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Performing *Bürgerlichkeit*: the German Bourgeoisie and Contemporary Theatre

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

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Declaration

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Acknowledgements

Summary

This dissertation will investigate *Bürgertum* and *Bürgerlichkeit* and their relevance to the work of three contemporary German theatre directors: Michael Thalheimer, Thomas Ostermeier and René Pollesch. While the concept of class may have fallen out of favour in recent years, *Bürgerlichkeit* remains an important concept with regard to German culture, specifically in relation to theatre, not least because in Germany the theatre has been a bourgeois project from the start and a fundamental part of the bourgeois public sphere. In the last thirty years, there has been renewed academic interest in the social and cultural history of the *Bürgertum*, and its important role in the establishment of the value systems and cultural practices of modern culture. This research has, however, revealed the *Bürgertum* to be a diverse and historically changing social formation, leading some scholars, notably Manfred Hettling, to speak of a *bürgerliche Kultur* (bourgeois culture), or like Lothar Gall, a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (bourgeois or civil society), rather than a class *per se*. I aim to show that this bourgeois culture is by no means obsolete and that many of its values and practices can still be identified today, albeit perhaps in a somewhat altered form.

The main analysis will focus on the cultural practice of theatre and contemporary productions in which these values are addressed or bourgeois social milieus are portrayed. The aesthetic approach of these directors will form a central focus of my investigation. New approaches in theatre studies, such as the concept of the 'performative' (Erika Fischer-Lichte) or 'postdramatic' theatre (Hans-Thies Lehmann), often delineate new types of performance in opposition to realist forms of drama and theatre, explicitly or implicitly associated with the bourgeois culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The nexus between historical and contemporary constructions of the *Bürgertum* will therefore also be pursued in the aesthetic nexus between 'dramatic' or 'bourgeois' and 'performative' or 'postdramatic' theatre forms.

The concept of the 'performative' not only provides a basis for my analysis of contemporary theatre aesthetics, but also functions as a foundation for my thinking about the formation of identity, specifically with regard to group identities or subjectivities, such as that of the *Bürgertum*. This, and theories of the performativity of language on the stage, will be examined in chapter one. Chapter two examines the social history of the *Bürgertum* and questions to what it extent it can be described as a class. I will also ask if, and to what extent, the German bourgeoisie and bourgeois culture persist today. Despite the fact that the end of the bourgeoisie has been diagnosed numerous times (in the period of cultural

pessimism at the end of the nineteenth century, in the Weimar Republic, under National Socialism, in the GDR or in the economic boom of the 1960s in the FRG), bourgeois ideals and lifestyles have proven to be remarkably hardy, reappearing again and again in slightly altered forms. Here I also identify a fundamental antagonism between bourgeois ideals and social reality, which can – often in the sphere of culture – result in a 'split' in bourgeois subjectivity that both criticises and reinforces bourgeois culture simultaneously. In chapter three, I will examine the development of the modern institution of theatre as part of the bourgeois public sphere in Germany, with special attention to the literary drama and its specific 'bourgeois' form, the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*. The conflict between desire and duty within these plays, and the apparent paradox of a disciplining of the body, coupled with theatrical displays of emotion in the late eighteenth century theatre, