is, are old enough to think about what they want to be one day" (*women as lovers* 12).

[252] "her mother says: paula, you MUST become a sales assistant or housewife. paula replied: mother, there isn't a vacancy as trainee sales assistant available just now. her mother says: then stay at home, paula, and become a housewife and help me with the housework and with the animals and wait upon your dada as i wait upon him and also wait upon your brother, when he comes from the wood, why should you be better off than me, I was never better off than my mother, who was a housewife, […] and [my father] said, i have to stay at home and help momma and attend to him, when he comes from work and fetch the beer

This multigenerational cycle of replaceable women's bodies illustrates not only how male bodies profit from the service of female bodies, but also how one exchangeable female body, in this case, the mother's, maintains the same oppression she experienced. In this way, exchangeability does not lead to solidarity but rather to an atmosphere of competition and disparagement. The mother's insistence that her daughter live the same fate as generations of women before her could also be read along the lines of asymetrical relations: the mother wants to make sure that her daughter does not make progress, that she does not move from the realm of oppression and exploitation to one of protection and so profit from her mother's corporeal service (McWeeny 280).

Often enough, one body is also being substituted for another in the sense that one body has to serve and stand in for the function or purpose of another body. One textual example is when paula informs her parents of her illegitimate pregnancy. paula's mother uses her daughter's body as a substitution for absent bodies in order to let out the rage she feels.

> die mutta spitzt paula an und hämmert sie in den grund und boden hinein. und alle kinder, die einmal vor zeiten mutters bauch beschwert haben, scheinen fleißig mitzuhämmern, so eine kraft hat die frau auf einmal.
> paula hat bisher nur axtschläge im wald so laut widerhallen hören. es wäre eine lustige arbeit, das paulaerschlagen, würde sie nicht mit so viel haß ausgeführt. […] die mutta von paula haßt paula wegen des kindes in deren bauch. verschiedene wichtige organe paulas zerbrechen unter dieser behandlung.
> die mutta von paula hat schon mehrmals ihren mann gehaßt wegen der kinder in ihrem bauch, wegen der mehrarbeit und dem ekelhaften geburtsvorgang, hat auch schon viele male die kinder in ihrem bauch und später die kinder außerhalb ihres bauches gehaßt, jetzt ist die mutta endgültig übergeschnappt, sodaß sie nicht nur ein kind außerhalb ihres bauches im tochterbauch haßt, sondern die tochter gleich

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from the innkeeper, […] and why should you, my daughter, be better off than me?" (*women as lovers* 16-17).

> mit dazu. die leute werden glauben, daß man die eigene tochter unrichtig erzogen hat. so eine schande und spott.[253] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 95)

Several intercorporeal relationships are happening in this passage. First, paula's body is standing in for other absent bodies, be it that of the husband, against whom part of the rage is directed, be it that of the other children, whom the mother despises for existing, be it her own, hated because of her material and societal position, be it that of 'the people,' whom the mother hates because of their potential mockery. Second, the mother is taking on the body of a lumberjack, a corporeal position reserved for the men in town. But by figuratively doing so, the mother puts herself in a more powerful position, because of the bodily strength associated with such a profession and the gender privilege that comes with it. By using paula's body as the target for her aggression that would otherwise not have an outlet, the mother temporarily positions her body asymmetrically to paula's body and thus creates a dichotomous relationship where paula's inferiority enhances the mother's superiority.

The dynamics of the flesh create a relationship that is not one-sided or simplistic but rather one that combines dichotomies. paula's mother is thus able to both position herself as oppressor while simultaneously being oppressed by others. She is active in the scene described above but passive in other domains. The men, too, in the novel are described in

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[253] "momma sharpens paula and hammers her straight into the ground. and every child which ever in times past weighed down a mother's stomach, seems to be hammering busily with her, so much strength is there in the woman all at once.
until now paula has only heard axe blows echo so loud in the forest. it would be merry work, bashing paula, if it were not carried out with so much hate. […] paula's mommy hates paula because of the child in her stomach. various of paula's important organs break under this treatment.
paula's momma has often enough hated her husband because of the children in her stomach, because of the extra work and the horrible birth process, has also very many times hated the children inside her stomach and later the children outside her stomach, now momma has finally cracked, so that she not only hates a child outside her stomach in her daughter's stomach, but the daughter as well. people will think that one hasn't brought up one's own daughter properly. what a scandal and a mockery" (*women as lovers* 114).

two opposing positions: on the one hand, they are privileged and associated with the mind, and on the other, they are reduced to their corporeality and also oppressed in the capitalistic patriarchal system (although in different ways than the women). Close analyses of corporeal relations do not contribute to essentialism but rather equip one

> with a means to think connections and differences between beings at the level of embodiment without homogenizing beings, centering the activities of the oppressor, or obscuring the fluid relations of oppression and privilege among feminists themselves. […] The impetus for feminist action lies on our affirmation of the body's ability to harm and be harmed, touch and be touched, love and be loved. (McWeeny 284)

4. The Body in Pain

4.1 The Painful Body in *Lust*

In order to arrive at a better understanding of the workings of gender inscriptions on the female bodies in the selected texts, I consult sociologist Valérie Fournier's 2002 article on "Fleshing out Gender: Crafting Gender Identity on Women's Bodies," which, like my study, complements the post-structuralist view on gender performativity by including corporeal sentience. As the body experiencing things, being in touch with things, 'corporeal sentience' involves all five senses. When thinking about a body in pain, one first thinks about the body feeling things, but sight, hearing, taste, smell and touch all come into play. The simultaneity not only applies to the presence of the different senses but also to the synchronous direction of feeling, in the sense of 'seing and being seen, hearing and being heard, etc.,' in the spirit of McWeeny's concept of 'flesh.' The body in pain is one way to conceptualize the lived body as an embodiment of contradictions. The aching body of the Other is "caught in social and moral contradictions, [...] [which] are lived in the body and are marked on bodies as 'life-lesions'" (Fournier 55). The idea of life-lesions entails that the

painful body is conceptualized as wounded, as opened up somewhere, the lesion possibly opening up a space, which can be inscribed anew. While pain itself is not gender-specific, there are "(symbolic) connections between woman and pain" (56),[254] which are vital to understanding how womanhood is experienced, embodied, and how the 'flesh' plays into it.

In Elfriede Jelinek's *Lust,* Gerti's ordeal is one of incessantly experiencing pain in various forms, with the physical pain of being sexually and domestically abused by her husband and lover, with the emotional pain of being incessantly used and discarded and disregarded as a living being, as well as the chronic psychologial pain that comes with her gendered role as wife and mother in the strictly patriarchal society. Despite an abundance of very explicit and detailed descriptions of the violence inflicted upon her, the text does not provide insights into Gerti's perception of her suffering. The reader has to fill in the gaps of her experiencing her body in pain due to the fact that her feelings or 'inner view' are missing from the text. The descriptions of the body in pain all center on the perpetrator of violence and the instrument inflicting the pain, i.e. the androcentric symbolic order, which takes up all the space so that there is no room for Gerti to feel, let alone, express her pain. Unlike McWeeny's conceptualization of the flesh, the portrayal of Gerti's body in pain is limited to it being touched, being hurt, being opened up, but the reader does not get the concomitant perspective of how the painful body as excessive flesh feels. The following passage is just one among a plethora of scenes of abuse that Gerti suffers at the hands of her husband (or lover or son):

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[254] Culturally speaking, there is 'supposed' to be a connection between women and pain with the dictate of Genesis 3:16: "'To the woman he said,' I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children," a precept that is deeply engrained in Christian cultures.

> [Der Direktor] nimmt sich Freiheiten heraus, gern z.B. uriniert er, wie es Hunde tun, gegen seine Frau, [...]. Der Mann benutzt und beschmiert die Frau wie das Papier, das er herstellt. Er sorgt für das Wohl und das Wehe in seinem Haus, reißt seinen Schwanz gierig aus der Tüte [...]. Stopft ihn der Frau noch warm vom Fleischer in den Mund, daß ihr Gebiß knirscht. [...] Grob legt er unter dem Tischtuch Hand an sie, bebaut ihre Furche [...]. Sie soll nicht umhin können, immer daran zu denken, wie er es ihr mit seiner streng riechenden Losung eintränken könnte.[255] (*Lust* 68)

As reader, one feels queasy and uneasy when reconstructing these kinds of scenes, but one does not get to know how Gerti feels. One can only guess how the abuse must taste (his warm penis sausage in her mouth), smell (his urine or his 'pungent solution'), look (seeing her abuser treat her like a thing that he marks and besmears), sound (the grinding and cracking of her teeth), and how it must feel (his hands tearing apart her vagina, his penis forcing itself into her mouth). One gets a hint that she must feel something, but one never gets any actual insights: "Wie ein Fisch zuckt die Frau, weil sie die Hände aneinandergebunden hat, während der Mann sie kitzelt und ein wenig mit Nadeln sticht"[256] (*Lust* 56). The text's belittling of the abuse she is suffering, by phrasing the husband's act as tickling and adding 'a little' to the act of injuring her with needles, as well as the comparison to the flapping fish negate her pain instead of acknowledging it.

However, the fact that the reader never explicitly learns about how the pain is experienced does not mean that Gerti's carnal pain is symbolic. While Gerti's body certainly also acts as a bearer of cultural inscriptions – as "the feminine being produced through its effacement within the masculine discursive order" (Fournier 56) – it has the

[255] "[The Direktor] takes liberties himself, e.g. he pees on his wife as dogs do. [...] The Man uses and dirties the woman as if she were the paper he manufactures. He is responsible for the well-being or otherwise of this household, greedily he yanks his tail out of the bag [...] and stuffs it, still warm from the butcher's, into the woman's mouth, setting her teeth on edge. [...] Uncouthly his mitt gropes her under the table, burrowing into her furrow [...] She has to be ever mindful of the pungent solution he could steep her in" (*Lust* 57-58).

[256] "The woman twitches like a fish. Her hands being bound. While the Man tickles and prickles her a little with pins" (Lust 47).

additional dimension of being wounded, of being a feeling body. The absence of descriptions of what Gerti is feeling can be understood alongside Elaine Scarry's reflections on pain that it is unshareable. As Fournier explains, pain "not only destroys the world and the self, but also the word; pain is unshareable, inexpressible" (67). What's more, due to the incommunicable nature of pain, every attempt to represent it deters the focus from the experience of pain to the agent of pain. Taking up Scarry's seminal work *The Body in Pain*, Fournier explains that the "experience of pain becomes translated into the action of the weapon. […] this language of agency is a double-edged sword for, on the one hand, it serves to bring forth the pain, to make it visible and hence (possibly) to elicit support and attention. However, it also serves to displace the pain and transfer its power, presence and immediacy to the weapon" (67). Gerti's body is capable of both hurting and feeling things, yet the text does not convey what is actually being 'felt' so that the body serves as an abstraction for broader workings of gender. Gerti's body demonstrates how "pain and violence are central to making 'real' or fleshing out gender" (70).

In *Lust*, the focus is not so much on a physical object that inflicts pain on Gerti but rather on the husband, who uses language as a weapon and who serves as both the agent and the weapon of pain. His words are hurtful and quite destructive: "Über die Lippen des Vaters kommen stechend riechende Worte [...]. Es geht doch nicht, daß man einen lebendigen Menschen derart zerfleddert [...]"[257] (Jelinek 71-72). The text illustrates that "[v]erbal representation serves to translate pain into the insignia of power, and to deny the suffering body a claim to pain" (Fournier 67). Hermann's words not only have the power to inflict pain, but the novel also makes it explicit that Gerti is completely ignored in her

[257] "The words that come from Father's lips have a pungent odor. [...] To leave a living human being dog-eared and tattered like that [...]" (*Lust* 60).

suffering. In the passage quoted above, the text goes on to inform the reader that the 'tattered human being,' i.e. Gerti, is not even considered worth being looked at, let alone acknowledged in her hurt. The text purposefully fails to make Gerti's experience of pain visible, or readable, and makes the focus on and power of the perpetrator strikingly obvious.

The ascription of power to Hermann and the obliteration of Gerti's sentience confront the reader with the mechanisms of gendering, which Fournier characterizes as a two-fold process of first taking apart, of using the disconnect resulting from pain, and then rebuilding, where the 'idea of gender' is ascribed to the body in pain (70). Hermann constantly disassembles Gerti and the text uses this dissemblage to pave the way to 'flesh out her gender.' Gerti's ordeal exemplifies the processes of "'gender mechanisms'" that "cannot exercise their power, cannot do their work of 'gendering' and inscription without some bodies going through the machinery and being shredded into pieces of abject flesh as they do so. […] bodies get enrolled in the production of gender not simply as materials to be written upon but also as mass of hurting flesh" (70). With his words and his sexual abuse, Hermann is clearly the perpetrator of the gruesome workings of gendering:

> Wenn sie sich bückt, muß sie die Beine spreizen. Er kann jetzt ihren ganzen Feigenbaum mit einer Hand umfassen und die Finger zornig Wanderer spielen lassen. […] Stoßen wir ihr die Knie nach oben und treffen klatschend (Applaus, Applaus!) ihre weichen Futlappen, die sich gleich leise schmatzend öffnen werden und wir Männer müssen sofort mit dem Maßkrug auf den Tisch hauen. […] zerren wir ihr ganzes weibl. Geschlecht an den Schamhaaren nach unten, bis sie in den Kniegelenken einknickt, und, aufs äußerste gespreizt, auf den Brustkorb des Herrn Direktor hinuntersinkt. Wie ein geöffnetes Handtascherl hält er ihre Fut an den Haaren auseinander und schleift sie sich übers Gesicht, um sie grob auslecken zu können […]."[258] (*Lust* 41)

[258] "When she bends down she has to spread her legs. Now he can cop hold of her whole fig tree with one hand and set his fingers angrily a-roving. […] Up with her knee. There we are (applause, applause!) – the tender lips of her cunt, we'll part them with a soft smacking

While Hermann is the agent of power in this passage, the use of the pronoun 'we' reinforces the degrading, objectifying male gaze,[259] implicating the reader in the voyeuristic and humiliating gaze. Both men and women are included in this gaze as contributors to a perpetuation and sedimentation of the process of gendering and Gerti's installment in the male order. Passages like this one demonstrate that "die Installation der Ordnung und die Eingliederung in diese [ist] immer ein gewaltsamer Akt […]. Diese Gewaltsamkeit zeigt sich anhand der körperlichen Zurichtung der Figuren"[260] (Ronge 321). The disintegration and carving-up of female bodies uncovers the violence that comes with the status quo of the patriarchal order: "[es] rückt hier der Körper in seiner Materialität ins Blickfeld, der sich nicht widerstandslos in die symbolische Ordnung integrieren lässt, sondern wie das signifikante Material zergliedert, eingeschnitten und zerstört wird."[261] (321). Jelinek opens up both language and female bodies. The two are defiled with the goal of showing the violence inherent in maintaining the symbolic order. According to both literary critic Verena Ronge and Germanist Detlef Kremer, the female body turns into an opening, a hollow body, ready to be penetrated and worked on by a man, and through which things are turned inside out (Ronge 321): "Wenn man bedenkt, wie viele Hohlräume ein gesunder Körper besitzt und ein kranker erst! Die Frau reißt sich die Brust mit dem Messer ihrer

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sound and we men'll be banging our tankards down on the table with a thump. […] we'll drag her privates down by the short and curlies till she bends the knee and splays across the Herr Direktor's chest. By the hairs he holds the lips of her cunt parted like a handbag and slushes it across his face so he can drive his tongue inside […]" (*Lust* 35-36).

[259] See Laura Mulvey's ground-breaking essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" for more details on the 'male gaze.'

[260] "the installation of and integration into the predominant order is always a violent act. This violence appears via the figures being physically mauled."

[261] "the focus here is on the body in its materiality, which lets itself not easily be integrated into the symbolic order, but which is being dissected, cut into, and destroyed like signifiers."

Worte auf, und der Student kann gleich die Sägespäne seiner Meinung und andre Liebesgaben hineinstopfen"[262] (*Lust* 101). Gerti's body is opened and infused, or rather stuffed, with the male order.

The processes of cultural assimilation do not happen in a hidden and imperceptible manner, but with lots of brutality, noise, and corporeal traces:

> In die Höhlungen der Frau verkrallen sich noch mehr Leute, schaut nur hin, zwei Männer heben sie jetzt auf. […] Unter Vorwänden, unter denen sie ihre groben Geschlechtsteile nicht verbergen können, tasten sie die Gerti überall ab. Ein Schwall Gelächter von ihren Frauen, die ebenfalls rasch, bevor das Licht wechselt, ihre behaarten Spalten aufbauen und in Stellung gehen. Sie triefen alle noch von der Natur, so vollgesaugt haben sie sich mit Leben. Es hat ja auch genug gekostet, wie Inseln in diesem Wirtshaus zu hocken und zu kotzen. Einer nimmt zum Spaß eine Frau huckepack, es wird größer und röter zwischen ihren Schenkeln, die sie links und rechts an die Wangen des Mannes preßt.[263] (*Lust* 211)

Jelinek's anti-aesthetic move to turn the inside out can also be seen in the narrator's 'penetration' of the characters. The narrator directly addresses the reader to be complicit in the penetrating gaze,[264] to look at the defilement of Gerti's body, and, via the narrator, to penetrate Gerti's innermost body.[265] The otherwise upheld bodily borders are broken down and the reader is forced to stare into Gerti's cavities. Female bodies are depicted as battle zones, clearly illustrating that any form of cultural work demands a taming and

[262] "To think how many cavities there are in a healthy body! And, heavens, in an unhealthy one! The woman bares her soul and her bosom with words. And the student will get his chance to pinion her with opinions and shove his love into her" (*Lust* 85).
[263] "Even more people claw hold of the woman's hollows, look, now two men are lifting her to her feet, […] They find pretexts, unable to conceal their coarse sexual parts, to feel Gerti up all over. A flood of laughter from their wives, who are also readying their hairy crevices, quickly, before the light changes, and taking up their positions. They are still dripping with Nature, that is how much life they have soaked up. And it has cost quite enough, too, sitting like islands in this bar and vomiting. One man gives a woman a piggy-back for a bit of fun, she reddens between her thighs, which she squeezes left and right against the man's cheeks" (*Lust* 171).
[264] See also the use of the pronoun 'we' in the above passage and the reader's implication in the voyeuristic, male gaze.
[265] I will examine the "narratorial penetration" in more depth in section 5.4 of this chapter.

domestication of the body (Ronge 322). And it is not only men doing this to female bodies; women are also collaborators in the normatization processes. Both of Jelinek's novels uncover the implications of the sentient body in the gendering process and in this way are involved in making these processes visible. As such, they unsettle assumptions about a fixed gender identity and lay bare the constructedness of these categories. They illustrate that pain and the material body are not simply something given, unchangeable, and 'natural' but that they are "political effects open to destabilization" (Fournier 73).

4.2 (Paradoxical) Corporeal Excess and Identity

In Erlenberger's report, the embodied experience of pain takes on a different form and involves a different set of social constructions. The notion of excessive pain is transformed into what may at first seem like a contradictory form of surplus, that of stripping the body of weight, i.e. anorexia. As Fournier explains, "pain reduces one to the sentience of the flesh and unmakes the self. Making something of oneself involves extending into materials that lift us from the sentience (pain) of the body; or, […] to get an identity means to strip the flesh" (65-66). In Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*, the reader is made aware of the protagonist's project of searching for an identity by way of anorexic embodiment on the very first page:

> Ich hatte gehungert bis zum Zusammenbruch meines Körpers und bis zur Entleerung meines Gehirns. [...] Das Fasten war zu Beginn mühevoll und zermürbend. Es war für mich eine Aufgabe. Ich wollte sie lösen. Ich wollte vieles lösen, ich wollte mein Leben auflösen. Ich wußte, daß jede Mühe recht war, um wieder einmal vor mir zu stehen! [...] Ich sehe meinen Körper meinen Körper aufheben, liebevoll aufrichten, ich blicke mir selbst ins Auge. Nur sein ...[266] (7)

[266] "I had starved until my body collapsed and until my brain was drained. […] Fasting was laborious and exhausting in the beginning. It was a task for me. I wanted to solve it. I wanted to solve a lot, I wanted to dissolve my life. I knew that any effort was suitable for

Erlenberger's protagonist symbolizes the project of trying to find a sense of self by ridding herself of the flesh, of the body that is "loathsome weight," "repulsive mass," and "a mass of flesh that has to be stripped away" (Fournier 66). By rejecting and stripping herself of, in her view, unnecessary carnality, she opens up her being for new meanings.

Drawing on Scarry's work, Fournier explains how "gender is inscribed on women's bodies but it can only be crafted onto women's bodies through injuring, through pain, through emptying these bodies of meanings" (69). But what about a person who is actively trying to empty the body of societally inscribed and crafted meanings in order to open up a space for subversion and the creation of subjectivity by not only rejecting normative expectations and subject positions but also by undoing her gendered flesh? According to Fournier's reading of Scarry, "it is empty bodies that act as containers of ideas, bodies that have been eviscerated, or severed from connections or attachments to materials that give meaning to the self" (65). Fournier emphasizes how this process leads to the production of gender on women's bodies, but I argue that since gender inscription functions successfully in this way, it can also be overthrown so that the opening up of the body entails the possibility of establishing a different subjectivity. Quoting Scarry, Fournier herself suggests a subversive opening: "Pain and injured bodies are fluid in terms of their referentiality and have no inherent connection to the ideas they serve to substantiate (Scarry, 1985). Women's hurting flesh does not in itself mark 'womanhood'; but precisely because of its referential instability, it can be drafted into the substantiation of the idea of gender"

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standing in front of myself once again! […] I see my body cancelling/lifting my body, raising it lovingly, I look myself in the eye. Just being …" (there is an ambiguity in the German original with respect to the verb "aufheben," which can be translated as both "cancelling" and "lifting").

(Fournier 70). But just like hurtful speech can constitute a subject as inferior while also having the potential for re-appropriation, the same resignificatory process can be applied to the constitution of the anorexic body.

Erlenberger's text confronts the reader with a protagonist who sets out to free herself from the confinement she lives via her gendered corporeality: "Ich wußte, ich begann mit meinem Leben zu spielen. Ich bot alles, was ich hatte, mich selbst zum Einsatz. Ich hatte nichts zu verlieren außer mein Leben. Ich hatte nichts zu gewinnen außer mich selbst. Ich war es, aber ich wollte mich wieder. Wieder neu. Ich wollte mich wiedergewinnen. Mein Einsatz war mein Leben"[267] (Erlenberger 49-50). She repeatedly emphasizes how essential it was for her to find herself anew. And it becomes clear that the only way she saw as possible to achieve this was by stripping herself of her flesh. She constructs fasting as her path towards subjectivity and eating as the relapse into confining corporeality:

> Ich war ausgedörrt und so leer. Die Angst, doch zu essen, war groß. Ich durfte es auf keinen Fall, denn sonst bräche mein System zusammen und mein Leben geriete in heillose Unordnung. […] Manchmal begann ich, von einer maßlosen Gier getrieben, doch wild in mich hineinzufressen, […] Ich stand dann jedesmal vor einem erschöpften vollgefressenen Haufen Körper.[268] (56-57)

[267] "I knew that I began to gamble with my life. I offered everything I had, I gave myself up for a bid. I had nothing to lose except for my life. I had nothing to win except myself. It was me, but I wanted to have myself again. New again. I wanted to win myself back. My bid was my life."

[268] "I was dried up and so empty. The fear of nevertheless eating was big. I was not allowed to do so, under no circumstance whatsoever. Otherwise, my system would break down and my life would end up becoming a complete mess. […] Sometimes, driven by an excessive greed, I would after all begin to bottle up like crazy. […] Afterwards, I always stood in front of an exhausted, stuffed heap of a body."

Her lapses confront her with the 'mass of her body,' an experience from which she is working hard to distance herself. Two pages later, she describes the corpulence of another patient:

> Seit gestern wälzt sich […] ein mächtiges 120 Kilogramm schweres Walroß im Bett. Man findet es häßlich, wenn man herkömmliche Schönheitsideale heranzieht. Angenehm scheint so viel Gewicht nicht zu sein, denn sie kommt in kein Nachthemd hinein, sie wälzt sich träge in einer offenen Kleiderschürze im Bett herum. Das Bett faßt es kaum, an den Seiten hängt sie herunter. In einen Sessel mit Lehnen paßt sie nicht, weil sie zwischen den Hölzern steckenbleibt.[269] (58)

The detailed description of the overflowing and uncontained mass of flesh serves as a means to distance oneself from the experience of excessive carnality. But it also shows the interiorized regulatory norms of the female body that needs to be contained and disciplined. In conclusion, it is important to note that the "pain of womanhood" (Fournier 71) is not the only option for female subjectivity and identity. Fournier's argument "that the pain of women's bodies serves to substantiate the idea of gender" does not reduce femininity to being in pain; nor does it mean that pain is the only possibility for how gender can manifest itself.

5. The Performative Writing Subject

5.1 Writing Subjectivity in *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*

Erlenberger's autobiographical account, or rather feminist confession, of her protagonist's anorexia exemplifies how the sentient body is involved in the material and

[269] "Since yesterday, an enormous 120-kilo heavy walrus is rolling around […] in the bed. Consulting normative beauty ideals, one finds it ugly. This much weight does not seem to be pleasant because she does not fit into nightgowns, she wallows lethargically in her bed, wearing an open hospital gown. The bed can barely contain it, she hangs down on the sides. She does not fit into an armchair with armrests because she keeps on getting stuck between them."

figurative performativity of gender. By attempting to strip herself of her gendered flesh, she hopes to find herself. It is however not the discovery of an underlying, hidden, essential identity that she finds, but an identity that is performatively produced by writing itself. It is not a coincidence that she takes up writing right after her admission into the mental institution because of her near-fatal bout of anorexia. What sounds like a rather random decision – "Ich entscheide mich für das Schreiben. […] Niemand wird mich kontrollieren, niemand wird mich einteilen"[270] (Erlenberger 8) – can also be understood as resistance to a Foucaultian conceptualization of the bourgeois subject.[271] Like she did with fasting, she is now constituting her subjectivity in the act of writing: "Ich gebar mich jeden Tag, heute sowie damals. […] Ich sehe nichts, außer viele Wogen, die mich alle tragen können, es sind die Wogen meines Blutes, und ich schreibe mit meinem Blut Buchstaben Worte Sätze"[272] (66). She is however not transforming a supposed interior essence into words; her subjectivity can only come into being via writing. The pen and paper serve as an extension of her body: "Mein Kugelschreiber wird schwächer und schwächer. Er hat kaum mehr Saft in sich. Meine Glieder sind schwer, ich habe heute nicht so viel Kraft zum Spazierengehen. Aber ich weiß, ich werde es tun, sowie ich jetzt auch schreibe"[273] (91). The parallels between her act of writing and her experience of embodiment are striking. The fading

[270] "I decide to take up writing. […] No one will control me, no one will assign me."
[271] Foucault's theory of discipline contains the essential feature of "[n]ormalizing judgment [, which] is a peculiarly pervasive means of control" since "[i]ndividuals are judged not by the intrinsic rightness or wrongness of their acts but by where their actions place them on a ranked scale that compares them to everybody else" (Gutting 84), i.e. where they are assigned, as Erlenberger puts it.
[272] "Every day, I gave birth to myself, now and then. […] I see nothing except for many waves, which can all carry me, these are the waves of my blood, and I write letters words sentences with my blood."
[273] "My pen is becoming more and more weak. It's almost out of juice. My limbs are heavy, I don't have a lot of strength for taking a walk today. But I know that I will go for a walk, just like I am writing right now."

strength of the pen is mirrored in the decreasing stamina of her body; but simultaneously, she gains strength by putting words on paper. The ink is used, in a way, like the reserves of her flesh were used: to transform, to become words, to find a path towards her own sense of subjecthood. In a way, there is a sort of renewal happening, which comes with the cost of using things up, i.e. the ink or carnality, but it metamorphoses into a new mode of being.

The pervasive theme of effacement and loss of oneself in order to find oneself aligns with Sidonie Smith's notion that the "very sense of self as identity derives paradoxically from the loss to consciousness of fragments of experiential history. Political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson suggests that this 'estrangement' from our experiential history necessitates 'a conception of personhood, *identity* … which, because it cannot be 'remembered,' must be narrated'" ("Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" 108). Erlenberger's autobiographical subject verbalizes the process of establishing her sense of self through narration: "Ich muß Geduld haben, bis sich meine Erinnerung langsam auffaltet. In diesen Seiten ---"[274] (Erlenberger 15). Her statement very strongly evokes the notion that subjectivity is not some sort of core that can be brought to the surface but is instead something that unfolds with writing since "[a]utobiographical narration begins with amnesia, and once begun, the fragmentary nature of subjectivity intrudes" (Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" 109). Erlenberger's narrator starts her confessional account stating that she not only starved herself physically but also "bis zur Entleerung meines Gehirns,"[275] which connotes a sort of amnesia, a kind of forgetting, an emptying out to make space for setting in motion the process of having her new subjectivity unfold.

[274] "I have to be patient for my memory to slowly unfold. On these pages ---."
[275] "up until the emptying of my brain."

5.2 Death and Subjectivity in *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*

According to literary and cultural critic Elisabeth Bronfen, the experience of death is intricately connected with formulating one's subjectivity as a writing woman. Erlenberger's confessional report can be read as an example of "the notion that the poetic representation of the art of dying may serve to preserve, indeed to constitute, a woman's subjectivity" (Bronfen 401). Just as the act of writing allows the protagonist to constantly undo and create herself, her embrace of death and her penned report of confronting death as part of life constitute her both as a female subject and as a female writer. Erlenberger's literary work tackles the following questions Bronfen poses in her 1992 study *Over Her Dead Body* with regard to the role of women as authors:

> How do women constitute and establish themselves as authors within a culture which has not drafted this role, except as a blank, an aporia, a presence under erasure? How can they substantiate their authorship as women […]? Because the historically real woman writer cannot articulate herself entirely devoid of cultural fictions of femininity, writing as a woman transpires into an act of reading cultural texts (in this case the conjunction between femininity, death, and textuality) critically, so as to enact the implied contradiction. (404)

To answer these questions, Bronfen points out several factors constituting the dilemma female authors face. First of all, "the performance women's writing enacts […] involves the fact that the position of the real historical woman writer is one of non-existence, in the sense that it has not been established as a fixed occurrence in western culture's definition of authorship" (404). The particular genre of Erlenberger's work constitutes in itself a negotiation with the absence of the female writer. Erlenberger is not trying to situate herself in the position of a male author; rather, she positions herself by appropriating the genre of autobiography and writing her subject from that place. Furthermore, Erlenberger's text illustrates that "the form of speech conceded to women is in some sense

always connected with death, in that either woman speaks in silence, absence, anonymity, behind a pseudonym, […] or, in that it is precisely her death which for the first time endows her with a publicly acknowledged voice" (404). Writing behind a pseudonym and writing because of her near-death from anorexia, Erlenberger's text engages doubly with erasure.

Outlining further the symbolic deaths which the female writer must experience to become a subject, Bronfen explains that "authorship, as the production of symbolic textuality, requires the death of the feminine, and all the values belonging to this cultural paradigm" (404). Throughout the report, Erlenberger deconstructs gender norms, looking for a space in which both feminine and masculine roles can be undone:

> Hinter der dicken Mauer, hinter Gittern, hinter verschlossenen Türen, da gibt es die Freiheit vom anderen Geschlecht, hier gibt es die freiwillige Einsamkeit, ohne Alternative. Im normalen Leben wird man, weil soviel auf Vorbilder gehalten wird, gezwungen, ein Ich zu seinem Ich dazunehmen (*sic*). Man darf eigentlich nicht allein bleiben. Jeder zwingt sich dazu, weil er sonst nicht normal ist. Hier muß man diese Erwartungen nicht erfüllen. Hier muß man die weibliche oder männliche Rolle nicht spielen."[276] (104)

At the same time, the report very specifically grapples with the symbolic death of the feminine, which, according to Bronfen, is a prerequisite for the female author position. Erlenberger's narrator comes to grips with this form of death and goes back and forth with regard to the 'death of the feminine.' She is aware of the dynamic of erasure that comes with being Woman, a dynamic that is also present in the mental institution: "Die Ärzte stehen hier für die starke Welt des Mannes, und die Frauen sind klein und bittend. Die Frau

[276] "Behind the thick wall, behind boards, behind closed doors, there is freedom from the other gender, here you can find voluntary solitude, without alternative. Because so much importance is ascribed to idols, normal life forces one to take on an I to one's I. One is not really allowed to stay alone. Everybody forces himself to do that because otherwise one is not considered normal. Here, one does not have to fulfill these expectations. Here, one does not have to perform the masculine or feminine role."

ist der Patient des Mannes. Immer und überall"[277] (131). Even though she shortly before claimed that patients are freed of their gender constraints in the institution, she now clarifies that it is rather a transference instead of an undoing. However, her act of taking up writing, of creating, of not begging for something but of constituting exemplifies her writing from the impossible position of authorship for women.

The symbolic death, the act of killing the feminine, is also a form of social death, which comes along with one's admission to the mental institution. Referring to another female patient, Erlenberger's narrator reflects on gendered norms by arguing that

> [e]s ist die Norm, daß eine Frau über fünfzig zu Hause sitzt, in Tränen aufgelöst, mit Angst besetzt um die verlorenen Kinder und um den fleißigen Ehemann weint und schwer leidet unter den so gering gewordenen Pflichten im Haushalt. Das ist üblich, das ist erlaubt. Aber im Irrenhaus? Das ist nicht üblich, [...] da gehört man doch nicht hin! Empörend ist es, einfach bodenlos.[278] (201-2)

Becoming a patient in the mental institution thus entails a social death, a figurative death. It is from this position that Erlenberger's narrator appropriates authorship.

But there is not only symbolic death of the feminine in Erlenberger's report, there is also the notion of physical death, which is typically conceptualized as a finality. However, in Erlenberger's text, the narrator accepts and embraces physical death as an integral part of life: "Ich – das Gefühl meines Todes – zum Körper, zum Leben. Ich bin mein Tod und mein Leben. Als ich das erfuhr, wußte ich, das will ich nicht vergessen, das hatte ich gesucht. Ich brauchte keine Angst vor dem Tod zu haben. Er ist still, er ist ich. […] Bis heute lebe ich mit

[277] "The doctors here represent the strong world of the Man, and women are small and pleading. The woman is the man's patient. Anytime, anywhere."
[278] "it is normal that a woman over fifty sits at home, in tears, crying for her lost children and her hard-working husband and suffers horribly under her household duties, which have become so scarce. This is normal, it's allowed. But to be in the loonybin? That is unusual, [...] one does not belong there. It's outrageous, it's abysmal."

meinem Tod"[279] (45). In addition to rewriting the normative notion of death's finality, she also enacts death as a daily refusal of life through her process of starvation. Just as her anorexia and her consequential acceptance of death oscillate between a resistance against gendered expectations and an embrace of them, "the gesture of her writing repeats *and* resists the discursive formation from which it emerges and against which it performs" (Bronfen 404). In her confessional report, she re-signifies the position of Woman's non-existence in the phallocentric order by re-appropriating various forms of death. Unlike Jelinek, who is rather destroying or killing the feminine entirely, Erlenberger writes the feminine by creating a new subjectivity, one that demands a destruction of 'cultural fictions of femininity' to act as a catalyst for women to re-write their own oblivion in the male order.

It is crucial to note that despite her experience of a daily physical death (through fasting) and of a symbolic death of the gendered body, Erlenberger's protagonist does not create a new identity *ex nihilo*. Nor does she suddenly form a coherent and fixed identity through the act of writing. The autobiographical text deconstructs the expectation "to be a deep, unified, coherent, autonomous 'self,'" since that requirement "produces necessary failure, for the autobiographical subject is amnesiac, incoherent, heterogeneous, interactive.[280] In that very failure lies the fascination of autobiographical storytelling as

[279] "I – the feeling of my death – to body, to life. I am my death and my life. When I learned that, I knew that I did not want to forget that, this is what I was looking for. I did not need to be afraid of death. It is quiet, it is me. […] Up to today I live with my death."

[280] The fact that Erlenberger's narrator oscillates between deconstructing the expectation of a 'coherent, autonomous self' and a valorization of a more individualistic construction of selfhood does not negate the potential inherent in her autobiographical confession. It rather emphasizes the fact that her path towards subjectivity is an ongoing process, which is also marked by falling back on more normative constructs. However, the negotiation between multiple versions of selfhood illustrates the potential of her undertaking.

performativity" (Smith, "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" 110). It is this exact failure that constitutes the possibility for re-appropriation.[281] Both the protagonist's re-appropriation of the body in pain and the writing of her self enable her to negotiate her subjectivity. Or, to use Mary Russo's words: "To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off" ("Female Grotesques" 224).

5.3 Death and Subjectivity in *Depressionen*

In Muhr's *Depressionen*, the diary form embodies both a complicity in predominant cultural norms and a subversion of them. I argue that Muhr's text falls under the category of what Bronfen denotes "hysterical writing," which she outlines as "install[ing] conventions such as the masculinity of the gaze, the deadness of the feminine body, only to subvert and disturb the security of these stakes in cultural self-representation" (406). Bronfen is well aware of the fact that this kind of writing does not overthrow oppressive structures from an outside perspective but works from within these structures. It is in this sense "inscribed by complicity" but, according to Bronfen, "such complicity may also be the most effective critique" (406).

The following scene from the diary illustrates the tension between complicity with the male gaze and resistance against it with respect to the narrator's lived, embodied experience of subjectivity:

> Ich wachte langsam auf und bemerkte, daß ich nur noch durch die Nase atmen konnte. Mein Mund war durch einen anderen Mund verschlossen, einen angenehmen, warmen, nicht zu feuchten Mund. Ich weiß nicht, wie lange ich in meiner Benommenheit brauchte, um das Ungewöhnliche dieser Lage ganz zu erfassen. Die fremden Lippen lösten sich langsam ab und flüsterten: „Dornröschen,

[281] The notion of re-approporation and the potential and risk involved in its processes are discussed in depth in chapter 1.

> aus dem Schlaf erwachend. Weißt du, wie schön du bist?“ Und ähnliches mehr. Dr. Svenns sympathisches Gesicht lächelte über mir. [...]
> Es hat sich wiederholt. Es war keine Halluzination. Wieder flüsterte Dr. Svenn etwas vom erwachenden Dornröschen, nachdem er seinen Mund von meinem gelöst hatte. Ein 39jähriges Dornröschen. Ein alternder Prinz mit überfülltem Wartezimmer und schütterem Haar. Bin ich nun ein einziges Dornröschen oder handelt es sich um eine Dornröschenorgie größeren Stils? [...]
> Vielleicht gehört das mit zur Therapie? Ich bin sehr geneigt, diese Erklärung anzunehmen, weil ich ihm so dankbar bin und weil er immer so angestrengt aussieht. Vielleicht sieht er deshalb so angestrengt aus. Ein desolates, heruntergekommenes Dornröschen, das nicht so einfach zu küssen ist. [...]
> Gestern waren Dr. Svenns Küsse nicht mehr wie Seifenblasen. Eine Spur von Aggressivität störte meinen Schwebezustand und ließ mich endlich unwillig fragen: „Machen Sie das mit allen Ihren Patientinnen so?“ Er richtete sich abrupt auf und sah mich an: „Wie können Sie so etwas glauben?“ [...] Es war nicht der Blick eines alle therapeutischen Mittel ausschöpfenden Arztes oder eines unsanft aufgeweckten Märchenprinzen, sondern der Blick eines beleidigten, getroffenen Mannes.[282] (Muhr 80-82)

The passage starts off by describing the male gaze and the subjugation of Woman to the beauty ideal that is a product of this gaze. Not only is the woman exposed to the gaze of her doctor, but she is on display in a state of inertia since she has been medicated. The multiple references to the fairy tale of Sleeping Beauty evoke rape and the abused power dynamic that has resulted from the constructedness of femininity as passivity, silence, and frailty. At

[282] “Slowly I awoke and realized that I was only able to breathe through my nose. My mouth was sealed by another mouth, a pleasant, warm, not too moist mouth. I don’t know how long it took me in my drowsy state to capture the unusual aspect of this whole situation. The strange lips slowly detached themselves from mine and whispered: ‘Sleeping beauty, waking from her sleep. Do you know how beautiful you are?’ And more like that. Dr. Svenn’s likeable face smiled above me. […] It happened again. It was no hallucination. Once more, Dr. Svenn whispered something about a waking sleeping beauty after having detached his mouth from mine. An ageing prince with an overcrowded waiting room and sparse hair. Am I his only sleeping beauty or is this all part of a bigger sleeping beauty orgy? […] Maybe this is part of therapy? I am very inclined to accept this explanation since I am so grateful and because he always looks so strained. Maybe that is why he looks so strained. A desolate, shabby sleeping beauty that’s not so easy to kiss. […] Yesterday, Dr. Svenn’s kisses were no longer like soap bubbles. A hint of aggression disturbed my floating state and finally made me ask reluctantly: ‘Do you do that with all your patients?’ He straightened up and looked at me: ‘How can you think that?’ […] It was not the gaze of a doctor trying to exhaust all kinds of therapeutic means or of a harshly woken prince charming but the gaze of an offended, hurt man.”

the beginning, the protagonist is complicit in romanticizing the scene by describing the kiss as almost a lover's kiss between consensual parties and by focusing on the pleasant aspects of her doctor. In the next phase, however, there is already a shift towards feelings of obligation and gratefulness that are responsible for her wanting to excuse her doctor's behaviour, thus implying a knowledge of the abuse of his position and the harm that is being done to her sleeping, incapacitated body. The reference to him as an aging and balding man deconstructs the fairy tale's positively connoted cultural characteristics of Sleeping Beauty's Prince Charming. Finally, her breach of imposed silence breaks with the normative representation of Woman as Sleeping Beauty while the doctor's infantile and sulky reaction brings about a subversion of his previously powerful male gaze.

In Muhr's text, "the social construction of the feminine self, fixed by a masculine gaze, is both confirmed and ironised, because the body, as site for this social inscription, is self-consciously present. The woman writing shows herself as subject and object of her representation of woman as sign; of woman positioned by gender and by death" (Bronfen 407). Even if the narrator is in a state of half-sleep, half-wakefulness in the scene quoted above, she has the opportunity to experience her own body both "self-consciously" and objectively through the writing practice. Moreover, the repetition of this violating act means the narrator has multiple occasions to "see" what is done to her body from different angles. Interestingly, she does not condemn the doctor's actions; instead, she uses the fairy tale references as a way to invite the reader to re-interpret the kiss as one of violation rather than love and in doing so, to develop a more critical eye towards the construction of the female gender generally.

Bronfen's analysis of Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* works out many aspects that also apply to Muhr's *Depressionen*, which was published fifteen years later. Just like Esther Greenwood, Muhr's protagonist suffers from depression due to her seeing through the constructedness of societal expectations and her sense of isolation and detachment from the world around her:

> Dieser Zustand der seelischen Gesundheit erscheint mir zwar angenehmer, aber viel verrückter als mein eigener. Wenn man es nur einen einzigen Augenblick lang fertigbringt, die Verhältnisse dieser Welt einigermaßen klar und deutlich zu übersehen, dann muß man verrückt sein, um so zu leben wie die anderen: ohne Angst, mit Appetit, mit ungestörter Nachtruhe, mit dem Drang, sich fortzupflanzen, mit Aufgaben, die man für wichtig hält.[283] (11)

For the narrator, like for Esther, suicide seems to be the only solution. Albeit in a less comical way, the struggles of Muhr's protagonist about not being able to commit suicide can be understood alongside "a complicity with cultural images by presenting [the] protagonist's fantasies as clichés, yet turning these to excess so as to undermine them. The effect produced is that the impasse of her death plot catches [the protagonist] between clichés for death and a real desire for it" (Bronfen 409). Muhr's text is permeated with elaborations on death, including a failed suicide attempt, and musings on how one can be too lethargic for suicidal undertakings:

> Ich bin unfähig, einen Entschluß zu fassen, etwas zu unternehmen, Schlaftabletten zu sammeln und den Schlaf von zwanzig oder dreißig Nächten dafür zu opfern, mich in ein Hochhaus zu begeben, aus dem Fenster zu klettern, eine Eisenbahnstrecke zu suchen, die zugänglich ist und die niemand beobachtet. Man muß sich ja doch im

[283] "This condition of mental health seems more pleasant, albeit way more crazy than my own. If one manages to more or less rationally survey the affairs of this world for only a single moment, one has to be crazy if wanting to live like the others: without fear, with appetite, with undisturbed nighttime peace, with the urge to procreate, with tasks one considers important."

> wahrsten Sinne des Wortes aus dem Leben 'schaffen.' Dazu braucht man eine Aktivität der Verzweiflung, die ich nicht mehr habe.[284] (150)

Even if at the end, the narrator joins the side of the 'normal' people, the possibility of suicide remains in the back of her mind. Viewing herself from a standpoint of death, she works through the figure of the female author and questions of subjectivity by thematizing how one is constituted via the act of writing: "Deshalb habe ich in dieser Zeit nichts mehr aufgeschrieben. Weil ich Angst hatte, sobald ich es festhielte, überkämen mich die alten Zustände wieder"[285] (165). Muhr's text

> demonstrates the hysteric's voice, oscillating as [it] do[es] between complicity and resistance. [It] accept[s] the validity of masculine narrative formations and tropes only to show that these may be necessary but not the only truth there is. […] By using distance and comedy, [it] take[s] conventions to excess only to transform them into the macabre or the grotesque. […] The parody or excess of the hysteric voice makes the impasse women find themselves in unambivalently clear, on the thematic and rhetoric level of the text. In a sense [the] text […] compulsively repeat[s] so as to disclose the point of non-existence beyond which a woman writing as yet can't move.[286] (Bronfen 407)

5.4 (De)Constructing the Author as Creator in Elfriede Jelinek's *Lust*

Rather than actually trying to write female subjectivity, Jelinek undermines the discourse of man as creator.[287] According to Detlef Kremer, Jelinek "durchquert einen

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[284] "I am incapable of making a decision to do something, to collect sleeping pills and to sacrifice the sleep of twenty or thirty nights for it, to go into a highrise building, to climb out of the window, to look for a railway line, which is accessible and not observed by anyone. One has to literally 'do' oneself out of this life. For that, one needs an activity of desperation which I no longer have."

[285] "That's why I didn't write anything during this period. Because I was afraid of being overcome by the old conditions again if I had recorded it."

[286] Chapter 4 takes a closer look at the concept of the grotesque and subversion by way of excessive adherence to conventions.

[287] Jelinek's critique of man as creator is quite different from Erlenberger's project of rewriting the creation myth (see chapter 2, section 5.4) in the sense that Jelinek's focus is on the exposure and destruction of power structures, whereas Erlenberger looks to move towards a new understanding of creation.

Männerdiskurs, richtet ihn extrem zu und versucht, ihn durch stereotype Endlosschleifen und multiplizerende Litaneien von innen her auszuhöhlen und in seiner bornierten Gewalttätigkeit transparent zu machen"[288] (141). Ronge points out that Jelinek overthrows the myth of the male creator, revealing the brutality of the creation processes very clearly: "Der Körper der Frau wird zum weißen Blatt Papier, zur Leinwand, auf der sich der Mann gewaltsam einschreibt, sein Samen zur Tinte, mit der er sein "Werk" signiert"[289] (319). The director of the paper factory constantly verifies the traces of his marks on his wife's body: "Er zieht das Geschlecht seiner Frau auseinander, ob er sich auch leserlich dort eingeschrieben hat" [290] (*Lust* 32-33). However, there is nothing left of the typical representation of the female body as a compliant and docile creation of the man. On the contrary, the text uncovers the discursive brutality and the painful bodily experience women had to, and still, undergo in literary and cultural history:

> Sein Eigentum ist ihm das Liebste. Der Mann streichelt lächelnd die Frau, doch schon eine Sekunde später gräbt er, wie rasend, ein Terrier in einem fremden Bau, unter ihrem Mantel, scharrt an dem Revers ihres Kleides, das der ungezogenen Frau sofort ausgezogen werden soll. Liebevoll wird ihre Wange mit den Fingern gestrichelt, als hätte der Schöpfer den Bleistift vorzeitig abgebrochen, und jetzt muß das Leben selbst das Werk korrigieren.[291] (215)

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[288] "crosses a male discourse, extremely mangles it and tries to undermine it from the inside by means of stereotypical infinite loops and multiplying litanies and to render it transparent in its perverse violence."

[289] "The female body becomes a white piece of paper, a canvas, onto which the man forcefully inscribes himself, using his semen as ink, with which he signs his 'oeuvre.'"

[290] "He opens wide his wife's genitals to see if his signature there is legible" (*Lust* 28-29).

[291] "His property is what he loves dearest. Smiling, the Man strokes the woman, but a mere second later he is grubbing about like mad, like a terrier in a newly-discovered earth, under her coat, pawing at the cleavage of her dress, which he wants to have off his naughty woman right now, oh and talking of having it off, her cheek is lovingly stroked by his fingers, as if the creator had broken his pencil and now life itself had to correct the job he started" (*Lust* 175).

The passage undermines the omnipotence of the man as creator by implying the imperfection of his work and the need for a greater force, like that of life, to correct it accordingly. By undoing the illusion of unambiguous signifiers, the passage further breaks open language, and more specifically, phallocentric language. The omission of one letter suddenly transforms the gentle act of lovingly stroking a cheek into a scene of violent inscription, since the broken pencil leaves visible, assumably bloody, traces on Gerti's skin. There are many passages, which contain a similar deconstructive stance, and despite the absence of a productive counter-model to the violent inscriptive processes, Jelinek provides a chance for the reader to take a breath from the abuses raining down on Gerti by stating "Das Schöpferische erschöpft sich rasch"[292] (184).

By assigning the man the profession of paper factory director, i.e. the head of a mass-production machinery, Jelinek indicates that the act of creation is an act of inscription (Kremer 167): "Der Mann benutzt und beschmiert die Frau wie das Papier, das er herstellt"[293] (*Lust* 68). Kremer convincingly summarizes Jelinek's subversion of the male creator myth as follows:

> In blasphemischen Arrangements travestiert Jelinek die mythische und christliche Schöpfungsgewalt des Mannes, die sich nicht damit begnügt, sich selber hervorzubringen: seine grenzenlose poiesis, die Gott abgeschaut ist, definiert auch die Formulare weiblicher Standards. In göttlicher Gemeinschaftsarbeit sondert die männliche poiesis ihre Herrschaftssekrete ab: Samen als körperliche und Tinte als symbolische Bedeutung.[294] (166)

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[292] "Creative endeavour is ever at a rapid end" (*Lust* 151).
[293] "The Man uses and dirties the woman as if she were the paper he manufactures" (*Lust* 57).
[294] "Via blasphemous arrangements, Jelinek travesties the mythical and Christian creation force of the man, which does not content itself with bringing forth himself: his limitless poiesis, copied from God, defines the forms of female norms. In divine collaboration, the male poiesis discharges its secretions of domination. Semen as corporeal and ink as symbolic meaning."

He supports his argument with the subsequent textual example:

> Linkisch wird der Frau ins warme Ohrloch getröpfelt, was die Macht des Mannes alles kann, […] Sie muß nur das Tor aufmachen, denn hier wohnt er, und seinen Samen kann er nur unter Vorwänden und Vorhängen noch mühsam zurückhalten. Lächelnd treibt der Schöpfer aus den Männern ihr Produkt, damit es unter uns herumzurasen sich angewöhnen kann.[295] (Jelinek, *Lust* 26)

Not only is the act of creation thus rendered a travesty in Jelinek's novel (Ronge 319), it also illustrates the painful, and very much embodied, process of gendering. In addition, Jelinek includes a self-referential note commenting on the figure of the Creator who can be understood as God, but also as the female author, who stands behind her creation – that is, the novel – as the all-powerful being capable of both using and deconstructing phallogocentriscm: "Dem Mann ist sehr an seinem Werk gelegen, in dem Papier erzeugt wird, damit es uns gutgeht. Und damit wir wissen warum. Ich schreibe es jetzt deutlich auf. Ich bin wie Wachs in der Hand des Papiers. So einen Menschen möchte ich auch einmal kennenlernen, der die Macht hat, mich in dem, was ich sage, neu herzustellen"[296] (*Lust* 135). Despite parodying the Author-Creator position, Jelinek nevertheless also finds herself in a vulnerable position when using phallocentric language. Her narrator can be 'cut' by the paper that is vital to Man's discursive construction of power in a world governed by phallogocentrism. Jelinek, too, finds herself in the double bind of the female author; becoming part of the literary canon means aspiring to and to some extent being destroyed by the power that emanates from the male order.

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[295] "Awkward nothings are slobbered into the woman's warm earhole. The power of the Man! […] She need only open the gate, for this is his dwelling place, and it's hard to keep back his seed. With a smile, the Creator brings forth out of men their product, so that it may grow accustomed to dashing about in our midst" (*Lust* 23).

[296] "The Man sets great store by good works, works where paper is made for the well-being of us all. Let me write it down, quite unambiguously: paper could cut me open as a paper knife slits paper. I'd like to meet the person who could make a new woman of me out of the things I say" (*Lust* 112).

6. Conclusion

This chapter seeks to address three overarching questions. The first aims to understand the process of how gender is inscribed on bodies, not just in the sense of how those bodies are societally constructed and understood but also how and to what extent gender marks itself on the material body. It sets out to examine the significance of representations of the male and female body with regard to gender performativity and illustrates the female writers' projects of being complicit with but also resisting normative somatic cultural representations. Jelinek's works, while on the surface appearing to work within rigid gender binaries, subvert expectations of ideal masculinity and open up a space for resistance to entrenched patriarchal norms. Just as she does with phallocentric language, Jelinek integrates bodily gender expectations to challenge them by breaking taboos such as the upholding of physical boundaries. Erlenberger not only transgresses narrative limits, she introduces a protagonist oscillating between and reconciling contradictory experiences of embodiment. Focusing on the function of skin for both male and female bodies, my analysis explains what it means when women's bodies are portrayed or conceptualized as empty, hollow spaces and how this portrayal plays into the mechanisms of gender inscription. I then shift my attention to the experience of pain, which is one aspect of embodiment and the sentient body. The female body in pain allows for a deconstruction of psychological and physical differences, as experienced from within and as portrayed from without. In this way, I am able to reveal a key connection between hollow bodies, corporeal sentience, and inscriptions of gender and power mechanisms on the body.

The second concern of this chapter, namely the concept of the 'lived body,' requires looking more closely at the interrelatedness of emptying and reassembling, similar to Valérie Fournier's quote of this chapter's epigraph. My analysis of intercorporeal relations reveals the complexity of social experiences and the absence of strictly delineated and static bodies. In Muhr's *Depressionen* and Jelinek's *women as lovers*, I examine multiple forms of female oppression, emphasizing the necessity to take diverse experiences of embodiment into account. This part of the analysis sheds light on the double status of womanhood as both subject and object: subjectivity can only be attained once a woman gains an understanding of the role her body plays both as an object, a sort of commodity for others, as well as for herself. Drawing on the concept of intercorporeality, I investigate the paradoxical and simultaneous experience of embodiment, in the sense of a woman's body being her own and not her own at the same time. This leads to deeper insights into what happens when the borders between subject and object status are dissolved and taken into account simulteously.

This chapter's third main question deals with the potential and productivity of writing from the standpoint of death, i.e. subverting the normative understanding of death as finality, as end to something, and rather recognizing it as a productive point of departure for Woman to take up the position of the author, not in the sense of trying to imitate the male authorial position but in the sense of creating a space for herself. Erlenberger's report demonstrates the act of writing as enabling oneself by embracing symbolic and physical death as a means out of the female position of nonexistence in the male order, using this position as an empowering site rather than a final subjugation. While Erlenberger's and Muhr's texts' proximity to death open up a way for women to write themselves, Jelinek's

narrators uncover the traces of power structures on the gendered body. In the next chapter, I will examine more closely the inscriptions of gender on female bodies in the form of illness, the grotesque, the abject, and the monstrous.

Chapter 4
The Monstrous Body:
The Grotesque, The Abject, and Illness

> "Why should [the subject] be a whole? We haven't the faintest idea. Have you ever encountered whole beings? Perhaps it's an ideal. I've never seen any. I'm not whole. Neither are you. If we were whole, we would each be in our corners, whole, we wouldn't be here, together, trying to get ourselves into shape, as they say. It is the subject, not in its totality, but in its opening up."
> –Jacques Lacan, *Seminar II*

1. Introduction

The ongoing negotiation, reopening and rebuilding of borders is essential to the process of subject formation. The question that then arises is what happens when these borders are undone, when one is confronted with bodies whose boundaries are not clearly delineated or when one lives in such a body. Being confronted with the incompleteness and transformability of one's subjectivity commonly has a destabilizing and unnerving effect because of the importance of clear-cut identities and bodily boundaries. This chapter turns to a selection of specific cultural constructions of the female body in order to examine the possible paths towards liberation and resistance in an undoing, reversing, or over-doing of normative boundaries. Building on the previous analysis of the lived body and the mechanisms of gender inscriptions on the body, the focus of this chapter is on corporeal re-appropriation.

An analysis of grotesque bodies in Elfriede Jelinek's novels *Lust* and *women as lovers* uncovers the extent to which new meaning can be created in the symptomatic play with margins and boundaries. It also looks at if and how taking up otherwise oppressive uses of

the female body as leaking and monstrous can have an empowering effect and whether an excessive confrontation with the abject, that which threatens a subject's identity, can create new possibilities for becoming a subject in a patriarchal society. From Jelinek's monstrous bodies, the analysis turns to Maria Erlenberger's construction of the anorexic body. The focus lies on the question of subject-formation via an undoing of one's corporeality, an excessive compliance to gendered expectations, and thus a utilization of the body as a visualization of sickening cultural inscriptions. The notion of undoing will be key to a reading of the destabilizing and empowering unmaking and dissolution of the self through the ill and sentient body in pain in Caroline Muhr's illness diary. I will therefore come back to the previously discussed topic of the body in pain with the goal of further explicating the relationship between social constructions of gender and the physical materiality of female bodies.

2. The Grotesque Body

Readers of Elfriede Jelinek's writing find themselves experiencing a clash of emotions, which stems from Jelinek's harsh portrayal of the workings of society and her witty distortion of accepted structures. One route to better understanding Jelinek's writing and the mixed reactions it evokes is to look at the texts from the viewpoint of the grotesque. The most prominent figure in the field is the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and his study of the carnivalesque grotesque in François Rabelais' *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel*. Without diminishing the impact and importance of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*, this chapter will look at a more wide-ranging scope of the grotesque, of which the carnivalesque is but one manifestation. Some of the canonical

studies on the grotesque considered in this chapter are Bakhtin's seminal book, Philip Thomson's *The Grotesque,* Wolfgang Kayser's *Das Groteske. Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung*, and Geoffrey Harpham's *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, all of which were published between the 1950s and 1980s.

Based on these canonical analyses, art historian Frances S. Connelly recently published a comprehensive and insightful examination of various forms of the grotesque, while also tracing the history and development of the concept and providing a productive definition, which will shed light on the reading experience of the female body in Elfriede Jelinek's novels. Connelly's 2012 study presents the grotesque as a "boundary creature" (1), which is situated at the borders of that which is common and accepted, "pushing against boundaries" (ix), and in that act "raising questions" (ix). As a play with margins, the grotesque "pulls us beyond the boundaries of the world we know, [and] it also reminds us of our own limits and our own mortality" (1). This understanding of the grotesque as a boundary creature[297] is vital to my examination of Jelinek's writing. In Jelinek's fictional worlds, we as readers are fascinated by the texts because, by over-exposing us to familiar worlds, they keep pushing against societal norms, thereby possibly rupturing them. At the same time, this fascination is accompanied by dread, as the excessive confrontation with norms opens up a space that is unknown and that which was familiar becomes strange. In numerable instances, the reactions the readers experience are marked by contradictions and ambivalence, such as a intermingling of "humor with horror, [...] repulsion with desire" (1).

[297] I will from here on use the term without quotation marks but I would like the reader to note that it is to be credited to Frances S. Connelly.

The grotesque is located at the margins of that which is known and familiar, perpetually challenging said margins, with the focus on doing something, not being it. Connelly provides a concise and nuanced understanding of the grotesque as "an action, not a thing" (2). According to Connelly, "put[ting] things into play" is "what the grotesque does best" (2). She clarifies this fundamental "element of play" (2) by describing images as in motion, unstable, or, as she says, "aberrant, combinatory, and metamorphic" (2). Even though Connelly analyses the grotesque in terms of visual art, Jelinek's project of re-appropriation of normative language can also be understood along these lines since her processes of resignification can be conceived as "rupturing cultural boundaries, compromising and contradicting what is 'known' or what is 'proper' or 'normal'" (2).[298] Finally, "the grotesque is best understood as something that creates meaning by prying open a gap, pulling us into unfamiliar, contested terrain" (2).

In Jelinek's acts of shattering fixed and deeply engrained norms, the cracks that open up create the possibility of new meanings. For example, in *women as lovers*, Jelinek's play with the grotesque is particularly clear in the following passage: "und die tochter kann es gar nicht mehr erwarten, endlich auch sterben zu dürfen, und die eltern kaufen für den tod der tochter schon ein: leintücher und handtücher und geschirrtücher und einen gebrauchten kühlschrank. da bleibt sie wenigstens tot aber frisch."[299] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 18). By equating marriage with death, Jelinek distorts the idea of 'marriage for life,' i.e. 'until death do us part' and makes it very clear that the act of marrying is the same as dying

[298] Taking into account what is 'known' or 'normal' demands a consideration of the contextual particularity of the grotesque since norms are not universal but culture-specific.
[299] "and the daughter can hardly wait, to be allowed to die at last also, and the parents are already going shopping for the daughter's death: sheets and towels and dish cloths and a used refrigerator. then at least she'll stay dead but fresh" (*women as lovers* 16).

for a woman. She supplants the play of perverting the familiar with the shocking image of the bride's body as dead, but alas, fresh, meat. The tradition of parents providing a dowry for their daughter is grotesquely transformed into the act of them providing a sort of coffin for her. The readers are very much reminded of their 'own limits and mortality,' as Connelly argues. In addition, the wives-to-be are depicted as impatient for this grim destiny of theirs, blindly embracing cultural norms, which make the reader question these standards even more.

Jelinek's often-acclaimed project of de-familiarization can also be framed as "interstitial moments when the familiar turns strange or shifts unexpectedly into something else" (Connelly 3). These shifts or turns into something unfamiliar are characteristic of the grotesque's "transitional, in-between state of being" (5) that takes on many different forms, making it at times hard to grasp, but also full of subversive potential. This can be clearly seen in the following passage from Jelinek's *Lust*:

> Es hantelt sich die Frau, in ihrer Verstörung den Notausgang aus ihren Erinnerungen nicht findend, am Zaun neben einem alten Spritzenhaus der freiw. Feuerwehr entlang. Sie läuft frei, ohne Leine. Das ungewaschene Geschirr ist ihr vom Kopf abgestreift. Jetzt hört sie es nicht mehr, das vertrauliche Klirren und Klingen der Schellen an ihrem Zaumzeug. Sie leckt sprachlos an sich empor, wie Funken. [...] Vor ihr nur der kalte Sturmwind vom Berg; der Raum ist von wenigen dünnen Pfadrinnsalen bedeckt, die in den Wald führen. Es dämmert. In ihren Zellen bluten die Hausfrauen aus dem Hirn und dem Geschlecht, zu dem sie gehören. Was sie selbst gezüchtet haben, müssen sie jetzt auch noch pflegen und am Leben erhalten mit ihren Armen, die mit Hoffnungen ohnehin schon überladen sind.[300] (83)

[300] "The woman gropes her way along a fence by an old volunteer fire brigade station, failing in her confused state to find the emergency exit from her memories. There she goes, not even on a lead. The dirty washing-up waiting to be done is clean gone from her mind. Already she has ceased to hear the familiar jingling of the bells on her bridle. Speechless, she licks up a flame, like sparks. [...] Ahead of her is only the cold tempestuous wind off the mountain. The terrain is threaded by a few paths leading into the woods. Dusk. In their cells, the housewives bleed from the brain, from the sex they belong to. What they have

Transitionality marks this passage. Gerti is attempting to break out of the confines of the prison cell of her household, venturing into nature, not knowing where she is going but finding herself at the entrance to the forest, a space on the other side of the dichotomy of that which she is escaping. All of this happens at dusk, the temporal transition from day to night. Even more disturbing are the descriptions of Gerti without a leash, portraying her like a dog that has managed to break loose and that is now on a path of exploration, sniffing along the fence. In the next sentence, though, the imagery of the dog transforms into that of a horse, with the description of the unwashed, dirty harness. In addition to feeling disgust at this uncleanliness and confused by the human-animal images, the reader may wonder about the word "Geschirr" that can refer both to a horse's harness and to dishes left behind in an unwashed state in the kitchen. The uncertainty between the two options is not cleared up since the next sentence further develops the intermingling of the two, while managing to intensify the imagery of Gerti as a horse having freed itself from its confining tack. The passage exposes the reader to the grotesque through its play with transitionality and flux, which makes the familiar become unfamiliar and emphasizes the in-betweenness of bodies and states. Jelinek's novel forces the reader to deal with reactions of shock and disgust these kinds of passages evoke, all the while also being drawn (in)to it. The above-quoted passages are just a few examples among many in which the grotesque draws the reader "into a liminal state of multiple possibilities" (Connelly 5-6).

In Jelinek's writing, the female protagonist's body is the polar opposite of the Classical representation of the naked female body. According to psychology professor Jane

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bred they must now tend and rear and keep alive and cradle, in arms already laden down with hopes" (*Lust* 70).

Ussher, "the icon of idealised feminine sexuality" removes "all abhorrent reminders of her fecund corporeality" such as "secretions, pubic hair, genitals, and disfiguring veins or blemishes" ("Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 3). In the novel, the narrator constantly reminds the reader of Gerti's "fecund corporeality", zooming in on the bodily markers of her sexual difference: "Der Mann reißt seiner Frau beim Waschen ganze Büschel Haare aus der Fut. Er krallt sich in die Kiemen ihrer Scham und fährt mit seifigen Fingern tief in ihr Grundwasser, wo er vorhin noch sein gewaltiges Paket abgelegt hat. Sie strampelt und wimmert, denn das brennt"[301] (*Lust* 140). Her genitals, denoted with the very vulgar term "pussy," are on open display; they are exposed as hurting and violated flesh, containing fluids, revealing the illusion of perfection on which the Classical, idealized female body is founded. The description of her genitalia as gills once again compares Gerti's human body to an animal body, this time, a fish, which seems to be swimming in her ground water. In many ways, Gerti's body epitomizes that "[t]he apparently uncontained fecund body, with its creases and curves, secretions and seepages, as well as its changing boundaries at times of pregnancy and menopause, signifies association with the animal world, which reminds us of our mortality and fragility, and stands as the antithesis of the clean, contained, proper body " (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 6). The morphing of the female body with animals and the connotations that arise in the process can be read as markers of Gerti's body as grotesque.

While it is tempting to regard the grotesque as a transgressive occurrence, Connelly aptly points out that "it is more like a catalyst, opening the boundaries of two disparate

[301] "The Man tears whole handfuls of hair from her pussy as she goes about her washing and refurbishing. He digs into the gills of her privates and his soapy fingers invade her ground water where she shot his wad. She thrashes and whimpers, it stings!" (*Lust* 116).

entities, and setting a reaction in motion" (8). In that sense, the grotesque is not so much about trespassing that which is abiding by the norm; rather, it "ruptures boundaries, compromising them to the point where they admit the contradiction and ambiguity of a contrasting reality" (10). Jelinek's style of playing norms against each other is where the potential of a subversion of confining norms lies. Connelly reasons that an "effective grotesque fixes our attention on an existing boundary, making the contours of the familiar and 'normal' visible to us, even as it intermingles with the alien and unexpected. As such, the grotesque turns received ideas, normal expectations, and social and artistic conventions against themselves" (11). In the previous passage, Jelinek's portrayal of the bleeding housewives does exactly this. It is not clear whether they are bleeding in the cells of their homes, thus denoting their living space as a prison, and one in which they are subject to abuse, or whether it is a reference to their brain cells as bleeding, which would weave in the notion of sickness but possibly also a decline in their mental capacities. The reference to the generally tabooed depiction of menstruation is further complicated by the reduction to and lumping together of women's genitalia with their gender and other women. Through the juxtaposition of multiple meanings, the reader is lead to call into question the normative drawing of signifying boundaries and challenge the construction of societal and cultural norms.

In addition to playing with boundaries, another key characteristic of the grotesque is its strong focus on physicality. Shun-Liang Chao describes the grotesque as "a corporeal, or flesh-made, metaphor which produces within itself (and within the reader/viewer's response) intellectual uncertainty, emotional disharmony, and hermeneutic indeterminacy" (14). Chao's study is based on Bakhtin's seminal work on the carnivalesque

grotesque, in which the Russian philosopher stresses the open and unfinished aspect of the grotesque body, which

> is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, [...]: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth, which exceeds its own limits only in copulations, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation. This is the unfinished, ever creating body [...].
>
> One of the fundamental tendencies of the grotesque image of the body is to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born. [...] From one body a new body always emerges in some form or other.
>
> [...] The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. (Bakhtin 26-27)

This excerpt highlights the hybrid corporeality of the grotesque. There are no clear boundaries; bodies are constantly in flux, morphing into each other, melding with their surroundings, transitioning. The in-betweenness and the absence of delimitations once more bring to light the characteristic ascpect of the grotesque 'doing something' instead of 'being something.' The focus on the act instead of the condition of being becomes apparent in the incessant transitionality.[302]

In Jelinek's texts, there are numerous allusions to hybridity, to bodies assembled as food displays or serving as cold buffet – "das üppige kalte Büffet seines Leibes"[303] (*Lust* 253) – thus recalling Renaissance painter Guiseppe Arcimboldo's famous portraits that are

[302] In addition to the subsequent analysis of hybrid bodies in *Lust*, one can also find such depictions in *women as lovers*: "einer hat sich in den leib des anderen verbissen und haust darin wie ein vandale, lebt, nährt sich davon, man nennt das eine symbiose" (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 28). ["someone has got stuck into the body of the other and is laying waste inside it, living, feeding off it, that is called symbiosis" (*women as lovers* 29)].
[303] "the lavish cold buffet of his body" (*Lust* 205).

composed of items such as vegetables, fruits, animals, books, and flowers. The following scene also perfectly illustrates the many forms of hybridity that Jelinek's text showcases:

> Der Mann biegt der Frau den Kopf am geraden Halm weit zurück, da sie schreien will. Sein Vogel ist wach und wird in den Käfig ihres Mundes gesperrt, so ergeht es ihm wohl, und er flattert unflätig herum, bis ein Würgen im Hals der Frau aufsteigt, das Wachstum rauscht, und ihre Kotze seinen Schaft entlang und über das baumelnde Gewölbe seiner Hoden rinnt. Da kann man nichts machen.[304] (140)

In this passage, the bodies 'transgress their limits' and 'outgrow themselves.' From Gerti's open mouth the reader is led to the aperture of her throat, which provides a way for her insides, her vomit, to transgress the bodily boundaries and overflow onto her husband's genitals, which had just moments before still been in the process of protruding from his body and becoming one with hers. The scene describes an invasive interaction of bodies, objects and liquids, a violent 'blending' that is always unfinished. Not only does Hermann's penis become a bird and Gerti's mouth a cage, his "Schwanz steht wie ein Schilf um ihr Bett, in das er endgültig gelegt wird, die Glocken ihrer Brüste werden geschlagen, Alkohol rinnt wie Wasser aus ihr, und in ihre Fotze springen kräftige Tropfen"[305] (140). Jelinek's bodies are the embodiment of hybridity, or, to use Connelly's term again, border creatures.

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[304] "The Man forces the woman's head right back to prevent her from yelling. His bird is wide awake, it's locked in the cage of her mouth, which is where it likes to be, flapping about till the woman starts to retch and heave and her vomit travels along his shaft and dribbles down his dangling testicles. Too bad" (*Lust* 115).

[305] "prick is as stiff as a bull-rush, and now he rushes her like a bull and tucks his prick up in bed where it belongs, he tolls the bells of her breasts, alcohol gushes from her like water, and potent drops of the good stuff squirt into her cunt" (*Lust* 115).

3. The Abject Body

3.1 The Abject and Identity Formation

The depiction of Gerti's vomit, her leaking body, as well as the earlier representation of bleeding women and menstruation can also be analysed in terms of the abject, a concept which is closely related to the grotesque but not interchangeable with it. According to Connelly, the "abject sidles alongside the object whose identity it threatens" (12). Its relationship to the grotesque is found in the destabilization and undoing of subject formation. Connelly positions the abject as an emergence of the grotesque, and more specifically, of what she calls the traumatic grotesque, which "threatens the limits of our identity, rupturing the boundaries between self and oblivion through the monstrous, the uncanny, the abject" (14).

In addition to being marked by hybridity and the subversion of idealized female nudity, Gerti's body does not exist aside from its sexual and reproductive function. Its constructedness in these terms depicts the overall preoccupation with the female reproductive body, which is marked by fascination and idealization as well as repulsion and admonition. As Ussher argues, "[c]entral to this positioning of the female body as monstrous or beneficent is ambivalence associated with the power and danger perceived to be inherent in woman's fecund flesh, her seeping, leaking, bleeding womb standing as site of pollution and source of dread" (1). Inherent in this description of the female reproductive body is the concept of the abject, which is indispensably tied to woman's procreating body in most Western civilizations.

In her seminal work *The Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva defines abjection as that which "disturbs identity, system, order [and w]hat does not respect borders, positions,

rules" (4). The abject "stands for that which we most dread, the object of primal repression. [It] represents the hidden, unacknowledged, and feared parts of identity and society, [...] the 'other' against which normality is defined" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 6). A vital component of identity formation, abjection marks one's entrance into and continuance in the realm of the symbolic, i.e. of language, and it is thus a threshold in a child's development in becoming an individual subject, one separate from the mother. Kristeva's theory uncovers a plethora of ways in which the formation of one's place in society and one's subjectivity depend on the ejection of those parts or products of the body which are considered unclean or disturbing.

Jelinek's novel *Lust* is a sequence of abjection processes, which are at times more, at times less, successful in forming the subject by rejecting that which is considered perilous to its sense of self. Despite the relational and shifting character of the abject, Kristeva lists some concrete examples of what it constitutes, namely bodily fluids such as blood, sweat, pus, vomit, excreta. These are fluids that disrupt borders, which undo the construction of a clearly demarcated body that separates a subject from the world. According to Ussher, they uncover a "body without boundaries, which threatens the illusion of the contained, controlled, rational subject, and as such, threatens stability and social unity" ("Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 6).

The abject, or the process of abjection, is thus about ridding oneself of that which does not constitute the "I," even though I am not arguing that there is such a thing as an essential, interior "I." In this process, one tries to banish that which is seen as being or belonging to the other. In that sense, abjection denotes the course of a person seeing themselves as an individual subject with borders that delimit them from the other (McAfee

45). All that a person rejects from themselves, be it certain fluids, such as the above mentioned vomit, excreta, among others, or that a person pushes away from them, as in a child breaking away from being one with the mother, is considered the abject.

For Kristeva, abjection is specific to the mother-child relationship and does not encompass every relationship of rejection. The abjection process is obstructed for brigitte in *women as lovers,* who accepts various substances into her body. For example, in the following passage, brigitte willingly foregoes any chance at ridding herself of the Other, making the reader question the system in which she would rather incorporate all of that which she finds utterly disgusting and a nuisance instead of foregoing any acceptable position in society at all:

> ein kindchen muß her! ein ekelhafter, weißer, krallender engerlingssäugling. [...] brigitte will es in sich hineinkriegen und, daß es dann auch drinnenbleibt und nicht wieder ungenützt, sinnlos und zukunftslos herausrinnt. brigitte will, daß heinz abdrückt und ihr den extrakt aus dem rindsbraten und den semmelknödeln von heute mittag hineinschießt. jetzt muß dieser schlatzige mist doch endlich hineingespritzt und drinnen sein.[306] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 47)

In *Lust*, the family relationships are the site of multiple processes of abjection. For example, the son is caught trying to separate himself from his mother's all-encompassing reach:

> Ja, dieses Kind ist noch klein, aber es ist speziell als Mann geplant, glaube ich.
>
> Jetzt ist es noch ein Verreckerl von einem Kind, so klein, [...]. Lieb senkt die Mutter den Mund über sein Haar. Der Vater wird bereits unerschöpflich, er kann kaum noch an sich halten. [...] Er schiebt sich von hinten an seine Frau heran. Verächtlich beugt die Frau sich vor, damit es in ihrer Tiefe lebendig werde. Vor Lachen, weil es gekitzelt wird, lädt das Kind seinen Dung ab, ins Gesicht der Mutter

[306] "there must be a little child! a horrible, white, clinging grub of an infant. [...] brigitte wants to get it inside of her and, then that it also stays inside and doesn't dribble out again unused, pointless, and without a future. brigitte wants heinz to discharge and shoot the extract of roast beef and the bread dumplings from today's dinner into her. by now this slimy muck must at least have been squirted into her and be safe inside" (*women as lovers* 53).

> hinein. Es macht nichts, wir tollen herum, als wären wir uns feucht aufgestoßen. Die Frau kann gar nicht genug aufpassen, doch zu spät, da ist sie hinterrücks schon halb entblößt, während sie vorn noch an dem Kind saugt [...].[307] (219-20)

In this scene, the boy expels his excrements into the mother's face. During this act, both the son's excrements as well as his mother are constituted as the abject. The boy is depicted as attempting to become a subject by erecting a boundary between himself and the mother, who is holding on to him, engulfing him with her mouth that is sinking down on his head and sucking on him. The text's mention of him being designed as a man emphasizes the process of subject formation, in the sense of 'taking-his-place-as-man.' Simultaneously, the mother herself is threatened with the breakdown of her own borders. While she is in the process of holding on to her child, her borders are being undone. Her offspring not only defecates on her, and by doing so breaking down behavioural norms and bodily boundaries, but he does so in her face, with the narrative thus implying that what he has abjected enters her body via the mouth.[308] While, strictly speaking, the son's excrements are not an item of food, Kristeva writes: "Loathing an item of food, waste, or dung. The spasms and vomiting that protect me. The repugnance, the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck" (2). The text shows again how Gerti is constantly hamstringed when trying to maintain the borders of her own self. In this

[307] "Yes, this boy may be small, but he's specifically designed as a man, I believe. Now he is still just a wretch, a brat, so small, [...]. Lovingly Mother bows her mouth to his hair. Father is already becoming inexhaustible, he can hardly contain himself. [...] He shoves up to his wife from behind. The woman bends contemptuously forward so that life stirs in her depths. With laughter, since his mother's tickling him, the boy shits himself, dumping his dung in Mother's face. Never mind, we go on frolicking about as if we'd just repeated, damply. The woman really has to watch out, but it's too late already and she's half exposed at the rear while at the front she's still sucking up to the child, [...]" (*Lust* 178-9).

[308] The scene furthermore evokes Oedipal undertones, since the act of the son's defecation is suggestive of him ejaculating in his mother's face as the scene is not only one in which the parents are in the process of engaging in coitus, but it also mentions that the gush follows the son being tickled.

scene, she does not rid herself of the abject, does not undergo the process that would be necessary for subject formation. Gerti is not granted the possibility to 'establish herself,' she is rather depicted as incorporating what was supposed to be expelled. In this way, she is absorbing the other and not ejecting it, which works against the erection of borders necessary for subject formation. Gerti epitomizes the precariousness of the borders of a subject. The textual passage is one of many in which she is both constructed as abject herself and prevented from becoming a subject via abjection.

At the same time, the passage illustrates the offspring's process of subject formation by way of rejecting the abject. The son is drawing "a line between [him]self and [the mother]" "[i]n order to become a subject" (McAfee 48). Kelly Oliver describes Kristeva's theory on the process of subject-formation via abjection of the maternal body in the following way: "The 'subject' discovers itself as the impossible separation/identity of the maternal body. It hates that body but only because it can't be freed of it. That body, the body without border, the body out of which this abject subject came, is impossible" (60). This elaboration clearly points to the difficulty in identifying the maternal body's borders.

. Returning to a passage I examined in chapter one with regard to the uncleanly female body, I argue that Gerti's body does not get to claim any boundaries; it's a constantly leaking, breached, penetrated, bumpy, irregular body that serves as a reminder of and simultaneously cautionary tale with regard to the abject: "Wie einen Faden soll diese Frau ihre Gerüche nach Schweiß, Pisse, Scheiße, hinter sich herziehen [...]. Dieser lebende Abfallhaufen, wo die Würmer und Ratten graben"[309] (*Lust* 56-57). Herrmann prevents the abjection process that Gerti would have to go through in order to be constituted as a

[309] "He wants her trailing a banner of sweat, piss and shit scents. [...]. A living heap of garbage. Where worms and rats go burrowing" (*Lust* 48).

subject. He attempts to keep all that would pollute the body – "sweat, piss, and shit" – within Gerti and thus to position himself in control over her, over the Other. Far from glorifying the maternal body, Jelinek confronts readers with the constructedness of what is seen as imperative to cast away. Gerti is Woman who fell from the idealized pedestal into the "position of monster incarnate" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 2). This fall has no liberating potential in the sense that Gerti cannot free herself from societal expectations of normative femininity. Rather, her debasement as abject[310] confronts the reader with questions of why certain images evoke disgust and what it means that these repelling images are associated with femininity.

Each time Gerti, the archetypal women, tries to undergo the abjection process, the attempt fails, which leads to an impossibility on her part to recognize herself as an "I." In the novel's patriarchal system, there is no space for Woman to constitute subjectivity. Kristeva emphasizes the importance of imaginary boundaries that are erected in order for a person to maintain the illusion of a stable, clearly demarcated body on which one's sense of self is based. The novel does not grant Gerti this experience and her body, and by extension, her sense of selfhood, is constantly exposed to disruptive and perilous elements (Doncu 335). At the end of the novel, however, Gerti kills her son by first asphyxiating, then drowning him. The novel's depiction of Gerti as murderous mother could be read as an attempt to take her out of her predominant role as victim, or rather, non-subject, in the patriarchal society, which is embodied in her son who is seen as an extension of his father.

[310] Ussher clarifies that "[t]his is not to say that the female body *is* abject or polluted, it has merely been positioned as such, with significant implications for women's experiences of inhabiting a body so defined" ("Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 7; emphasis in original).

3.2 Infanticide

In Jelinek's novel, the act of infanticide is marked by paradoxes. First, the mother is described as "zärtlich"[311] (*Lust* 254), while she is committing murder. Second, the violence of the act of infanticide is countered by the everyday and the banality of the reference to a plastic shopping bag: "Üppig entfalten sich unter dem Zelt des Sackes, auf dem die Adresse einer Boutique aufgedruckt ist, noch einmal die Lebenskräfte des Kindes"[312] (254). Third, the death throes of the son's body are depicted as something calm and peaceful: "Dann ergreift sie eine Plastiktüte, legt sie dem Kind über den Kopf und hält sie unten ganz fest zu, damit der Atem darin *in Ruhe* zerbrechen kann"[313] (254; emphasis added). The text seems to be painting a lullaby scene, with the mother bedding her child for eternal sleep. References to water and oceanic elements abound, with the breath of the child breaking like waves against a rock. He is overpowered by the element of water[314] and succumbs to it: "Dann treibt der Sohn hinaus ins offene Wasser, wo er gleich ganz in seinem Element (Mutti!) ist"[315] (254). His is not a body being born but one who in death returns to the womb, the uterus becoming his grave.

When Gerti first carries her son's corpse from the bed to the riverbed, she gently and cautiously holds him in her arms "wie einen knospenden Strauch, der einzupflanzen

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311 "Tenderly" (*Lust* 206).
312 "Under the tent of the back, on which is printed the address of a boutique, the boy's life force burgeons richly one more time" (*Lust* 206).
313 "Then she takes a plastic bag, slips it over the boy's head, and draws it tight at the bottom so that the child's breath will perish *in peace*" (*Lust* 206; emphasis added).
314 This is unlike the father's body, who withstands the liquid forces, as will be shown later in this chapter.
315 "Then the son drifts out into the open waters where he is immediately quite in his element (Mummy!)" (*Lust* 206).

ist"[316] (254). But the image turns into something quite shocking when she grows tired and begins dragging his body behind her. Similarly, once Gerti arrives at the riverbed, the scene starts with the serene picture of the son's body peacefully gliding into the water, but soon after, the tranquility is disrupted since "[d]as Wasser hat das Kind umfangen und reißt es mit sich fort, lang noch wird viel von ihm übrig sein, bei dieser Kälte"[317] (255). The text does not spare the reader the image of the slowly decaying drowned body, with no clear bodily boundaries since the body will decompose, become bloated, discoloured, and disfigured. The extreme lack of emotion in the text clashes with the horror the visualization evokes, creating a grotesque feeling due to the opposing visuals. Directly following this image, the text informs the reader that the "Mutter lebt"[318] (255), an elliptical affirmation that stands in juxtaposition to the standard image of the mother giving (her) life and whose ludicrousness forces a laughter that sticks in the reader's throat. In addition to taking life, the maternal body is here a devouring one, with the narrator wondering "Sollen sie sie etwas verschlingen wie die Nabelschnüre ihrer Kinder?"[319] (255). The rhetorical question centering on the very carnal and at the same time symbolic reference to the umbilical cord associates mothers with female animals eating the remnants of the birth-giving act. Mothering is not an act of idealistic bonding; the narrative frame emphasizes destruction, life-taking by placing "Mord und Tod"[320] (255) right after the question. Furthermore, by ingesting the umbilical cord, the woman collapses the crucial differentiation between the Self and the Other, reversing abjection as an act of expulsion.

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316 "like a budding cutting that has to be planted" (*Lust* 207).
317 "The water has taken hold of the child, and bears him on and away, a good deal will remain of him for a long time in this cold" (*Lust* 207).
318 "The mother is alive" (*Lust* 207).
319 "What are they to do, devour it like the umbilical cords of their children?" (*Lust* 207).
320 "Hell and damnation" (*Lust*, 207).

Gerti's act of infanticide positions her as an agent of disruption, and she is thus portrayed as a threatening and monstrous woman. In Jelinek's novels, mothers are portrayed in proximity to death and thus depict a double-edgedness of the maternal body as giving life but also taking it away.[321] For Gerti to open up a space of resistance and become a subject, she has to embrace the role of monstrous mother and repel her offspring, overturning the act of giving birth and undergoing abjection in the process of killing her son. In order for her to break out of the pattern of constantly being positioned as the abject, she has to radically disturb patriarchal ideology. Committing infanticide positions her as that which Kristeva denotes as disturber of "identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Gerti in that moment disrupts the system by turning into a murdering mother. She is a polluting force endangering the patriarchal system by annihilating a vital element of its continuance. But since her crime will most likely not go unpunished, the suggestion of a space of resistance is a transient one. Her transgression once again turns her into the abject, which will be discarded in order to maintain the workings of the patriarchal system. Even though the momentary shattering uncovers the oppressive constructedness of the system, it does not bring about a complete breakdown of such a system. There is no entailing liberation to be expected for her since the "threat of

[321] See, for example, the following passage from *women as lovers*, which is just one example of the interrelatedness between death and motherhood in Jelinek's oeuvre: "für die frau ende des lebens und anfang des kinderkriegens. während die manner schön reifen [...], dauert der todeskampf ihrer frauen oft jahre und jahre, oft auch noch so lang, daß sie dem todeskampf ihrer töchter beiwohnen können. die frauen beginnen ihre töchter zu hassen und wollen sie möglichst schnell auch so sterben lassen wie sie selber einmal gestorben sind" (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 16). ["for the woman end of life and start of having children. while the men mature nicely [...], the death throes of their wives often last for years and years, and often so long that they can even be present at their daughters' death throes. the women begin to hate their daughters and want to have them die as quickly as possible just as they once died" (*women as lovers* 13-14)].

danger from pollution leads to disciplinary practices that contain and constrain the fecund body, and as a consequence, contain and constrain women" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 6). Jelinek leaves no doubt about the omnipresent and ensuing confinement that Gerti is exposed to: "Die Mutter lebt, und bekränzt ist ihre Zeit, in deren Fesseln sie sich windet"[322] (*Lust* 255). Ultimately, on the level of subject formation, Jelinek's depiction of the tenuous border of subjectivity does not provide enough agency necessary for resistance (Doncu 336).

3.3 The Castrating Mother

Closely related to the question of subject-formation from a psychoanalytic perspective is Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety. According to the Austrian psychoanalyst, the Oedipal stage is a pivotal phase in a child's development in which said child's libidinal desire is formed, which in turn influences his or her mental development in the process and state of adulthood. Erotic interest for the other-sexed parent and competition with the same-sexed parent marks the onset of the child's early stages of his or her sexual development. The libidinal interest is, however, closely related to the anxiety of being castrated, which would have a destructive effect on the construction of the person's identity. Thus, according to Freud, castration anxiety is linked to the threat of disintegration of one's sense of self. Since women, in Freudian discourse, are perceived to be lacking the empowering phallus, their sense of identity is established via motherhood (Storr 34). Jelinek's novel *Lust* can be read as a subversive take on the Freudian castration complex. In killing her child, Gerti eradicates that which would,

[322] "The mother is alive, her time is wreathed and limited, with fetters she has twined in it" (*Lust* 207).

according to Freudian logic and terminology, elevate her from her 'inferior' existence as woman.

In addition to literally taking her son's life, Gerti also can be read symbolically as an agent of castration. Within Jelinek's numerous references to and nods at pop culture, an analysis from the vantage point of horror film studies will allow a more nuanced reading of the dynamic between Gerti and her offspring. The son in the novel is nourished by TV shows and seems to watch horror films on a daily basis: "[das Kind] spricht ja selbst wie aus dem Fernsehen, von dem es sich ernährt. Jetzt geht es wieder fort, ohne sich zu fürchten, denn es hat heute das Grauen[323] der Videos noch nicht geschaut"[324] (*Lust* 12). In her seminal 1993 analysis *The Monstrous-Feminine*, cultural critic Barbara Creed points out that horror films offer key insights into the dynamics of mother-son relationships, as they reveal "in terms of repressed Oedipal desire, fear of the castrating mother and psychosis" (139). In Jelinek's novel, the relationship between the mother and her son is largely shaped by Oedipal desire.[325] The son enjoys watching his parents through keyholes and letting his eyes wander over his mother's body, and he wants to "sich an die Frau kleben, an ihr weiden, sie in die Brustwarzen beißen zur Strafe, daß vorher der Vater ihre Tunnels und Röhren ausweiten durfte"[326] (*Lust* 28). The language, once again, positions the son as an extension of his father, who frequently bites Gerti's breasts or nipples – "[e]r beißt die Frau

[323] The official translation interprets this as "nastiness," while a translation such as "horror," "dread" or "terror" would be more fitting in this scene.
[324] "Listening to this neatly-turned-out child talking like a television. Which is his main source of nutrition. Off he goes now, out for a walk, unfearing, because he hasn't been watching the nastiness of the videos yet today" (*Lust* 11-12).
[325] See pp. 53-54 in the German edition (pp. 45-46 in the English translation) of *Lust* for another striking example of Oedipal desire in the novel.
[326] "cling to the woman, graze upon her, bite her nipples to punish her for allowing Father to explore her tunnels and piping" (*Lust* 25).

in die Brust"[327] (21) –, while the use of the modal verb "dürfen" (*to be allowed to*) evokes its negation for the son, i.e. a prohibition, in this case, the incest taboo. The fact that he will cling to her, make himself stick to her, references the impossibility for Gerti to position herself as an individual with her identity rooted in motherhood. Her son is using her for nutrition, both literally and figuratively. Since he is biting her nipples, reminiscent of him being breastfed,[328] Gerti is depicted as being sucked of everything by her son.

However, within the Freudian universe, the child is also that which gives meaning to the woman's life and which can make up for her lack of penis. It is then not surprising that on the other side of the Oedipal desire, one can find the depiction of the mother as "over-possessive" (Creed 139):

> Die Frau spricht zu ihrem Sohn, durchzieht ihn (Speck, in dem die Maden der Liebe weiden) mit ihrem leisen, zärtlichen Geschrei. Sie ist besorgt um ihn, schützt ihn mit ihren weichen Waffen. Jeden Tag scheint er ein wenig mehr zu sterben, je älter er wird. Den Sohn freut das Gejammer der Mutter nicht, gleich fordert er ein Geschenk. [...] Lieb wirft sie sich über den Sohn, aber auch als rauschender Bach fließt sie unter ihm dahin, verhallt in der Tiefe. Sie hat nur dieses eine Kind."[329] (*Lust* 11-12)

Gerti is represented as an all-pervasive, over-protective mother. In typical Jelinek manner, she is not an unconditionally loving mother but one full of contradictions, both demonstrating ubiquitous love and a deep-rooted aversion bordering on hate. The oxymoron "leise[s], zärtliche[s] Geschrei" ("low and tender shrieking") as well as the

[327] "he bites the woman's breast" (*Lust* 19).
[328] Even though the text does not give the son's specific age, there are a few mentions of him being in school, which makes him at least six or seven years old. Thus, the reference to breastfeeding and nipple-biting evokes strong Oedipal undertones, and reinforces an unwillingness on the son's part to fully separate himself from the mother.
[329] "The woman talks to her son (bacon infested with the maggots of love) and fills him with her all-pervasive low and tender shrieking. She is concerned about him. Protects him with her soft weapons. Every day he seems to die a little more, the older he becomes. The son takes no pleasure in Mother's griping and promptly demands a present. [...] Lovingly she flings herself on her son, but even as a torrent she simply flows away, to be heard somewhere far beneath him, in the depths. And she has only this one child" (*Lust* 11).

distortion of the idiom "wie die Made im Speck leben" (*to live the life of Riley*) evoke discomfort and disgust in the reader.[330] Overall, the scene reads like an uncanny foreshadowing of the novel's culmination in the son's murder, which is further reinforced through the reference to the son's dying day by day.

Playing into the concept of the mother as agent of castration is the novel's description of female genitalia. The text teeters between depicting Gerti as castrated and the possibility of her doing the castrating (Creed 141). This can be read as one of the reasons why the son is so fascinated with his mother's body, which he "besieht [...] sich schlau und dreist"[331] (*Lust* 28). Through his brash gaze, he already takes on the infamous objectifying male gaze and thus follows in his father's footsteps. The text positions the son as the successor and growing image of the father, which is emphasized in the depiction of sexual rivalry between father and son. Even though the son has not yet reached the age of puberty, the text points out the evolving potency of his member. However, it is the father who is doing everything he can to take away from the force of his son's penis and who intervenes by administering some medication that puts the son to sleep and ensures his member's limp state.[332] Befitting the emphasis on the son as patriarchy-in-the-making, the depictions of his body and his member resemble those of the father while clearly still being in the early stages of development and not yet reaching the same intensity. Peering at his mother's body, the son is not so much afraid and wary as opportunistic since he has figured out how to benefit from his voyeuristic transgressions: "Das [Kind] überlegt inzwischen ein

[330] Maggots moreover recall the image of a corpse, the utmost form of abjection, according to Kristeva.
[331] "cops a sly, audacious eyeful" (*Lust* 25).
[332] See, for example, p. 231 in the German version (p. 188 in the English version) of *Lust*, where the description of the sleeping son with a non-erect penis is supplanted with references to the Oedipus myth and incestuous undertones.

Geschenk, das es gekauft haben möchte, um von den zusammengepflockten Eltern nichts Heimliches gesehen zu haben. In jedem Geschäft, das es erblickt, will dieses Kind ein Stück Leben frisch (vom Lebendigen, von den guten Lebensbedingungen) herausgeschnitten bekommen“[333] (40). The proximity of secrecies, which implies the mystification of female genitals, and evocation of a knife implies the imagery of Gerti's vagina as castrating force.[334]

In her analysis of horror films, Barbara Creed argues that signs of the castrating mother's presence are "cruel appraising eyes, knives, water, blood, the 'haunted' house" (140). She adds that "[h]orror is further intensified through the representation of the female figure as abject in relation to images of woman's blood, the mother's entrails, the female corpse" (140). Even though Jelinek's work is a fictional text and not a film, one finds many of these motifs in her novel. Gerti's body is bleeding from her vagina – "ihrer blutigen Furche"[335] (*Lust* 45), resulting in "oft blutige Hosen"[336] (28) – and the text leaves it unclear whether the reference is to menstruation or to blood caused by the incessant acts of sexual violence inflicted on Gerti by her husband. In addition, Gerti's entrails are mentioned in a grotesque way: "Es winselt in den Eingeweiden wie von gefangenen Tieren, die herauswollen mit schweren Tritten"[337] (38). The imagery of captured animals is gory and the pain of Gerti's viscera is made palpable. On the one hand, the text emphasizes the aspect of allure in the son's encounter with his mother and her genitals; on the other hand,

[333] "[The boy's] pondering a present he wants bought in return for not having seen any of his plug-and-socket parents' secrets. From every shop he sets eyes on, the child wants another slice of life, cut fresh, only the best, just for him" (*Lust* 35).
[334] This is reminiscent of Freud's case study of Little Hans and Barbara Creed's reading of it. The idea of the vagina as castrating force will be explored in more detail in the analysis of the 'vagina dentata' later on.
[335] "her bloody groove" (*Lust* 39).
[336] "the blood that frequently stains her panties" (*Lust* 25).
[337] "There is a whimpering in her entrails, like the whimpering of captive animals trying to kick a way out of their cage" (*Lust* 33).

the references to blood, knives, and the mother's over-possessive attitude portray Gerti as the castrating mother. The interactions between Gerti and her son are shaped by the dynamic of the "oral mother, the incorporating, devouring mother who threatens the son" (Creed 144). The depiction of Gerti as "threaten[ing] to incorporate the child both psychically and physically" (144) positions her as a voracious, and more specifically, an obliterating mother. At the end of the novel, the threat of annihilation is realized and Gerti murders her son, who is no longer granted the chance to grow up, to become like his father, a patriarch; he is left exposed to his mother's menacing gaze – "[u]nbequem liegt das Kind unter dem Auge der Mutter"[338] (*Lust* 254).

3.4 The Monstrous-Feminine

The novel's depiction of Gerti as murderous, castrating mother can be read as an attempt to subvert her predominant role as victim in a violent patriarchal society. According to Creed, the "monstrous-feminine" is constructed as an active rather than passive figure but this does not mean that this image is "'feminist' or 'liberated'" (7). Instead, monstrosity distorts boundaries of which maternity is one essential component in the case of women (7).

As previously mentioned, the abject and the monstrous are part of the traumatic grotesque, which "makes visual what is most threatening, inspiring fear and repulsion as it tears at the ultimate boundary between self and oblivion" (Connelly 115). As elements of the grotesque, the "abject and the monstrous drag us into a fearful, liminal world that threatens the carefully constructed veneer of our identity. But true to the nature of the

[338] "Comfortless he lies there under the eye of his mother" (*Lust* 206).

grotesque, the repulsion we feel when confronted by the monstrous or the abject is matched by an equally intense fascination, each undercutting the other" (115). What is common to the abject and the monstrous then, is that they "provoke a visceral response of dread, fear, and disgust" (115). This physical reaction can overlap with the grotesque but the latter does not always evoke this feeling. Moreover, the grotesque can play on normative boundaries, causing a rather cerebral response, unlike the monstrous and the abject, since "each in its way defies our attempts to objectify it, to re-present or grasp it in our minds" (116). While the abject and the monstrous can be subcategorized under the traumatic grotesque, they should not be equated with it. Even if something can be both monstrous and abject, there is a clear difference between the two. The difference lies in their composition. According to Connelly, "[m]onstrous bodies are actively constructed, through deformation and combination, to embody that which is feared" (116). As for abjection, Connelly posits that it "it is equally threatening and uncontrollable but elicits fear and disgust through its dissolution of bodies" (116). In Jelinek's novel *Lust*, Gerti's body incarnates both the monstrous and the abject and is threatening in different ways for different reasons, with each depiction retaining its own specific symbolic power.

To define the monstrous body, Connelly uses cultural critic Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's 1996 *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*, who argues that

> [t]he monster is born only [...] as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment [...]. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy [...], giving them life and an uncanny independence. The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically "that which reveals," "that which warns." (201)

In her understanding of the monstrous-feminine, Connelly emphasizes corporeal materiality as indispensable to both the monstrous and the grotesque as they have been

constructed in relation to the feminine (116).[339] Moreover, she asserts that it is possible to "appropriate[...] the power of abjection [and the monstrous] in ways that deliberately ren[d] the fabric of representation" (144), i.e. engage with the act of re-appropriation. The question that follows from these reflections is: what impact does Jelinek's appropriations of the monstrous-feminine such as the mother's act of infanticide have? As Creed convincingly argues, the effects of the monstrous-feminine are two-edged. For one, it "reinforce[s] the phallocentric notion that female sexuality is abject" (Creed 151). But at the same time, it "challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity" (151). This duality is essential for understanding how Jelinek's novel constructs femininity. The text incessantly repeats patriarchal notions of femininity and yet at the same time undertakes a shattering of these entrenched structures, and thus opens the possibility for both linguistic and cultural re-appropriation, via, what Sabine Wilke calls, "critical mimesis."[340] Jelinek's depiction of Gerti as monstrous mother takes her out of her passivity and transiently opens up the possibility for a form of empowerment.

If one reads Jelinek's novel not only as anti-porn, as the majority of critics have, but also as a horror story, with the monster lurking below one's bed taking the form of an over-bearing mother, we can ask what the effect of Gerti's act of infanticide is on the female reader. The questions Creed asks about the female spectator's relationship to the horror film are also applicable to the experience of the female reader of *Lust*. "Does she recognize herself in the figure of the monstrous-feminine? To what extent might the female [reader]

[339] The critique that has been brought forward against Cohen for calling the monstrous body 'pure culture' could also extend to Connelly, since both thinkers operate within a framework in which, despite the strong focus on corporeality, all is subject to cultural construction.

[340] See chapter 1, section 4.5 for a more detailed discussion of Wilke's theory of "critical mimesis."

feel empowered when identifying with the female castrator? Does she derive a form of sadistic pleasure in seeing her sexual other humiliated and punished?" (155). On the one hand, *Lust* makes reader-identification particularly difficult due to the typification and lack of individuality of the characters.[341] On the other hand, the female reader experiences an all-too familiar dynamics in the personification of societal conventions and patriarchy, which possibly give rise to a feeling of the uncanny, *unheimlich,* in the sense that some structures have been repressed and come to the fore unapologetically. The text additionally complicates the process of identification and empowerment by having a mother kill her offspring, thus breaking a very constitutive taboo. The stereotypes of Woman as passive and non-violent and of the mother as all-loving are shattered with a depiction of infanticide that is committed in a very mechanical and sterile manner, disturbing the female reader even more by inhibiting her empathy for the murdered son. The narrator makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the female reader to feel compassion for the son by positioning him as an inevitable extension of his patriarchal, oppressive, violent father with no redeeming qualities. This may give rise to a sense of empowerment in the final scene since the text opens up the possibility that the monstrous-feminine eradicates the continuation of oppressive patriarchy. If the son is read as parallel to his father, then the female reader may feel satisfaction since the woman manages to take revenge for her incessant violation and abuse. But the fact that she obliterates the son, not her husband, leaves the possibility that her suffering will simply continue. The text does not provide any evidence of Gerti also murdering her husband and in this way the ultimate pillar of patriarchy's power is not wiped out.

[341] See Lorenz "Gender, Pornography, and History in the Fiction of Albert Drach and Elfriede Jelinek" 360.

3.5 The Vagina Dentata

As the analyses of infanticide and the castrating mother have shown, Gerti is a far cry from the "sacred sanctity of woman as mother, driving all notions of monstrosity aside," far from the "glorification of woman" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 2). More "a reflection of man's 'desire to conceal his dread'" (2), Gerti's genitals and insides are exposed over and over again in the novel:

> Michael zieht der Frau die Beine wie zwei Oberleitungsbügel über sich drüber. In seinem Forscherdrang beobachtet er zwischendurch aufmerksam ihre ungespülte Spalte, eine knorpelige Sonderausführung von dem, was jede Frau in einem andren Lavendel- oder Fliederton bei sich hat. Er zieht sich zurück und betrachtet genau, wo er immer wieder verschwindet, um ungeschlachtet wieder zum Vorschein zum kommen und ein ganzer Genießer zu werden. [...] Ohne daß der Gerti die Gelegenheit zum Waschen gegeben worden ist, erscheint ihr Loch trüb, wie von einer Plastikhülle überzogen. Wer kann da widerstehen, ohne gleich das Fingerl hineinzustecken (man kann auch Erbsen, Linsen, Sicherheitsnadeln oder Glaskugeln nehmen), sofort wird man begeisterte Zustimmung von ihrer kleinsten und immer an irgendetwas leidenden Seite her ernten. Das unbeugsame Geschlecht der Frau sieht wie ungeplant aus, und wofür wird es verwendet? Damit der Mann sich mit der Natur herumschlagen kann. Aber auch für die Kinder und Enkerln, die ja von irgendwoher zur Jause kommen wollen. Michael schaut in die komplizierte Architektur Gertis und schreit wie am Spieß. Als wollte er einen Kadaver ausnehmen, zieht er ihre nach Unzufriedenheit und Sekreten stinkende Fotze an den Haaren vor sein Gesicht. Das Pferd und sein Alter erkennt man an den Zähnen.[342] (*Lust* 108)

[342] "Michael yanks the woman's legs about him like the legs of high-tension masts. In his exploratory zeal he gives intermittent attention to her undouched cleft, a gnarled version of what every other woman has on her person in a discreet shade of lavender or lilac. He pulls back and takes a good look at the place where he is repeatedly disappearing, only to reappear, a huge great thing, fun for one and all. [...] Since Gerti didn't have an opportunity to wash, her hole looks murky, as if it were plastic-coated. Who can resist jamming a finger in (you can use peas, lentils, safety pins or marbles, if you like), try it and see what an enthusiastic response you'll get from her lesser half. Woman's unyielding sex looks as if it were unplanned. And what is it used for? So that Man can tussle with Nature, and the children and grandchildren have somewhere to come trailing their clouds of glory from. Michael scrutinizes Gerti's complicated architecture and yells like a stuck pig. As if he were dissecting a corpse, he seizes her hairy cunt, stinking of secret dissatisfaction and dissatisfied secretions, and buries his face in it" (*Lust* 90).

This passage foregrounds the conflicting attitudes towards women's genitals, how they inspire "fascination and fear" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 1), playfulness and dread. In her history of the representation of the vagina as dangerous, Ussher explains the cultural meanings of the myth of the 'vagina dentata,' the toothed vagina. In such a fantasy, the vagina becomes a weapon with the power to incapacitate the unsuspecting penis. Ussher argues that this allegory stands for "a representation of the sexualised mother who both nurtures and devours" (1). In the passage above, Michael is pulling out of Gerti's vagina 'un-butchered,' which evokes an imagery of blood, knives, danger, devouring, and death. The fact that her vagina seems 'murky' and as if 'plastic-coated' implies that Michael cannot see what is inside her vagina, and so cannot discern the amount of danger waiting for him upon entrance. For all he knows, it could be spiked with objects ranging from legumes to sharp, stinging, piercing objects such as safety pins or easily breakable glass balls.[343] Later in the passage, the narrator directly references the imagery of teeth, which further strengthens allusions to the vagina dentata. But Gerti's genitals are not only depicted as potentially dangerous and fear-inspiring. Despite them being a hazard zone, Michael is fascinated by them and keeps on scrutinizing them. He is captivated and aroused by them and cannot resist 'jamming a finger in.' While he is satisfying his urge to explore her vagina, he 'yells like a stuck pig,' which again recalls a mental image of the man being butchered by the woman's reproductive organs. But the act is not without pleasure, since the scream could also be that of jouissance. Ussher summarizes the representations of the vagina dentata as "an allegory crude in symbolism, leaving little room for ambiguity about

[343] The latter two being reminiscent of the urban legend of Vietnamese women hiding razor blades in their vaginas during the Vietnam War (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 2).

its underlying message: the fecund body as 'the mouth of hell[344] [...];' the monstrous feminine most thinly disguised" (2).

In *women as lovers,* brigitte's destructive fantasies of her vagina evoke similar feelings of fascination and dread: "brigitte [könnte] statt ihrer möse zum beispiel einen sack hinhalten, in dem innen lauter lange stacheln sind, und heinz hasenhüpft hinein, ho ruck, arbeitet sich ran mit gezücktem schweif, und nichts wie rein! los, rin in die stacheln oder nägel!"[345] (*Die Liebhaberinnen* 55). This reference to the vagina dentata opens up space for resistance as it is brigitte who "could" instigate such destruction. Moreover, it negates the invulnerability of the male member, raising male anxieties. brigitte's vagina is no longer the imagined empty space waiting to be filled by a male member; instead it is filled, not with the supposed life-giving power of male ejaculate but with death-bringing weapons to protect itself from the threat of the male member.

Teeth and sharp objects are not the only possible danger in the vagina, lying in wait for the penis to enter and then attack it. *Lust* also incorporates the preoccupation with the rise of Aids in the 1980s and posits the disease within the mythology of the vagina dentata, as only female genitals are a source of illness.[346] Positioned as a polluting force, the female body needs to be monitored and subjected to purifying processes. Male bodies, on the other

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[344] Fitting with the etymological origin of the word 'grotesque,' one could also read the fecund body as 'entrance to the grotto' in that regard.

[345] "brigitte could for example instead of holding out her snatch hold out a sack, which is full of long thorns, and heinz hops in, heave ho, works his way in with tail up, there's no stopping him! straight into the thorns or nails!" (*women as lovers* 64).

[346] The notion of female genitals being a source of illness and disaster evokes comparisons to Pandora's box. The allegorical depictions of the vagina as a container of misfortunes can be found in numerous examples in *Lust*, with the vagina being referred to as 'box,' ranging from "die Sparbüchse der Mutter, wo ihre Heimlichkeiten sich aufhalten" (31) [Mother's piggy bank, where she keeps her secrets hidden away from him" (27)] to "[d]ie Büchse der Frau klafft" (114) [[t]he woman's socket gapes wide" (95)].

hand, are not a source of the disease; they are in danger of catching it and so need to take precautionary measures: "[d]em Mann genügt eine allein nicht, doch die drohende Krankheit hemmt ihn, seinen Stachel auszufahren und Honig zu saugen"[347] (*Lust* 14). Here, the female body as "source of malevolence and evil" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 2) severely impacts and stymies the man since "[w]enn nur nicht die Angst vor der neuesten Krankheit wäre, die Werkstätte des Herrn würde nimmermehr schweigen"[348] (*Lust* 19). The description lampoons the discourse of the inexhaustible powers of male creation by positioning women's genitalia as disruptive and hamstringing the almighty man.

Herrmann's adherence to monogamy due to the dangers lurking outside of marital intercourse can be read as an attempt to push aside the dread in the face of the destructive power of the vagina. He limits his attention to the one he knows, and the text's pornographic aspect reinforces the discourse of keeping the anxiety about female sexuality in check. Ussher argues that in

> pornography, we see recurring representations of the female body most graphically exposed, the splayed vagina revealing pink glistening flesh – reassurance that there is nothing to recoil from here; no teeth to bite. In hard-core porn, the next stage of this particular story, the vagina is repeatedly penetrated by the penis of the all-conquering man. Gargantuan, never failing, anxiety about the *vagina dentata*, or the monstrous feminine, is pushed out of the picture, and firmly to the back of the mind. ("Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 3)

Within the confines of marriage, Gerti's genitals are depicted as a sort of safe haven, where her husband has nothing to fear, but in the moments when she breaks out of the marital bounds, in her sexual encounters with Michael, the imagery of the dangerous vagina is

[347] "One woman isn't enough for the Man. But the threat of disease restrains him. Prevents him from putting forth his sting and supping honey" (*Lust* 13).
[348] "[i]f only it weren't for the fear of this most up-to-date of diseases, then there would never be silence in the workshops of the Lord" (*Lust* 17).

evoked. This duality illustrates that "[w]omen [...] who fail to perform femininity within the tight boundaries within which it is prescribed at each stage of the reproductive life cycle, are at risk of being positioned as mad or bad, and subjected to discipline or punishment" (4). Gerti is a prime example of this dictate: whenever she attempts to transgress her marital delimitations, she is portrayed as 'mad' – "Die Frau rast durchs Land. Ihr Verstand wütet in ihrem Kopf und stößt gegen die Schädelwanne, in der er aufbewahrt ist, d.h. er stößt an seine Grenzen"[349] (*Lust* 207) – or in need of punishment, which she receives when she is gang raped by Michael and his friends.

Jelinek's texts bring to light various roles and forms of the monstrous-feminine. Gerti's act of infanticide positions her as a monstrous mother, since she is exercising her castrating power to take away her son's life and going against the convention of the nurturing and life-giving mother. Her fecund body is thus not glorified as life-giving, but rather portrayed as an instrument of death, with her vagina acting as the source of illness and demise. Both Gerti's and brigitte's 'vaginas dentatas' are simultaneously alluring and terrifying, and they reveal the ambivalent cultural standing of the (fertile) female body. Theses forms of monstrosity uncover the workings of normative femininity and the risk that comes with going against them.

By overstating normative gender roles, Jelinek's novels uncover "the ways in which the normative role of wife and mother can be a source of distress and despair" (Ussher, "Managing the Monstrous Feminine" 4). The sense of confinement and oppression that comes along with these roles, which can simultaneously act as a source of societal recognition, also plays a crucial role in the dynamics at work in Maria Erlenberger's report

[349] "The woman tears across the countryside. Her mind is rioting in her head, banging at the walls of the skull it is contained in, that is to say, it goes to the limit" (*Lust* 168).

on anorexia. While in Jelinek's *Lust* there is a strong emphasis on the construction of female genitalia as a source of illness, Erlenberger's feminist confession puts forth a reading of fabrications of femininity as a source of the protagonist's eating disorder.

4. Maria Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*

4.1 Introduction

As the above analyses of the grotesque body, the abject body, and the monstrous body have shown, these concepts all reveal the illusory inviolability of one's identity, and more specifically feminine identity. In partially similar, partially distinct ways, they confront us with a threat of breaking down the boundaries established by the subject who seeks to be recognizable. In this sense, they pose a risk to the woman's sense of self, insofar as they trigger a questioning of the experience of boundaries that are an integral part of the construction of her identity. Faced with the fear of her body's porosity, destabilizing proportions, and transgressions, the female character is confronted with the undoing of her identity. Moreover, these concepts of the grotesque, the abject, and monstrosity share a focus on corporeality as a defining trait and as a way of uncovering, questioning, and possibly deconstructing societal and cultural norms by way of breaching them.

While emerging more specifically in the medical sphere, the discourse around illness and its constitution is closely intertwined with these border-crossing concepts. Similar to the danger of becoming undone via an exposure to the grotesque or the abject, the experience of illness can lead to a disintegration of the sense of self. This can destabilize identity to the point of a complete breakdown; but illness also has the potential to undo a constructed identity that is experienced as imposed and stifling and, in this way, open a

pathway towards a sense of identity that is perceived as more autonomous and self-determined. One example of illness that contains this potential is the representation of anorexia in Maria Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*.

In line with the contemporary understanding of anorexia in the 1970s, Erlenberger's report portrays the illness as mainly a mental one in the sense that anorexia is seen as exceeding societal norms and overdoing expectations of femininity with the result of a near-eradication of the physical body of the anorexic. Echoing the feminist discourse of the 1960s and 70s in the US, Erlenberger's report lays bare an understanding of the "female body [as] a *socially* shaped and historically 'colonized' territory" (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 21; emphasis in original). In other words, Erlenberger's protagonist experiences and reads her body as culturally inscribed in the sense that its biological make-up does not exist as 'pure matter' outside of societal norms and expectations. Erlenberger's account portrays the illness as a cultural one in which the female body acts as a kind of surface for the excessive inscription of and possible emancipation from normative femininity.[350]

[350] I am reading Erlenberger's report in the context of the then contemporary discourse on anorexia in which it was mainly understood as a mental disease, which also explains her admission to a mental institution. More recently, however, the understanding of anorexia has changed and nowadays, the medical sphere takes the physical changes and bodily adaptations to the illness into account. Some of these corporeal adjustments include, for example, transformations in the anorectic's metabolism, which has an impact on the food intake and the 'refeeding' phase, which entails that the recovery process not only requires psychological work but also needs to take physical alterations into account. See Polito et al. "Body composition changes in anorexia nervosa;" Agüera, Zaida et al. "Changes in Body Composition in Anorexia Nervosa: Predictors of Recovery and Treatment Outcome."

4.2 Cartesian Dualism

The understanding of the female body as culturally and societally produced complicates the Cartesian split between mind and body, in which the former is prioritized and valued since it is associated with culture and the latter is regarded as something alien that needs to be controlled and tamed since it is associated with nature. This dualist distinction is broken down in discussions of the body as formed and produced by societal expectations, since it undoes the strict nature-culture binary. Erlenberger's account describes the passage from the protagonist's experience of her body as controlled, and experienced as something alien, to a recognition of the societal forces being implicated in the construction and formation of her body, and finally to an understanding of her mind and body as one, continually influencing and amalgamating with each other. Early on, she writes "Mein Körper lag lose und doch starr. Er war wie getrennt von mir. Ich war leer, hohltönend und unendlich. Ein leerer Kopf, der mein ganzer Körper war und ein Loch darin, das war dieses Auge, das in einen Raum starrte, der gleich meinem hohlen Kopf war"[351] (Erlenberger 24). This quote strongly resonates with a Cartesian mind-body split, since the body is regarded as distinct from the mind. At the same time, it evokes a breakdown of that split since the border between mind and body seems to have dissolved by way of equating the head, i.e. the place of the mind, with the totality of her body. Near the end of her account, she conceives of her being as a unity of body and mind, or rather, she 're-embodies' the mind by adopting a biological understanding (mind as brain) in opposition to Descartes' immaterial mind: "Mein Körper und mein Geist ist [*sic*] die

[351] "My body was lying loosely and nevertheless stiff. It felt detached from me. I was empty, hollow-sounding, and infinite. An empty head, which was my whole body, with a hole in it, which was this eye that stared into a room, which was equal to my hollow head."

Ausgeburt meiner Gedanken. [...] Geist ist das Resultat der körperlichen Hirnfunktion"[352] (217-18). At this point, her reflections mirror an attempt at breaking down the binary between body and mind, but there is still a prevalent understanding of the power of thoughts and the importance of the brain and the will for the construction of one's identity.

The narrator takes her contemplation on the dissolution of the Cartesian split further and puts forward an understanding of being as a complete breakdown of boundaries and a state of fluidity:

> ich bewege meinen Körper – er ist eins – es ist Bewußtsein – es ist Auflösung der Grenzen, die eins vom anderen unterscheiden lassen. Ich muß nicht trennen, ich kann mich ganz sein lassen. Ganz nichts, ganz im Nichts. Das bin ich – das ist eins, mein Körper, mein Geist.
> Wenn Geist Energie ist, ist Körper in seinem kleinsten Aufbau dasselbe, also kein Gegensatz, sondern nur ein anderer Zustand derselben Sache. Denken heißt: Blutkreislauf – Stromkreislauf in Nervenbahnen – Energielauf ohne Bahnen – alle diese Schichten arbeiten gleichzeitig ...[353] (231)

The quote illustrates the extent to which Erlenberger's narrator has integrated a scientific understanding of the mind as embodied biological processes. Her text appears ahead of its time in the way it not only puts forward a poststructuralist understanding of the body, but also expands this conceptualization with an understanding of the body/brain as fluid and transformable but without denying its materiality. In this sense, her report recognizes the importance of taking biology into account, without reducing one's being to it, which is one of the main interests of this chapter. As biologist Lynda Birke in her 1999 study *Feminism*

[352] "My body and my mind is [*sic*] the spawn of my thoughts. [...] Mind is the result of the bodily brain function."
[353] "I move my body – my body is one – it's awareness – it is dissolution of boundaries which distinguish one thing from the other. I don't have to separate, I can let myself be complete. Totally nothing, complete in nothingness. This is me – this is one, my body, my mind. If mind is energy, body is the same thing in its smallest composition, thus no opposition but just a different state of the same thing. Thinking means: blood circulation – power circuit in the nerves – energy flow without pathways, all these layers are working simultaneously ..."

and the Biological Body has argued, it is not sufficient to critique biological determinism and replace it with social constructionism since this still maintains a nature-culture binary. Birke, with strong undertones of eco-feminism, calls for a recognition of a mutual influence, or rather, adaptation between organisms and their surroundings (21-22). Erlenberger's text presents itself as a forerunner to this understanding of the impossibility of strictly differentiating between body and mind/brain. Before delving further into the implications of this simultaneous interaction, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the initial description of experiencing the body as something that has to be controlled and as "alien to the disembodied subject position of the mind/self" (Malson 121).

4.3 Control

Erlenberger's text reveals the complex dynamic behind anorexia and the extent to which the question of control is an all-pervasive and prevalent one. This is not surprising given the fact that a closer look at the signification of thinness uncovers, according to Susan Bordo in her 1993 study *Unbearable Weight*, "deep associations with autonomy, will, discipline, conquest of desire, enhanced spirituality, purity, and transcendence of the female body" (*Unbearable Weight* 68). More generally, literature on corporeality and eating in the 1970s and 1980s reveals a focus on understanding anorexia as a means of reclaiming control by disciplining the body (Malson 121). In a detailed 1998 study of the discursive production of anorexia, social psychologist Helen Malson collects numerous examples that map out the "thin, anorexic body [...] as a controlled body, whilst conversely being overweight signifies a lack of self-control" (121). Erlenberger's protagonist frequently recounts this need for control: "Ich wollte die Kontrolle über meinen Körper haben, ich

teilte ihm nach meiner sonderbaren Vernunft die Nahrung zu und er mußte sein, wie ich es wollte. Er sollte schlank und beweglich bleiben. Er sollte schön sein. Er blieb es lange"[354] (50). At this point, her fasting process is still negotiated as an aesthetic undertaking, even though control already plays a significant role. Further reflections uncover an underlying meaning, however, namely the production of an identity through the act of fasting, with an understanding of one's sense of self being dependent on moulding one's body according to one's will:

> Ich wollte mein Bewußtsein hintergehen. Ich wollte das Nichts überlisten. Fasten war meine große Idee – essen meine Liebe. Fasten mein Geist, essen mein Körper, Hoffnung gab es für mich nicht, ich hatte, was ich wollte. Ein totes Gehirn und einen schönen Körper. [...] Ich war dem Chaos entwichen und hatte eine Lebensregel für mich gefunden, mit der ich mich im Nichts zurechtfand.[355] (50-51)

In this sense, the 'unruly' body[356] is perceived as a nuisance, associated with the "anorectic's *other* self – the self of the uncontrollable appetites, [...], the flabby will [...]" (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 154; emphasis in original).

The construction of gendered selves strongly plays into the experience of a sense of identity. The part of the self associated with will-power and control over the body is affiliated with masculinity, while the 'other' self that the protagonist attempts to undo is on the side of femininity. Bordo explains this dichotomy by arguing that anorexia uncovers a "fear and disdain for traditional female roles and social limitations" as well as a "deep fear

[354] "I wanted to be in control over my body. I allocated the food to it according to my peculiar reason and it had to be like I wanted it to be. My body had to be lean and flexible. It had to be beautiful. It remained beautiful for a long time."
[355] "I wanted to deceive my consciousness. I wanted to outwit the nothingness. Fasting was my big idea – eating my love. Fasting my mind, eating my body. There was no hope for me, I had what I wanted. A dead brain and a beautiful body. [...] I escaped from the chaos and found a rule of life for me, with which I oriented myself in the nothingness."
[356] I'm using the term 'unruly' with reference to Roxane Gay's work *Hunger*, which looks at weight, eating, and disciplining the body from the other side of the spectrum, i.e. obesity instead of anorexia.

of 'the Female,' with all its more nightmarish archetypal associations of voracious hungers and sexual insatiability" (*Unbearable Weight* 155). Exercising control over one's body is thus to be understood as a form of resistance and a way of creating a sense of identity for oneself, liberated from imposed societal expectations. At the same time, it uncovers the extent to which oppressive constructions of femininity are engrained in the protagonist who tries to distance herself from associations with the ravenous Female.

In opposition to fasting that is associated with the mind, eating is linked to the body, a menace to one's sense of self, something to be avoided at all costs:

> Das Fasten war hart. Die Zeit war so lang. Ich war ausgedörrt und so leer. Die Angst, doch zu essen, war groß. Ich durfte es auf keinen Fall, denn sonst bräche mein System zusammen und mein Leben geriete in heillose Unordnung. [...] Manchmal begann ich, von einer maßlosen Gier getrieben, doch wild in mich hineinzufressen, so als wollte ich schneller laufen. Davon vor meinem grausamen Plan, der mich zu verfolgen begann. Ich stand dann jedesmal vor einem erschöpften vollgefressenen Haufen Körper. Ich hatte das Spiel wieder einmal verloren. [...] Angst und Grauen vor mir selbst ließen mich aber von neuem gierig essen, damit ich dieses entsetzliche Gehirn loswerden könnte.
> Mein Körper blieb makellos, wie immer, nach dem Zusammenbruch schlüpfte ich wieder mühselig, aber sehnsüchtig in die vereiste Bahn meiner Lebensregel und das Fasten glich aus, was das Fressen auf die Dauer nicht halten konnte. Es glich mich aus.[357] (Erlenberger 55-56)

The act of eating voraciously is portrayed as something Other, as something uncontrollable, as destabilizing. This contrast is further intensified by the shift from "essen," a term

[357] "Fasting was tough. There was so much time. I was dried up and empty. The fear of eating nonetheless was big. I was by no means allowed to because if I did my whole system would collapse and my life would fall into utter chaos. Sometimes I began to wildly devour everything, as if driven by excessive greed, as if I wanted to run faster. Away from my gruesome plan, which had started to chase me. Afterwards, I found myself standing in front of an exhausted, stuffed heap of body every time. I once again had lost the game. [...] However, fear and horror of myself made me eat greedily once again so that I could rid myself of this horrific brain.
My body remained impeccable, as always, after the breakdown, I laboriously but longingly slipped into the icy track of my life rule again and fasting compensated for that which eating away could not provide in the long run. It balanced me."

associated with human beings and culture, to "fressen," a term applied to the act of eating in animals and possessing connotations of gluttony and lack of sophistication. Fasting is experienced as a counter pole to the 'unruly' eating. It is seen as the solution to the felt lack of control over one's life. Or, as Malson explains in terms of the pervading mind-body split: "As eruptive Other, the body threatens to overwhelm the self and to disrupt self-integrity. This discourse thereby discursively produces the need for control over the body and at the same time constructs 'control' as a form of war against the body" (124). This paradox illustrates the double bind of the crossroads of binary gender expectations. Since masculinity and femininity are constructed as mutually exclusive, this 'battle' between the two "tears the subject in two" (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 174).

4.4 Identity

Anorexia uncovers the struggle for a sense of identity that arises out of the "contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology of femininity" (Bordo, *Unbearable Weight* 172). Malson's study of anorexia and her conversations with people diagnosed as anorexic or self-identifying as anorexic mirrors the complex relationship of Erlenberger's protagonist to her illness. The account's central character both oscillates between and simultaneously embodies varying relationships to anorexia. The illness is experienced as a way of providing meaning to an otherwise empty life, but also as a very draining and tiring undertaking. There are numerous instances in the report which uncover the complex workings of identity formation with regard to an illness. Malson concludes from her findings that

> [a]norexia may be construed as something entirely dissociated from the self or as something that 'invades' and affects the self but that is simultaneously separate

> from the self. Alternatively it may be construed as an identity. [...] [T]he category of 'anorexia', [...] is a plural collectivity, signifying a multiplicity of shifting and often contradictory subjectivities. (145)

In Erlenberger's account, there is an almost simultaneous shift from an understanding of the act of hungering as a means of constructing an identity for oneself – "Das Hungern war zu meiner Person geworden"[358] (Erlenberger 74) – to a condition in which hungering takes over and controls one's being (Malson 145). Anorexia thus "becomes an excess of control, a form of control that is itself out of control" (145), which counters the understanding of an autonomous, managed sense of self:

> Ich hatte mir ein Gesetz gemacht. Das Hungern. Jetzt bin ich im Irrenhaus und niemand weiß, wie lange noch.
> Ich neige dazu, mich zu zwingen. Mich in meinem Zwinger, meinem Hirn zu fangen. Ich wollte ordnen, ich wollte mich nicht zum Chaos des Augenblicks bekennen. Ich wollte Sicherheit, wo Unsicherheit war. Ich wollte mich nicht. Ist das in Ordnung? Indem ich hungerte, war es meine Ordnung [...].[359] (Erlenberger 52)

The invocation of the law is crucial.[360] Making one's own law can be understood as an attempt to empower oneself in an oppressive, phallocentric order in which Woman is the Other, and in which there is no space for Woman to construct her own subject-position. However, the narrator then goes on to question herself, asking whether her reflections are "ok" and casting doubt on her previous assertion. Moreover, she uses the verb "zwingen" (*to force, to coerce*) in close proximity to the noun "Zwinger" (*kennel*), which implies that

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[358] "Starving became my being."
[359] "I made a law for myself. Hungering. Now I am in the madhouse and no one knows for how much longer. I tend to coerce myself. To catch myself in my kennel, my brain. I had the idea to not want to eat. I wanted to tidy up, I did not want to confess to the chaos of the moment. I wanted to replace insecurity with security. I did not want me. Is that ok? By hungering, it was my order."
[360] In the preceding paragraph, the narrator muses on the biblical story of Genesis and the apple of knowledge as the first law, wondering whether a return to paradise is possible after eating the forbidden fruit. She thus once again deconstructs the biblical creation myth and opens up a space for agency (see chapter 2, section 5.4 for more details).

asserting one's identity even as an empowering move remains bound to a set of pre-established social rules and norms.

The narrator's subjectivity is in constant negotiation with her illness that is "construed as a […] process that marks one's identity" (Malson 147) but a process that can take over and exceed one's agency as well as "indicate a concomitant negative construction of 'the self' as otherwise lacking an identity" (147). The teetering between her hungering – she uses the possessive pronoun with the noun – as identity-marker and identity-substitute is an integral part of her story: "Ich wußte, ich begann mit meinem Leben zu spielen. Ich bot alles, was ich hatte, mich selbst zum Einsatz. Ich hatte nichts zu verlieren außer mein Leben. Ich hatte nichts zu gewinnen außer mich selbst. Ich war es, aber ich wollte mich wieder. Wieder neu. Ich wollte mich wiedergewinnen. Mein Einsatz war mein Leben"[361] (Erlenberger 49-50). Anorexia is experienced as a means to establish a sense of self, almost like the shedding of an old skin,[362] or old sense of self, of creating a subjectivity that is more one's own and that seems to be more of a reflection of one's own self-image instead of being a mirror of societal expectations. The narrator affirms this construction by pondering on what the underlying reason for the hungering was:

> Oder war ich ganz einfach nicht imstande, ein „normales" Leben zu führen. Vielleicht bin ich es nie imstande. Ich bin nicht imstande, ein Leben zu führen außerhalb des meinen. Mein Leben ist für mich das Normale. [...] Ich gab mir Antwort auf mein Suchen nach mir selbst, auf ungewöhnlichen Wegen. Auf einsamen Wegen, da lernt man sich hören, denn da ist nichts, außer ich selbst.[363] (80)

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[361] "I knew that I began to gamble with my life. I offered everything I had, I gave myself up for a bid. I had nothing to lose except for my life. I had nothing to win except myself. It was me, but I wanted to have myself again. New again. I wanted to win myself back. My bid was my life."

[362] The experience of anorexia is in this sense similar to the process of identity-construction in Verena Stefan's *Häutungen*.

[363] "Or was I maybe just not able to lead a "normal" life. Or maybe I will never be able to do that. I am not able to lead a life beyond my life. My life is that which is normal for me. [...] I

Implicit in these reflections is an awareness of the confining societal norms that are imposed on the individual in order to be given the status as a subject.

In addition, Erlenberger's report deconstructs oppressive gender binaries numerous times and dissects the relationship between pre-given societal roles and their implication in one's recognition as subject:

> Hier trennt man nicht zwischen weiblich und männlich, hier heißt der Überbegriff „Irr." Hier hat jeder den gleichen Anspruch auf Irresein. Die Männer sind hier den Frauen gegenüber nicht bevorteilt. Jeder erfüllt die Erwartungen, die man in seine Krankheit setzt. [...]
> Hinter der dicken Mauer, hinter Gittern, hinter verschlossenen Türen, da gibt es die Freiheit vom anderen Geschlecht, hier gibt es die freiwillige Einsamkeit, ohne Alternative. Im normalen Leben wird man, weil soviel auf Vorbilder gehalten wird, gezwungen, ein Ich zu seinem Ich dazuzunehmen. Man darf eigentlich nicht allein bleiben. Jeder zwingt sich dazu, weil er sonst nicht normal ist. Hier muß man diese Erwartung nicht erfüllen. Hier muß man die männliche oder weibliche Rolle nicht spielen. Hier ist man sich selbst Vorbild, und es sieht ein leeres Auge in ein leeres Auge und das sind zwei, dich ich in meinem Gesicht habe.[364] (104)

The passage thematizes the liberation from gender expectation through one's illness while also pointing to the expectations of behaving according to one's illness, which is initially described as merely another form of an imposed subjectivity. However, the narrator goes on to muse about the emancipatory aspect of being able to shed oneself of the role one has

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gave answers to my search for myself, in unconventional ways. On lonely pathways, you learn to hear yourself because there is nothing besides me, myself."

[364] "Here, one does not separate between feminine and masculine. Here, the umbrella term is "crazy." Here, everybody is equally entitled to insanity. Here, the men are not advantaged compared with the women. Everybody meets the expectations that come along with their illness. [...]
Behind a thick wall, behind bars, behind locked doors, that is where there is freedom from the other gender. Here, one has voluntary loneliness, without alternatives. In normal life, since so much value is assigned to role models, one is forced to add an I to one's I. One is not really allowed to stay alone. Everybody forces themselves to do so since otherwise one is not considered normal. Here, one does not have to fulfill these expectations. Here, one does not have to play the masculine or the feminine role. Here, one is one's own role model, and one empty eye looks into another empty eye and there are two, which I have in my face."

to fulfill in society. She thus approaches an understanding of her subjectivity, one that she would conceive of as beyond normative gender expectations. The reference to two empty eyes looking at each other in one face implies the possibility of the narrator liberating herself from the gaze of others and seeing herself outside of societal norms. Finally, the invocation of emptiness could be read as the fabrication of a cleansed space, which allows for the construction of a self-determined subject-position.

To summarize, anorexia serves as a means to, if not uncover, then rather create a sense of self for the narrator. This sense of self is one which first has to be erected in an isolated space after having undone the culturally imposed identify and only from there can it be taken back into society, where it is meant to withstand the intrusion of once again oppressive norms and allow for a more autonomous, but nevertheless connected existence. Thus, without anorexia she would still have a sense of identity but it would be experienced as a distorted, disowned sense of self. The space of alterity that she finds in both her illness and her stay in the mental institution thus serves as a necessary step in her process of subject formation. It is however not a space in which she will reside 'forever,' but is rather marked by providing a transient location which enables her to work through her construction of subjectivity, inter alia, via writing.

4.5 Latent Schizophrenia

Analyzing the role of writing in the creation of an autonomous subject position, the literary scholar Sigrid Weigel coined the term 'latent schizophrenia' in the 1980s that she applies to Erlenberger's report and which she defines in the following way:

> Die Anteile von ‚Weiblichkeit', die Frauen moralisches Ansehen verleihen und die auch die Utopie einer *anderen* Lebensweise in sich bergen (Sensibilität, Verständnis-

> und Liebesfähigkeit, Sozialverhalten, Konkretheit, Nähe etc.). begründen gerade ihren gesellschaftlichen Ort als Unterlegene. Und die herrschenden Frauenbilder und Weiblichkeitsmuster stehen in einem eklatanten Widerspruch zur sozialen und psychischen Realität von Frauen. Diese Widersprüche sind als Risse[365] in die weibliche Identität eingeschrieben. Mit der Geschwätzigkeit des hysterischen, magersüchtigen oder depressiven Körpers verschaffen sich nun Frauen, die in der männlichen Ordnung zum Schweigen verurteilt sind, Gehör. Doch diese ‚Sprache' zerstört mit den alten Bildern auch die Persönlichkeit der Redenden selbst. Am Körper der Frau, dem Repräsentationsort von ‚Weiblichkeit', wird die Ent-Täuschung notiert und ausagiert.[366] ("Stimme der Medusa" 115; emphasis in original)

In short, 'latent schizophrenia' is the condition resulting from a compliance to the concealed implications of normative femininity for the actual societal position of women in the patriarchal order. For example, fulfilling the role of mother entails societal approval for women, given that motherhood is attained and acted out within the dominant societal framework. But at the same time, this role will place women in an inferior position since their subjectivity is inseparable from that role and itself requires numerous norms, which entail a perpetual consolidation of the inferior societal standing by limiting options for mobility both in the literal and figurative senses. Weigel's concept gets to the heart of the experience of femininity as a gap between one's own image and the image others see or construct. It is then quite interesting, or rather, problematic that the medical community's

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[365] Weigel's use of the term "Risse" (*ruptures*) is reminiscient of Fournier's use of the term 'lesions.' See chapter 2, section 4.

[366] "The parts of 'femininity,' which bestow moral prestige upon women and which also hold the utopia of a *different* way of life (sensibility, acumen and capacity for love, social behavior, concreteness, closeness, etc.), are exactly that which establish her societal place as defeated. And the dominant images of women and patterns of femininity stand in stark contrast to the social and mental reality of women. These contradictions are inscribed into female identity as ruptures. By means of the chattiness of the hysterical, anorexic, or depressed body, women, who are condemned to silence in the male order, now find their voices. But this 'language' not only destroys the old images but it also destroys the personality of the speaking subject. The 'Ent-Täuschung' (word play between undoing ["Ent-"] deception ["Täuschung"] and disappointment ["Enttäuschung"]) is being recorded and acted out on the female body, the locus of representation of 'femininity.'"

official diagnosis for Erlenberger's narrator is schizophrenia:[367] "'Wissen Sie, sie sind schizophren.' Ich bestätigte ihm das gern und war nicht im geringsten erstaunt über seine Diagnose"[368] (Erlenberger 38). This quote reads as if the narrator were indeed, at least to a certain extent, quite consciously aware of the connection between her illness and the mental condition that arises from pressures to fulfill normative femininity (Weigel, "Stimme der Medusa" 113).

In a recent extensive study of the relationship between illness and gender, philosophy professor Bettina Zehetner offers a similar analysis of the hidden and concealed destructive effects of the demands of femininity. Citing the work of British cultural theorist Angela McRobbie, Zehetner argues that "[h]eute wird von jungen Frauen verlangt, Autonomie und die Möglichkeit zum Erfolg mit einer Mittäterschaft in einer patriarchalen Geschlechterordnung in Einklang zu bringen, 'die aufgelöst, dezentralisiert und nirgends zu sehen ist' (McRobbie 2010, 163) und dennoch vielfältige diskriminierende Wirkungen entfaltet."[369] (Zehetner 162). Zehetner's claim, echoing Michel Foucault's theory of the functioning of power, both mirrors and expands the concept of latent schizophrenia, explicitly describing the required complicity of women to the patriarchal order, thus complicating the dynamics of resistance to oppressive structures. This complicity means that attempts to incarnate accepted femininity can lead to illness, both mental and physical (162). In order to be recognized as a subject, to attain the status of an intelligible subject, a

[367] For more information on the medical diagnosis of schizophrenia with regard to the report's narrator, see Sukrow "Sich zum Verschwinden bringen" 185.
[368] "'You know, you're schizophrenic.' I happily confirmed that and I was not in the least bit surprised by his diagnosis."
[369] "Today, young women are required to reconcile autonomy and opportunities to be successful with a complicity in a patriarchal social order, 'which is dissolved, de-centralized, and nowhere visible' and nevertheless takes diverse discriminatory effects."

woman must embody all the contradictory and repressive expectations that come with ideal femininity.

4.6 Anorexia as Cultural Disorder

Anorexia, according to Weigel, is a refusal to internalize these norms that takes the form of overly performing them.[370] By excessively complying with the ideal of the beautiful, thin, desirable woman, the anorexic woman destroys this image on her own body, by literally getting it out of her hair, or rather, her body (Weigel, "Stimme der Medusa" 114): "Ich hätte die beste Karikatur eines Modells unseres Modegeschmacks abgegeben"[371] (Erlenberger 53) or "Ich war viel zu elegant geworden, um die damit verbundenen Vorstellungen zu erfüllen"[372] (95) are just a few examples of when the narrator explicitly refers to gender expectations. The element of resistance within the discourse of anorexia can be found in both personal accounts and social analysis more generally. As Susan Bordo explains: "Virtually every proposed hallmark of 'underlying psychopathology' in eating disorders has been deconstructed to reveal a more widespread *cultural* disorder" (*Unbearable Weight* 55; emphasis in original). No longer an individual pathology, anorexia becomes a sign of society's inability to reverse or question its own norms.

Anorexia is not however a rejection of becoming Woman; rather, it is a refusal of a very narrow dominant and repressive image of ideal femininity (Zehetner 163-64). One way to understand anorexia is thus as an "Ausbruchsversuch und Verweigerung der

[370] Excessive compliance resulting in a possible destruction of societal expectations is of course also a prevalent feature in Elfriede Jelinek's writing.
[371] "I would have passed as an excellent caricature of a model of our fashion taste."
[372] "I had become way too elegant for fulfilling the expectations relating thereto."

'inneren Kolonialisierung', Zurichtung und Enteignung des Körpers"[373] since the "Körper der Frau gehört ihr nicht, obwohl sie über ihn definiert wird"[374] (164). This bodily resistance to cultural norms plays a significant role in the experience of the body and hungering in Erlenberger's report. Even though her illness can and should not be reduced to a simple reaction to ideals of thinness, these normative exigencies for the female body play a role in her sickness's trajectory. There is a continuous double gaze since the norms of society are omnipresent and inescapable.[375] Zehetner speaks of a mechanism of self-assessment and self-debasement (164), which can frequently be found in Erlenberger's narrative:

> Als ich mit meinem Kind noch das Bad aufgesucht hatte, habe ich gesehen, wie sie aßen. Sie aßen alles, was die Kinder nicht aßen, [...]. Die Mütter in den bunten Bikinis wälzten sich auf den Handtüchern in Blätterteig, Hühnerfett und Schnitzeln mit Mayonnaisesalat. Sie taten es so ausgiebig und so stetig.
> Ich trocknete in der Sonne mein dürres Fleisch und begann zu knistern. Die Sonne schläferte mich oft ein. Sie ernährte mich, aber sie erschöpfte mich auch. Ich sah die Frauen neben mir essen, sie sahen mich nicht essen. Ich tat es nicht. Nur manchmal gönnte ich mir einen Schluck Wasser. Ich hatte keinen Schweiß. Ich war staubtrocken. Sie unterhielten sich in ihrer Langeweile über Diätvorschriften, über Nahrungsmittel und wenig Kalorien. Ich hielt mich an keine Diät, sondern ich hatte auch die Diät aus meinem Leben verbannt. Wenn mich die Frauen, die so faul wie Möpse dalagen und Langeweile hatten, betrachteten, wurden sie ein wenig stutzig, konnte ich bemerken. Mein Anblick schien sie in ihren Diätvorschlägen und Bemühungen zu irritieren. Diätvorhaben und meine Figur, das schien in ihren Köpfen auf irgendeinen Widerstand zu stoßen.[376] (114-15)

[373] "attempt to break out [of] and reject the 'inner colonialization,' shaping and expropriating the body."
[374] "woman's body does not belong to her even though she is defined by it."
[375] The experience of a double consciousness in the spirit of W.E.B. Du Bois can also be seen as playing a role in the experience of the anorexic woman.
[376] "When I still went to the public pool with my child, I saw how they ate. They ate everything that the kids did not eat [...]. The mothers in their colorful bikinis rolled around in puff pastry, chicken fat, and schnitzel with mayonnaise salad on the towels. They did it so very copiously and steadily.
I dried my dry flesh in the sun and I started to crackle. The sun often lulled me to sleep. It nourished me but it also thoroughly exhausted me. I saw the women eating next to me, they saw me not eating. I didn't do it. Only sometimes I treated myself to a sip of water. I had no

This passage clearly illustrates the double gaze for women. Judging the women around her, whom she constructs as 'unruly' bodies, wallowing in food and excessively fleshy, she highlights the stark contrast with her own body. The reference to the chicken fat and mayonnaise draws a strict line between these women's greasiness and moisture and her own dry flesh. She portrays these women as mindlessly reproducing social feminine norms with their discussion of dietary restrictions and boredom. Through her experience of hungering, she has attained a greater and deeper emptiness that exceeds talk of diets and calories and constant fretting about weight loss. The other women's perplexity and rejection as they gaze at her demonstrate the exaggeration of normative femininity. As Zehetner explains, the anorectic woman, in a caricatural manner, represents images of femininity in their conflictual contradictoriness, which uncovers their constructedness as a result of the patriarchal gaze (165). The problematic and paradoxical requirements of femininity are thus uncovered via hyperbole and over-doing of norms.

4.7 Isolation and Subject-Formation

What this passage further reveals is the narrator's creation of her own world, distinct from that of others. It also shows some of the reasons underlying Erlenberger's writing of the self that draws on (problematic) ideals of autonomy and individualism and sheds more light on why she is less able to break away from that individualistic paradigm.

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sweat. I was dust-dry. In their boredom, they talked about dietary restrictions, about food products and low calories. I did not keep a diet, I did not have to. I did not keep a diet, but I rather had banished even the diet from my life. When the women, who were lying there lazily like pugs and were bored, looked at me, I was able to remark that they were taken aback a bit. The sight of me seemed to confuse and annoy them in their suggestions and efforts for dietary regimens. Dietary projects and my figure seemed to meet with resistance in their heads."

According to Zehetner, this formation of a 'hungerworld' serves the function of shielding the anorexic against the unbearable reality of others (166). The way the narrator distances herself from the other women and her account of why she 'took up' hungering strongly support the thesis of anorexia as a defense against an unbearable lived experience. However, as Weigel concisely argues, the protest against norms of femininity can take on self-destructive forms ("Stimme der Medusa" 113). Frequently, the parties concerned by these forms of resistance simultaneously isolate themselves and minimize or deny the gravity and life-threatening consequences of their illness (Zehetner 166). As argued before, Erlenberger's protagonist's experience is shaped by an accompanying feeling of control and the conviction that eating is unnecessary, as the authority over what is being allowed into her body is hers.

Concurrent to the self-destructive and health- or life-threatening aspects of anorexia, there is the component of subject-formation. As Zehetener explains, anorexia can be understood as a "Abwehrmaßnahme zur Erhaltung des existenziell von Fragmentierung bedrohten Selbst [...]. Hier enthüllen sich die der Magersucht inhärenten emanzipatorischen Aspekte zur Erlangung von Ich-Identität und selbstbestimmter Weiblichkeit"[377] (166-67), thus defying the objectifying, devouring, and annihilating gaze of the patriarchal subject. Erlenberger's narrator expresses on numerous occasions this aspect of re-appropriation, of "Wiederaneignung des Enteigneten"[378] (Zehetner 167): "Nur mein Körper und meine Langsamkeit, die wurden zur Attraktion. Immer öfter sprachen mich Nachbarn an: ‚Sie haben doch immer sehr gut ausgesehen, sie sind jetzt so schlank!'

[377] "defence mechanism intended to maintain the self, which is existentially threated by fragmentation [...]. Here, the emancipatory aspects which are inherent to anorexia come to light, which serve the acquisition of a self-identity and self-determined femininity."
[378] "reappropriation of the expropriated."

[...] [I]ch war einmal recht hübsch anzusehen gewesen, das meinten sie mit sehr gut aussehen, und jetzt wurde ich häßlicher und häßlicher“[379] (Erlenberger 121). A few pages later, she becomes more specific with regard to first the de(con)struction of the objectifying gaze, and the consequential creation of an autonomous self: “Ich wollte ja dieses Gesicht, dieses eingefallene, das man nicht mehr hübsch finden konnte, er war für mich meines und ich stand zu ihm“[380] (129). In her undertaking of subject-formation, the novel’s narrator recounts the complex dynamic of a woman’s suffering under contradictory societal gender expectations, which is mirrored in an ambivalence between adaptation and resistance, between desperately wanting to be invisible and longingly wanting to be visible[381] (Zehetner 167).

5. Caroline Muhr’s *Depressionen*

5.1 Introduction

While anorexia can be analyzed as a visible resistance to oppressive norms via an excess of compliance with these norms and a re-appropriation of selfhood, the question of depression as illness plays out in different ways. Caroline Muhr’s diary is an account of her mental state and her concomitant health condition. The journal’s narrator does not understand and recount her depression as a mere mental state, but details the interrelatedness and interaction between her mental and physical ill health. Similar to

[379] “It was only my body and my slowness which became an attraction. More and more often, my neighbors approached me saying: ‘But you always looked so good, now you are so thin!’ [...] I used to be very pretty to look at is what they mean when they say ‘looking good,’ and now I am becoming more and more ugly.”
[380] “I wanted this face, this hollow one, that one could no longer find pretty. It was mine and I stuck with it.”
[381] Note the collection of essays on gender in autobiographical texts with the fitting title “sichtbar unsichtbar” (*visibly invisible*), in which Sukrow’s chapter was published.

Erlenberger's report and representative of the socio-historical context of 1970s feminism in Europe, the diary demonstrates a remarkable clear-sightedness about the protagonist's role in a patriarchal society and the destructive and confining expectations that come with it. Muhr's records of the numerous troublesome relationships with doctors, their inability to appropriately diagnose and treat her malady, as well as the painful experiences in various institutions mirror the anti-psychiatry movement of her time. She recounts how the medical community looks for the origin of her illness in the wrong places, namely in the ones that correspond to their expectations of femininity, an approach that is undoubtedly doomed to failure.

5.2 Gendered Illness

Reminiscent of Freud's frequent misdiagnoses,[382] the doctors do not look for reasons for Muhr's protagonist's condition beyond the normative expectations of marriage and motherhood: "Was im Leben einer Frau spielt schon eine Rolle außer Ehe, Kinder oder Liebesverhältnis"[383] (Muhr 65). The diarist accurately identifies the societal and cultural gender norms at play in medical diagnoses:

> Bei einem Mann ist das natürlich etwas anderes. Da steht ein ganzes Universum von Krankheitsursachen offen, angefangen vom Versagen im Beruf bis zur metaphysischen Verzweiflung, da gibt es auch Lebensüberdruß, die nagende Trauer über das Schicksal der Menschheit und die Unfähigkeit es zu ändern, subtile und sublime Dinge, mit denen unsereins in seiner weiblichen Beschränktheit erst gar nicht in Berührung kommt.[384] (65-66)

[382] See, for example, Webster *Why Freud Was Wrong: Sin, Science, And Psychoanalysis* for more details on Freud's, by now famous, misdiagnoses.
[383] "What else could play a role in a woman's life besides marriage, children, or a love affair."
[384] "Of course, that's a completely different thing for a man. There you have a whole universe of causes of illness at your disposal, from failure in the job to metaphysical desperation, you also have weariness of life, a gnawing sorrow with regard to humanity's

This passage shows how the narrator is clearly aware of gender's role in differing constructions of mental illness. According to Westerbeek and Mutsaer, there are two predominant conceptions of depression since the nineteenth century, one being "a romantic version of depression," which is regarded as sublime and denominated as melancholia and which has been "reserved for men" (26-27). This exalted version, which Muhr's diarist very explicitely refers to in the above passage, stands in stark contrast to a much more "banal image of depression," which "stigmatizes because it devalues the sufferer by designating her as a weak-willed, oversensitive boor" (27). Not only is there a gap in the perception of depression, but there is also a significant divide in the construction of causes and what is conceived as 'normal' and healthy behaviour in itself.

Zehetner sums up the all-too-known understanding of "typical feminine" traits as passive, empathetic, altruistic, and emotional (236) – all traits which generally are obstructive to professional careers, which would potentially provide opportunities outside the domestic sphere and its limitations. According to Zehetner, health can be defined as "Zustand optimaler Leistungsfähigkeit eines Individuums für die wirksame Erfüllung der Rollen und Aufgaben, für die es sozialisiert worden war"[385] (236). This understanding of health is key to the world inhabited by Muhr's diarist and plays a decisive role in her suffering since her existence as Other can be identified as one major source of her illness. As Zehetner explains, "[a]ls Kriterium für psychische Gesundheit werden Eigenschaften und Verhaltensmuster von im patriarchal-kapitalistischen Sinne 'psychisch gesunden

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destiny and the inability to change it. Subtle and sublime things, which the likes of us in our female stupidity do not even come in contact with."

[385] "condition of optimal performance capacity of an individual for the effective fulfillment of the roles and tasks for which s/he had been socialized."

Männern' herangezogen, womit spezifische Erfahrungen und Verhaltensformen von Frauen ignoriert oder als Norm-Abweichung dargestellt werden"[386] (236-37). This explanation not only points to the larger norm of cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, white masculinity, but also serves to highlight the extent to which the medical apparatus' failure in Muhr's diary is symptomatic. Time and again, Muhr's journal describes the kind of experience critiqued by Zehetner in which the medical community is unable to listen to its female patients and offers flimsy or mis-diagnoses, such as "vegetative dystonia:"

> Dr. Henrich spricht immer noch von Vegetativer Dystonie, [...]. Er ist ein guter Internist. Er horcht mein Herz ab, tastet gewissenhaft meinen Bauch ab, drückt auf meine Schilddrüse, guckt unermüdlich in meinen Rachen, verschreibt Librium, Omca, Melival und stellt abschließend fest, daß es mir später, wenn dieser Zustand erst einmal vorüber sei, sehr gut gehen werde.
> Was aber ist dieser Zustand? Dieser Zustand, in dem ich gefangen bin wie in einer Zelle mit grauen, einmal auseinanderweichenden, dann sich wieder zusammenziehenden Wänden, ohne Fenster, ohne Türen, erfüllt von einer schrecklichen Lautlosigkeit, die meine Stimme unhörbar macht. Auch Heinz hält sich daran, daß dieser Zustand nichts anderes als ein Symptom der Vegetativen Dystonie sei. Aber ich weiß, daß es etwas anderes ist als die Vegetative Dystonie.[387] (Muhr 10)

The narrator's description is not only strongly reminiscent of accounts of hysteria around the turn of the century, but also includes a powerful reference to her voicelessness in a patriarchal society and a male-centered medical sphere. Dr. Henrich is described as the

[386] "characteristics and behavioral patterns, of what in a patriarchal-capitalistic sense is understood as 'psychologically healthy men,' are used as a criterium for psychological health, which leads to specific experiences and behavioral patterns of women being ignored or portrayed as deviation from the norm."

[387] "Dr. Henrich still speaks of vegetative dystonia, [...]. He is a good internist. He auscultates my heart, he conscientiously strobes my stomach, presses on my thyroids, incessantly looks into my throat, prescribes Librium, Omca, Melival, and concludes that later, once this condition is over, I'll feel much better.
But what is this condition? This condition in which I am trapped like in a cell with gray walls that at times expand, at other times contract, without windows, without doors, filled with a terrifying noiselessness, which renders my voice inaudible. Heinz also thinks that this condition is nothing else than a symptom of vegetative dystonia. But I know that it is something different than vegetative dystonia."

archetypal doctor, who foregoes talking to his patient and as the 'good internist' focuses on trying to find answers by treating her physical symptoms. According to Lynda Birke, "tactile examination of the patient, to investigate parts of his or her body, began to dominate medical consultations; indeed, the interaction became less of a consultation, as the opinion of the patients themselves became less important" (57). The act of listening is thus replaced with a fragmented examination of various body parts, a shift that further entails a perception of the body "as mechanism, as a system of separable parts" (61). Moreover, these clear demarcations enforce the delimitation between sick and healthy as well as the ensuing dichotomy between normal and pathological (57).

5.3 Illness/Health; Normalcy/Insanity

In addition to identifying the gendering of depression, the narrator at numerous times poses and ponders on the question of what is considered normal and healthy and what is considered insane or ill:

> Dieser Zustand der seelischen Gesundheit erscheint mir zwar angenehmer, aber viel verrückter als mein eigener. Wenn man es nur einen einzigen Augenblick lang fertigbringt, die Verhältnisse dieser Welt einigermaßen klar und deutlich zu übersehen, dann muß man verrückt sein, um so zu leben wie die anderen: ohne Angst, mit Appetit, mit ungestörter Nachtruhe, mit dem Drang, sich fortzupflanzen, mit Aufgaben, die man für wichtig hält.[388] (Muhr 11)

This quote, which has even been used on the book's back cover in lieu of a description, is a striking deconstruction of fixed definitions of the opposition between illness and health. It thereby challenges the construction of the binary and uncovers the necessity for the

[388] "This condition of mental health seems more pleasant, albeit way more crazy than my own. If one manages to more or less rationally survey the affairs of this world for only a single moment, one has to be crazy if wanting to live like the others: without fear, with appetite, with undisturbed nighttime peace, with the urge to procreate, with tasks one considers important."

maintenance of the dichotomy while at the same time opening up and blurring the demarcations. What the diarist's course of disease moreover shows is what Zehetner explains in the following words:

> So wie es viele Arten von „Krankheit" gibt, gibt es auch viele Arten von „Gesundheit." Die Anpassung an krankmachende Lebensumstände kann krank machen, auch wenn die entsprechenden Verhaltensweisen als gesund gelten, umgekehrt kann die Verweigerung einer solchen Anpassung ein Zeichen für Gesundheit sein, obwohl sie häufig als Krankheit definiert wird.[389] (235–36)

This explanation echoes elements of Weigel's concept of latent schizophrenia and perfectly captures what the diarist in *Depressionen* experiences first hand. On multiple occasions, she talks about how doctors and her husband, Heinz, expect her to feel remorse due to the fact that she cheated on her spouse and how they regard or explain her lack of remorse as a possible cause of her depression. Weigel talks about ruptures inscribed in women's identity, which are a result of the utter divide between their experience and society's expectations of femininity. These ruptures are also visible in Muhr's report:

> Die zwei Jahre waren eine Kette von Lügen und Heimlichkeiten. Sie waren ein Verrat an einer Ehe und an einem Menschen. Aber sie waren kein Verrat an mir selber. Vielleicht sollte ich dieser Einsicht wegen, die mir jetzt, fünf Jahre nach der Trennung, immer gewisser wird, verzweifelt sein, denn zeugt sie nicht von einer Schizophrenie, in der zwei getrennte und sich einander widersprechende Bewußtseins- und Bewertungsebenen zu einer sich verhängnisvoll auswirkenden Zerstörung der Integrität führen? Oder ist gerade dieses Nebeneinanderexistieren die mir eigene Form der Integrität?[390] (54)

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[389] "Just like there are many kinds of 'illness,' there are also many kinds of 'health.' Adaptation to morbid living conditions can be sickening, even though the corresponding behavior is considered as healthy. Conversely, the refusal of such an adaptation can be a sign of health even though it is oftentimes defined as illness."

[390] "The two years were a chain of lies and secrecies. They were a betrayal of a marriage and of a human being. But they were no betrayal of myself. Maybe I should be desperate because of this insight, which is now, five years after the break-up, becoming more and more clear. Does this insight not attest to a schizophrenia, in which two separate and contradictory levels of consciousness and valuation lead to a disastrous destruction of integrity? Or is it exactly this parallel existence which is my very own form of integrity?"

Much like Weigel's concept of latent schizophrenia and anorexia, this passage illustrates the battle of contradictory societal exigencies and individual sentiments that plays out in being Woman. Weigel rightfully points out that Muhr's diary is more concerned with a general questioning of the concept of normalcy than with a very overt gender critique ("Stimme der Medusa" 34). Nevertheless, there are frequent mentions of the demands of normative femininity and the difficulties in attempting to be a modern, independent, emancipated woman. One notable, direct mention of a protest against normative expectations of femininity is the diarist's refusal to procreate: "Meine freiwillige Unfruchtbarkeit ist der einzige Protest gegen dieses Leben, den ich zu leisten imstande bin"[391] (Muhr 90–91). Her active and conscious rejection of motherhood is reminiscient of Jelinek's subversion of the idealization of motherhood. Muhr's protagonist from the start refuses to ascribe life-giving features to her body, while Jelinek's characters either reverse this by taking life or by wishing to obliterate it. Both writers thus engage with the problematic ambivalence concomitant to the societal recognition and expectation of motherhood.

5.4 The Body in Pain

Aside from these rare moments of autonomy and control, Muhr's text recounts the tormented life of the protagonist whose pain is largely caused by her mental illness but does include experiences of corporeal pain and suffering.[392] Drawing on Elaine Scarry's

[391] "My voluntary infertility is the only protest I am able to perform against this life."
[392] While Scarry and Fournier speak mainly of what is considered physical pain, I argue that their claims can also be applied to the pain of mental illness since I do not support a dualist hierarchy of physical over emotional pain and consider it indispensable to recognize the validity of psychological suffering.

work on the body in pain, Valérie Fournier explains the double mechanism of pain: "first, it dissolves the self and the world, and, second, it magnifies the sentience of the body. In pain, the body becomes a colossal mass of flesh that ensnares the self and the world; one becomes at once empty (of a self, of meaning) and an excess (of flesh)" (63). Muhr's protagonist repeatedly describes how she is disintegrating and deflating:

> Was wissen sie von der Angst und Düsternis, die nicht mitteilbar ist, die in Tabellen nicht eingefangen werden kann, die durch alle Eingeweide und Adern und Drüsen und Sinne kriecht? Alle Restbestände von dem, was die Menschen Tapferkeit und Willenskraft nennen, werden ausgelöscht. Ich bin ein Wesen, das die erstickenden Atemzüge der Beklemmung ausstößt, die Schweißtropen der Todesangst absondert, noch ehe es im Sterben liegt, ein Wesen, das nicht mehr essen und trinken und keinen Menschen mehr sehen will. […] ein Wesen, dessen Qual nur einen Brennpunkt hat: das übermächtige Verlangen, nicht mehr zu sein, niemals gewesen zu sein[393] (125).

This passage underscores the material impact the mental illness has on the protagonist, describing the intertwined experience of suffering of the body and the mind. On that account, Fournier's adoption of Scarry's argument can be taken one step further to surpass the strictly corporeal focus with regard to the repercussions of pain: "Pain ruptures attachment to the world for pain has no external referent; it is unshareable and makes us retreat to self-isolation, […] pain makes us shrink into the body. Pain is characterized by its overwhelming presence and totality, it destroys everything (the world, the self)" (63–64). While Fournier's assertion that "other states of consciousness (feelings, emotions, self) are for something, or about something that makes us extend outside the boundaries of the

[393] "What do they know about the fear and somberness, which is not communicable, which cannot be captured in tables, which crawls through all intestines and veins and glands and senses? All remainders of that which people call bravery and willpower are wiped out. I am a being which emits the suffocating gasps of anxiety, which secretes the drops of sweat of fear of death even before it is dying, a being which does no longer want to eat or drink or see other people […] a being, whose torment has one focal point: the overpowering desire to no longer be, to never have been."

body" (63) could be used as a counter-argument to a reading of depression as embodied pain, the textual example above demonstrates that the protagonist does not experience an 'extension beyond bodily boundaries' but rather a withdrawal into the body. Her experience of unshareability is overwhelming and omnipresent and she deconstructs the medical apparatus's attempt to render pain communicable by pointing out the uselessness of tables and charts when it comes to the experience of all-encompassing suffering. In Muhr, there is never a clear distinction between strictly corporeal pain and psychological suffering. The binary cannot be drawn since for her, one affects the other. She explicitly talks about the "Fleisch meiner Seele"[394] (Muhr 127), and ascribes organ status to her consciousness: "Mein Bewußtsein erwacht, [...] wie ein bloßgelegtes Organ, überempfindlich und allen schmerzhaften Einprägungen ausgeliefert"[395] (52).

Muhr's diary exemplifies how pain leads to an unmaking of one's sense of self, which entails feelings of fear and anxiety, all of which make up her suffering. Even though pain is something more tangible than anxiety and fear, they are interrelated because of the destabilizing component of pain. The threefold experience of the body in pain is captured in the diarist's visceral reaction to the dietary offering in the first sanatorium, for instance. The raw food that is prescribed to the patients for its supposed health-promoting effects leads to diarrhoea and pain-troubled stomachs. Diarrhoea epitomizes all the components of the body in pain: it effects a literal emptying out – an expulsion of digestive materials which leads to weight loss – as well as a figurative effacement – with the pain making the body overly present, transforming the subject into a mass of hurting flesh – and finally it includes

[394] "flesh of my soul."
[395] "My consciousness awakens [...] like an exposed organ, hypersensitive and delivered to all painful imprints."

the repulsive aspect of the abject – because diarrhoea is experienced as disgusting, rendering the nauseating corporeal aspects all too visible and sentient.[396]

5.5 Effacement and Excess of Femininity

The experience of pain thus entails an unmaking of one's sense of self. The notion of unmaking, of an effacement, also plays a decisive role in *Depressionen*'s description of the onset of the protagonist's illness: "Mit einer Nichtigkeit fing es an. Ich hatte in einer eiligen Sonderausgabe unseres Informationsblattes das Wort 'nicht' im letzten Satz der Rede John F. Kennedys ausgelassen, der Rede, die er nicht mehr halten konnte, weil er tot war"[397] (Muhr 5). She is singling out this moment of omission as the onset of her mental health's demise. It is noteworthy that the inception of her (mental) body in pain is brought into relation with John F. Kennedy's dying body in pain, which resulted in not just the unmaking of the self but also the unmaking of his being. In addition to this relationality, the emphasis on the concept of negation is essential. Not only did she leave out the differentiating word "nicht" (*not*), but she also states that it all started with a "Nichtigkeit" (*nullity*). Through the pain of her depression, she is confronted with feelings of effacement due to the severing of attachments to the world.

On the other side of the (de)construction of femininity as effacement or emptiness is the notion of monstrosity, of excess of hurting flesh and its relation to femininity, which is exemplified in the protagonist's fellow patient, whom she describes as a "Monstrum" (*monstrosity*):

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[396] See Muhr, *Depressionen* 17.

[397] "It all started with a nullity. In an urgent special edition of our newsletter, I omitted the word 'not' in the last sentence of John F. Kennedy's speech, the speech, which he could not give anymore because he was dead."

> Eine ungeheure, formlose Wesenheit atmet, ächzt, schnieft, schnupft, schnauft und schnarcht auf mich zu. […] [Ich] überlasse mich diesem aus den Urtiefen eines 250 Pfund schweren Körpers hervorbrechenden Geräusch. Der dumpfdröhnende Grundtenor, […] wird von geröchelten Intervallen letzter Agonie durchbrochen. […]
> Das schnarchende Monstrum hat auch einen Namen. Es heißt Frau Manaluschkowski. […]
> Der unförmigen Masse, die Frau Manaluschkowskis aufgeschwemmter Körper darstellt, ist das schmale Krankenhausbett nicht gewachsen. Das Fleisch quillt über seine metallenen Ränder, in geblümten Batist gezwängt wie eine Wurst in ihrer Pelle, oder auch, meist von den Oberschenkeln abwärts, unverhüllt, bleich, quabbelig. […]
> Die aus dem Leim geratene Fleischmasse ist in unablässiger Bewegung. Die dicken bleichen Finger der einen Hand drehen an den Brillanten der anderen. Die Goldreifen sieht man nicht mehr, sie sind zugewachsen. Der Oberkörper fährt ruckartig hoch und fällt mit einem Ächzen wieder in die Kissen. Ein Bein, das man kaum noch als Bein bezeichnen kann, kommt jäh aus der zerrauften Decke herausgefahren, steht schräg in der Luft, fällt schwer gegen die Metallkante des Bettes und wird stöhnend wieder zurückgezogen[398]. (112)

This is a body as flesh, *par excellence*. The description of Frau Manaluschkowski's body mirrors the all-too-well-known representations of woman as an overabundance of carnality. Coming back to Connelly's discussion of the abject and the monstrous, it is possible to analyze the diarist's description of her fellow patient's corporeality as epitomizing both the revulsion and the fascination experienced when looking at the 'monstrous' body. The diarist explicitly states that she feels threatened by this body – "der

[398] "A tremendous, formless being breathes, groans, sniffles, snorts, puffs, and snores towards me. […] [I] surrender myself to the noise that bursts out from the depths of this 250-pound-body. The muffled sounding basic tenor […] is being interrupted by rattled intervals of a final agony. […]
The snoring monstrosity also has a name. It is called Mrs. Manaluschkowski. The narrow hospital bed is not up to the unshapely mass that is formed by Mrs. Manaluschkowski's bloated body. The flesh, which is crammed into flowery batiste like a sausage into its skin, overflows over its metal margins. The flesh which also is, usually from the thighs downwards, naked, pale, wobbly. […]
The mass of meat, which lost its figure, is in incessant motion. The fat, pale fingers of one hand turn the diamond on the other hand. One can no longer see the gold bracelets, they have become overgrown. The upper body jerks up and falls back into the pillows with a groan. A leg, which can almost no longer be called a leg, makes a sudden appearance from under the tousled sheets, slants in the air, falls heavily against the metal edge of the bed and is being pulled back with a moan."

Name ist harmlos im Vergleich zu dem, was er bezeichnet"[399] (Muhr 112) – and she tries to distance herself as much as possible from the other woman. One essential aspect that plays into the experience of Frau Manaluschkowski's body as monstrous is its exhibited lack of control. As sociologists such as Arthur W. Frank have noted, "society demands a considerable level of body control from its members; loss of this control is stigmatizing, and special work is required to manage the lack of control" (31). The diarist is confronted with an adult who does not maintain control in the sense society demands it and does not seem to attempt to regain a sense of control over her body. The dynamic between the two female patients shows that "the work of the stigmatized person is not only to avoid embarrassing [her- or] himself by being out of control in situations where control is expected. The person must also avoid embarrassing others, who should be protected from the specter of lost body control" (31). In this sense, Muhr's diarist reveals herself as an agent of the societal gaze, the one that exercises its power with the goal of maintaining disciplined, 'orderly' bodies. By imposing her normative judgment on her fellow patient's 'unruly' body, she does the necessary work of surveillance that keeps the dominant patriarchal system in place.

Frau Manaluschkowski's surplus of corporeality and her monstrous body can also be read within the framework of the abject, which, according to Scarry, constitutes the third aspect of pain, and which renders the body a "repulsive mass" (Fournier 66) and poses a threat to an understanding of a clearly delineated body and one's own identity. In the diary, the description of Frau Manaluschkowski's body exists only in relation to the diarist's attitude. The reader is not given any insight into whether Frau Manaluschkowski

[399] "the name is harmless in comparison to that which it designates."

experiences her body as abhorrent; rather, the focus is on how the protagonist sees her fellow patient's body and how she distances herself from and judges that mass of excessive and abject flesh: "Angesichts dieses Schauspiels, das da in epischer Breite neben mir abläuft, fühle ich mich entmaterialisiert, stumm, bewegungslos, fast wie nicht mehr vorhanden"[400] (Muhr 113). The narrator describes how the encounter with her bedmate undoes the construction of imaginary boundaries of selfhood and thus leads to her feeling empty and immaterial. In other words, the exposure to the monstrous and the abject confront her with the precariousness of the imagined boundaries of subjectivity and she finds herself in the face of the breakdown of the construction of her identity, not just because of her own sickness but also because of her proximity to the Other's illness.

5.6 Telling Illness Stories

Similar to encounters with the abject, experiencing pain breaks down the affected person's established borders of identity and can lead to feelings of disintegration and loss of selfhood. However, even though pain is unshareable and can only be expressed with a recourse to metaphors, that does not mean that there is no way to tell stories about, or rather, through it. In his 1995 in-depth analysis of illness narratives, sociologist Arthur Frank explains that the tale is "not just *about* illness"; rather, "[t]he story [is] told *through* a wounded body" (2; emphasis in original). The very form of Muhr's text as diary illustrates exactly this kind of narrative. Muhr's journal is not just an account of her illness; the reader witnesses how the story is told through her illness, meaning that "the body [...] is simultaneously cause, topic, and instrument" (Frank 2). As Muhr's diarist explains:

[400] "In light of this spectacle that is taking place in epic breadth next to me, I feel dematerialized, mute, motionless, almost like non-existent."

> Warum schreibe ich das alles überhaupt auf? Ich habe doch sonst so etwas nicht getan. [...] Gehört das mit zu meinem ‚Zustand', ist es Teil einer ununterdrückbaren Selbstbespiegelung? Eine krankhafte Sucht zur Vivisektion an mir selber? Man könnte es auch anders sehen: Musik kann ich nicht mehr hören, lesen kann ich nicht mehr, Bilder bedeuten mir nichts mehr. Aber ich kann merkwürdigerweise schreiben. Dabei komme ich mir vor wie eine Ertrinkende, der erlaubt ist, ab und zu nach Luft zu schnappen, damit sie nicht ganz ertrinkt.[401] (12)

Taking up journal writing is a consequence of the onset of her illness. Very fittingly, the subtitle of the text is "diary of an illness," which makes the topic of the diary unmistakably explicit. The comparison to drowning and journal writing as a gasp of air uncovers the necessity of writing for her existence as well as the corporeal involvement in it. Writing through her illness allows her to go beyond the unshareability of pain and the isolation that comes with it.

As Frank explains, the difficulty with the body in pain or the sick body is that it "is certainly not mute – it speaks eloquently in pains and symptoms – but it is inarticulate" (2). The fact that the sick body requires a form of translation from "pains and symptoms" into "words" is key in Muhr's diary. It also makes the story difficult for the reader to experience while also opening up new, empowering meanings for the storyteller. Frank writes that

> [the body] does not use speech, yet begets it. The speech that the body begets includes illness stories; the problem of hearing these stories is to hear the body speaking in them. People telling illness stories do not simply describe their sick bodies; their bodies give their stories their particular shape and direction. People certainly talk about their bodies in illness stories; what is harder to hear in the story is the body creating the person. (27)

[401] "Why do I even write all of that down? I have never done that before. [...] Is this part of my 'condition,' is it part of an insuppressible self-mirroring? A pathological obsession for a vivisection on myself? One could also see it differently: I can no longer listen to music, I can no longer read, images no longer mean anything to me. But oddly enough I can write. Doing that, I feel like a drowning person who is allowed to gasp for breath from time to time so that she won't completely drown."

This last sentence gets to the heart of the isolation Muhr's diarist experiences,[402] not only in her private life or in her professional environment, but also in her countless encounters with medical practitioners. Confrontation with a person who is ill puts into question the neatly constructed markers of identity, which is both a source of dread as well as fascination. Frank points out that while the sick person is not (usually) judged for having become sick, that person's behavior and conduct as well as the display of their illness is subject to strict norms and guidelines. In Muhr's case, people expect her to not display the signs of her depression and to 'pull herself together' through the use of willpower and self-discipline.[403] When her body starts showing signs of the medication's side effects, malnutrition, or incorrect treatment of her illness, people get frustrated with her, blame her for not controlling her body, and accuse her of flaunting the manifestations of her sick body as a way of signaling insubordination.[404]

The difficulty of reading Muhr's illness story also has to do with the particular type of illness story that it represents. Frank distinguishes between three kinds of narratives, namely the restitution, the chaos, and the quest narrative. The first one is characterized by a focus on overcoming the illness, on the light at the end of the tunnel of illness (Frank 77). The second one, the chaos narrative, is on the other side of the spectrum, with a feeling that the illness will never end and that there is no way out of the suffering (97). The last one is marked by seeing illness as a sort of mission, not focusing on overcoming it or getting completely sucked into it, but using it to somehow feel more accomplished because of it

[402] For more details on how she longs to overcome this sense of isolation and how she engages with communality (of female patients, of female readers) and tries to find recourse in a version of self that is marked by multiplicity instead of individuality, see chapter 2, section 3.
[403] See Muhr *Depressionen* 8.
[404] See Muhr *Depressionen* 147.

afterwards (115). While there are certainly elements of all the narratives in Muhr's diary (and in illness stories in general, according to Frank), I argue that Muhr's text is most predominantly marked by a sense of chaos. While the narrator at the end did make it 'out of' her illness, the sense of truly having overcome the suffering is missing and the 'return to normalcy,' as she calls it, seems more like a transient condition with the illness simmering somewhere, ready to emerge again at any given moment. It is for that reason that there is neither a full sense of restitution nor an atmosphere of quest since the narrator does not embrace her depression but rather longs for either insanity or death. She is not able to make use of the clear-sightedness she ascribes to her depression and instead wishes to be delivered from it. Instead of integrating the concomitant perceptiveness either during her illness or for improved living conditions afterwards, she yearns for numbness, for the comfort of the status quo.

It is for these reasons that the most fitting category is that of the chaos narrative, since her text "reveal[s] vulnerability, futility, and impotence" (Frank 97). The narrator feels powerless, exposed to the destructive forces of her condition: "Mein Leben zerfällt in Minuten. Jede Minute erdrückt mich, aber nicht ganz, nur so sehr, daß ich die nächste Minute fürchte, die den Druck verstärken wird. Es gibt nur noch die Kontinuität einer schleichenden Angst. Was wird aus mir?"[405] (Muhr 8). The unknown suffering makes her story hard to read and the narrator's anxiety and threat to her being transfer themselves onto the reader (Frank 98). The helplessness and the menacing dread in the affected person's story entail that "words necessarily fail" (98). The 'insufficiency of language' is a

[405] "My life disintegrates minute by minute. Each minute crushes me, but not completely, only to the extent that I am scared of the next minute, which will enhance the pressure. All that is left is the continuity of an insidious fear. What is happening to me?"

core component of Muhr's diary and it accentuates and captures her position as "wounded storyteller" experiencing her illness as chaos since "those who are truly *living* in chaos cannot tell in words" (98; emphasis in original). There are numerous times in her account in which she informs the reader of her inability to write: "Seit vier Tagen geht es mir sehr schlecht. Ich kann nun auch nicht mehr schreiben"[406] (Muhr 13). These silences illustrate that in the moment in which the chaos is lived, in the immediacy, there is no means of mediation or reflection, characteristics that are necessary for a story to be told (Frank 98). Only once the narrator has obtained some sort of distance with respect to her suffering can she again recount her experiences.

In addition to the deficiency of words, Frank asserts that the "chaos story presupposes *lack* of control, and the ill person's loss of control is complemented by medicine's inability to control the disease" (100; emphasis in original). The absence of control appears throughout all of Muhr's diary: "[I]ch bin erfüllt von einer Ohnmacht, wie man sie normalerweise nur angesichts großer Katastrophen erlebt"[407] (107). The incapacity of the doctors and medical institutions mirror her feeling of powerlessness. Despite their pretense that most of the time they know what is going, and, in case they don't, that it is not their fault but rather the patient's, they are at a loss when it comes to finding an actual remedy for the narrator's suffering. This intensifies the experience of chaos, which "feeds on the sense that *no one* is in control" (Frank 100; emphasis in original).

[406] "For the past four days, I've been feeling very bad. Now, I can also no longer write."
[407] "I am full of that kind of powerlessness that one normally only experiences in face of huge catastrophes."

The chaotic body poses a threat to others, it represents that "against which [they] define themselves" (105). In that sense, the chaotic body is perceived like the abject body, since it disturbs order and the markers of identity and confronts people with the "possibility that they could become chaotic" (105). Muhr's diary of her illness exemplifies modernity's deep-rooted trust in medical institutions and their assertion of control, which is vital for maintaining the dominance of medicalization. Frank argues that

> [t]he anxiety that the chaos story provokes in others leads to the standard clinical dismissal of chaos stories as documenting "depression." When chaos is thus redefined as a treatable condition, [...] [c]linical staff can once again be comfortably in control: the chaos can be dismissed as the patient's personal malfunction. [...] it no longer represents an existential threat. (110)

Muhr's narrator oscillates between rejecting the doctor's mislabelling of her illness and yearning for an overcoming of the chaos she is experiencing. There is no place in society for her chaotic body since "[s]ociety prefers medical diagnoses that admit treatment, not social diagnoses that require massive change in the premises of what that social body includes as parts of itself" (113). Instead of making use of the potential to effect transformations in her living conditions that could possibly lead to bigger changes in the societal make-up, the narrator rejects the destabilizing social diagnoses. Even though she acknowledged and expressed the necessity and need to tell her story, to testify to her chaotic body, she concludes her diary with the following words:

> Ich bin wieder normal, das heißt unempfindlich geworden. Zwar staune ich noch immer darüber, daß wir nicht verzweifeln. Aber das besagt nicht viel, es ist ein theoretisches Staunen. Ich esse wieder mein Filetsteak, auch wenn ich drei Stunden vorher gelesen habe, wie Menschen sterben und gefoltert werden. Es scheint, ich gehöre tatsächlich wieder zu den Normalen, zu denen, die sich abfinden, die sich arrangieren, zu denen, die aus ihren Erfahrungen das Fazit ziehen: 'So ist nun mal das Leben.' Ich werde mir eine neue Arbeit suchen, ich werde eine bessere Ehefrau sein, ich werde durchschnittlich zufrieden leben. Aber ich fürchte, eines Tages

> werde ich wieder glauben, ich müßte nach einem anderen Fazit suchen.[408] (Muhr 172)

It comes almost as a disappointment to the reader to read the final lines which seem like a too limiting and almost deluded 'return' to pre-given roles and thus a possible turning of the narrator's back on the discoveries she made as a 'wounded storyteller.' Despite this, the diarist leaves open the option of questioning normative identities once again and setting out on another path of possible empowering, albeit painful, maybe even chaotic experiences. Overall, the diary is characterized by an opposition between a painless blinded life of apparent normalcy, but which is also an inauthentic and delusional way of living, and the 'un-deceiving' but painful life of depression and suffering. As has been shown, in order to be recognized as a subject in society, Muhr's diarist has to stay within the confines of cultural norms, experiencing the dissociation of her identity simultaneously as a soothing remedial effect and an omnipresent lingering of an unresolved discrepancy.

6. Conclusion

This chapter begins by analyzing the extent to which Elfriede Jelinek's destabilization of and play with boundaries opens up potential for new ways of writing and conceptualizing the female body. Reading her texts through the lens of the concept of the grotesque brings to light her complex and intricate challenging of societal norms and

[408] "I became normal, i.e. insensitive, again. I am certainly still astonished by the fact that we don't despair. But that doesn't mean much, it's a theoretical astonishment. I went back to eating my fillet steak, even after having read about people dying and being tortured three hours earlier. It seems as if in fact I am again part of the normal ones, part of those that resign, that come to terms with life, that draw the following conclusion from their experiences: 'That's life.' I will look for a new job, I will be a better wife, I will live unexceptionally content. But I'm afraid that one day I will again believe that I have to look for a different conclusion."

makes the reader overly aware of and question the countless normative limitations imposed on the female body. Within the framework of the grotesque, my analysis of the abject revealed that the moments in which Gerti, *Lust*'s protagonist, attempts to build an identity for herself are transient and the undertaken resistance to the patriarchal system in which she finds herself is short-lived. In the end, Gerti, the temporary disruptive factor, will be the one discarded, abjected, from the societal structure that exists on the basis of her negation.

Focussing on the question of female subject-formation, the chapter examined the ways in which illness can be both a destructive and a productive factor in this process. Maria Erlenberger's text illustrates the multilayered expectations of femininity and reveals how the narrator's erasure via her anorectic body enables a path towards a sense of self, without taking away from the importance of cultural and societal influences and implications. Her female body excessively incorporates and manifests normative expectations of femininity by controlling its appetite and ridding itself of flesh. The body thus creates a space for questioning and destabilizing the status quo. Despite a similar potential of finding a more corporeal sense of being through the embrace of one's illness, Caroline Muhr's diary falls short. Although her text demonstrates remarkable awareness of the confines of femininity and the female body, it recounts illness as a mainly destructive force, something that needs to be overcome. The narrator does not view her illness as a path towards the potentially liberating unknown that is inherent to the process of subject-formation; on the contrary, she shies away from using this potential and seeks recourse in a return to well-established norms and expectations. Her body speaking in her illness and creating her instead of her controlling it is unbearable for her and she constantly yearns to

be delivered from this mode of being. She does not view her female body as a way to disturb the system, as a way to liberate herself from societal confines. Instead, she wants to bring her body back under control so that it becomes invisible and "unempfindlich" (*non-sentient*).

To summarize, this chapter's examination of Jelinek's, Erlenberger's, and Muhr's undoing of the illusion of impermeable subject boundaries uncovers instances in which new meaning is created through the act of de-familiarizing via an exposure to grotesque, abject, monstrous, and sick female bodies. Key elements of these instances are hybridity – when unlike substances are combined or juxtaposed in unfamiliar ways – and transitionality – when bodily boundaries are exposed in ongoing processes of redefinition and dissolution. Even if moments of resistance are often temporary, the female body plays a crucial role since it is precisely the "Materialität des Körpers, welche die Position des Weiblichen gegen die Vereinnahmung durch das Männliche behauptet"[409] (Bauer, "Manchmal wird es mir peinlich" 272). Despite the subversive potential of the female body, the grotesque, the abject, the monstrous, and illness run the risk of annulling the female subject because of the inherent threat they pose to social stability and unity. In the patriarchal society in which the selected works of literature are set, the processes of subject-formation are always two-fold in that they can be both liberating and empowering and at the same time further oppressive and limiting. The analysis shows that a textual re-appropriation of an expropriated sense of subjectivity is situated, relational, and always open to new meanings.

[409] "materiality of the body, which defends the position of the feminine against the appropriation through the masculine order." As previously noted, even though Bauer examines Unica Zürns work in this chapter, parts of her analysis fit perfectly with my project.

Conclusion

> The desire for transformation animates feminist praxis. As a politics seeking radical redress, feminism is driven by an imperative for change.
> – Sara Ahmed et al., *Transformations. Thinking Through Feminism*

> Feminist politics are most effective, I argue, not when they transform the destructive into the productive, but when they are able to tolerate their own capacity for harm.
> – Elizabeth Wilson, *Gut Feminism*

By analyzing the diverse modes of resistance in the selected literary texts, I found myself confronted with the difficulty of writing a conclusion when the work of feminism and gender studies is an ongoing project. Seeking to determine the success in undertakings of resistance is a challenging task considering the fact that discourses continuously evolve, meanings change and specific contexts greatly matter. However, despite the lack of clear-cut categories of whether the repetition of a word or a re-use of imagery and discourses with a long and charged history effects a subversion of injurious power structures, looking closely and meticulously at these processes laid the necessary foundation for continuing to examine and undertake efforts at resignification. Taking various factors like historicity, citationality, power structures, intention, reception, culture, time period, speaking agent, addressee, and so on into account helps elucidate the major changes in feminist thought over the last fifty years and enables a continuous evolvement of societal structures and transformation of oppressive power structures.

In this dissertation, I address Elfriede Jelinek's infamous use of repetition, whether this be of words and phrases or of discourses and pornographic language. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of "excitable speech," my analysis of Jelinek's project of

resignification brings to light the subversive potential her texts display in the excessive repetition and playful distortion of conventional language and normative discourses. I argue that the strength of repetition lies in using the aspect of citationality that is inherent to language in the sense that a speaker, who is belatedly, temporally, and fictionally positioned as the origin of the utterance, can disrupt the continuance of prior meanings and connotations and thereby open language up to new meanings and contexts. My assessment of Jelinek's literary project exposes the possibilities of resistance that emerge from disrupting the 'chain of significations' but also from uncovering the camouflaged or obscured historicity of various discourses, for example, that of pornography or of writing femininity. As I maintain, the important potential inherent in this undertaking does not diminish the enormous amount of risk: despite the best intentions of re-signification, the reception of the repetition cannot possibly be calculated and the attempt at 'exciting speech' can backfire and further stabilize the hurtful effects of injurious language and hate speech. The project of linguistic resistance correlates with a risk of a person's subject-status, a contingency that underlies the majority of my project.

My study's focus on the formation and risk involved in the process of becoming a female subject also motivates my reevaluation and engagement with Caroline Muhr's and Maria Erlenberger's personal accounts. By tending to these non-canonical and almost forgotten pieces of literature, I seek to contribute to discourses on the re-appropriation of literary genres and its particular significance for writing resistance to patriarchal structures during the 1970s women's movement.

My comparative analysis of Erlenberger's report and Muhr's diary uncovers the texts' similar critique of very narrow and often contradictory expectations for being

Woman in a patriarchal society. It carefully examines the writers' approaches to embracing (one's) illness as a way of overcoming a societal impasse and shattering normative expectations. However, while Erlenberger's text promotes a sense of liberation in her anorexia, Muhr's diary is characterized by extreme hardships when acknowledging her illness. My study shows that the protagonist in Erlenberger writes herself out of the status quo of voicelessness, creating a subject-position in the text that explores dissolution and death and thereby re-appropriates what it means to write one's being as a woman who is defined by negation. Even though Muhr's diary is also characterized by an enlightened awareness of the destructive forces of patriarchal notions of femininity and health, it is more ambivalent about the potential contained in confronting and, more importantly, accepting the protagonist's illness. Despite reflections on the possible strength of creating communality and embracing one's multiplicity of selves instead of aspiring to the phallocentric ideal of an individualistic sense of self, the text is marked by an underlying fear with regard to completely turning one's back on societal expectations, which ultimately leads to the narrator's return to the illusory comfort of normalcy.

My study is interested in processes of subject-formation, both from a linguistic and a corporeal perspective. It therefore not only assesses the potential and danger of re-appropriation of injurious language, but also of the re-appropriation of so-called monstrous corporeality. The undoing of borders and the destabilization of clear-cut categories implicated in depictions of the monstrous body bring to light disturbing but powerful ways of engaging in acts of resistance. My analysis of Jelinek's writing of grotesque and abject bodies shows the construction of new meanings through tropes such as hybrid bodies, castrating mothers, and the vagina dentata. Her texts confront the reader with the

historicity and power mechanisms behind gendered identity markers. They expose and disrupt the semblance of naturalness behind societal and cultural norms and in doing so play with margins to create openings for new meanings. However, as my analysis shows, the moments in which Jelinek's female characters attempt to break out of their fixed societal positions and service status and engage in acts of subject-formation are transient and their acts of rebellion are not able to effect lasting change in the system in place.

In addition to the potential of writing monstrosity, part of this dissertation is marked by a general interest in the ways in which illness can serve as a means to engage in the process of subject-formation instead of merely being a destructive and world-shattering force. I carefully analyze the interrelationship of pain and identity and how one's experience of a hurting body can open up new ways of finding a sense of self that is less determined by oppressive and restrictive societal expectations. I argue that Erlenberger's confessional report brings to light the protagonist's re-appropriation of her body: she excessively exhibits societal expectations regarding the female body, such as a slim body displaying the values of control and restraint, and via this excess shatters patriarchy's objectifying gaze on female bodies. I maintain that her conscious destruction of an idealized notion of femininity and her working through the formation of medical subjects in the mental institution enable her to set out towards her project of discursively producing a sense of subjectivity. Symptomatic of comparable texts of the time, her report ends at the threshold of her re-entry into the sphere of social recognizability, i.e. at her dismissal from the institution and her embarking on a bus that would take her back to the city, society, and presumably to her family circle.

Unlike in Erlenberger, Muhr's diarist shies away from testing out a form of existence

that requires venturing into the unknown of subject-formation. This trepidation can be explained in part by the text's construction of a chaos narrative, which, as I show, writes the experience of illness as never-ending and all-encompassing, as a condition over which the narrator has no control and that is intensified by the inability or incompetence of the medical community to alleviate the narrator's suffering. Muhr's diarist experiences the body as a source of threat that undercuts efforts at holding on to or re-building a sense of identity. For Muhr, the de-stabilizing force of her sick body doing things is too much and she feels comforted when reaching (at least temporarily) a state of 'blissful delusion.'

By reflecting on the similarities and differences in the literary projects by Elfriede Jelinek, Caroline Muhr, and Maria Erlenberger, this study explores the relationship between language doing things to sentient bodies and bodies doing things to discursively formed subjects. One of its main interests lies in working out what effect language has on subjects who are both socially constructed but who are also sentient beings, with the ability to touch and be touched, i.e. to experience feelings such as touch, taste, smell, sight, and so on, multi-directionally. It seeks to do justice both to the power of language to constitute beings in societal positions, as well as to the indispensability of the material body in these processes. My research and analyses establish the importance of working within a framework of re-signification of patriarchal discourses. I examine how mechanisms of repetition can lead to writing a female subjectivity that is neither andro- nor gynocentric but that takes multiple perspectives and paradigms into account. My engagement with both a well-respected as well as neglected writers contributes to a deeper understanding of how resistance was written during the 1970s and 1980s and bridges the gap to more recent theoretical work in gender studies.

The gains from my current project make a new area of inquiry possible, namely that of the functioning and power of transformation. The two epigraphs suggest the importance of transformation for feminist theory. Based on what I have determined with respect to acts and forms of resistance in the texts I analyzed, I see the potential to further contribute to this area by engaging with the concept of transformation. When operating within frameworks of oppression, discrimination, constraint, and negation, a desire for and efforts at affecting transformation seem self-evident. However, the questions that arise are: What does transformation actually mean? What exactly is it that is supposed to be transformed? Is transformation only one-directional? Is there an active agent doing something transformative to a passive object? Is transformation centered on the social and cultural? What happens to readings of acts of self-destruction when transformation is not understood as overcoming something, but rather as what Wilson calls, 'a tolerance for one's own capacity for harm'? Where do bodies come into play in transformational politics?

In this thesis, my research and work have shown that 1970s and 1980s discourse on transformation focuses on either aiming to resist the political and social framework in which beings exist or on how the body can be altered with the goal of reclaiming agency. What is most often than not still missing from the discourse is the notion of "the body becoming, as transformative" (Birke 136), i.e. the body not as being acted upon but as a mutating agent, being in flux, adapting, becoming. To take the body 'seriously' in this way requires a careful consideration of biological studies that bring together corporeality and subjectivity and incorporate and implement the notion that "biology is not a synonym for determinism and sociality is not a synonym for transformation" (Wilson, *Gut Feminism* 9).

Needless to say, this does not mean a return to biology as a determining factor of gender; instead it holds that the next step necessary after theories of social constructionism is the more recent consideration of the materiality of bodies. It calls for an understanding of "performativity [...] that allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming" (Barad 122). New approaches to material feminism ask how matter affects political, societal, and cultural currents, in addition to how matter is itself affected by them.

These material feminist approaches allow for a more comprehensive understanding of illnesses such as anorexia and depression, for example. Even though there is increased awareness about the changes in metabolism resulting from anorexia, analyses of its relationship to identity-formation and literary accounts of the illness have yet to be fully developed. With respect to my analysis of Maria Erlenberger's *Der Hunger nach Wahnsinn*, a future project would be to adopt a material feminist perspective in order to better understand the role of the body as agent in her writing about illness. I see potential in examining how the body itself adapts to her illness and how its constitution is transformed through her sickness. Such a shift in focus would bridge more recent medical advances with regard to eating disorders and literary accounts of such illnesses.

Along the same lines, there has been a shift in understanding depression not merely as a 'malady of the mind' but as less fragmented and more interconnected with other parts of the body, such as the gut or nerves. In her intriguing 2015 project, *Gut Feminism*, feminist and gender studies scholar Elizabeth Wilson sets out to

> show how some biological and pharmacological data about depression help us think about minded states as enacted not just by the brain but also by the distributed network of nerves that innervates the periphery (especially the gut). [Her] argument is not that the gut *contributes* to minded states, but that the gut *is* an organ of mind: it ruminates, deliberates, comprehends. (5; emphasis in original)

Her study would be an ideal starting point for thinking through the complex assessments, experiences, and accounts of depression and would provide original insights into Caroline Muhr's *Depressionen* by focusing on the diarist's reaction to medication and her whole-body reaction to various medical treatments. Given the many unknowns and the (albeit decreasing) stigma associated with depression, I see the need to combine newer scientific studies on depression with literary accounts of the condition.

Given that sickness constitutes a central component of Jelinek's female characters, a material feminist approach would allow for further investigation of the changes brought about by bodies and matter and of the effects these transformations have on the social and cultural framework. Inquiries into bodies subjected to physical trauma on a daily basis could be supplemented by a turn to Jelinek's play *Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen* (*Illness or Modern Women*) and a focus on how she writes the body as agent and as matter. Based on insights I have gained from my analysis of the 'monstrous' body in Jelinek, I consider this new area of inquiry a most suitable next step to contribute to literary, gender, and illness studies today.

Transformation not only comes into play from a material feminist perspective, but it also plays a decisive role with respect to the diverse and changing effects the selected texts have on (female) readers at different time periods, in different locations, and from different backgrounds. Given the fact that Muhr's and Erlenberger's texts had been left out of discussions of constructions of femininity for thirty years despite the fact that their texts' subject matter and critique of societal norms are still very much relevant several decades after their original dates of publication shows the importance of continuously working to revive and include silenced voices and to transform entrenched structures and categories.

The space of the literary text provides an ideal setting for testing out possibilities of transformation, venturing into spheres that have been or are closed off otherwise, for imagining changing subject positions and for taking into account the development a text undergoes over the span of time and through different readings and perspectives. Changing understandings and conceptions of societal norms and expectations, of bodies and bodily processes, of margins and categories, of materials influencing and mutually altering each other, and of discourses evolving and mutating, keep on shaping the way literature, bodies, and language are read and received.

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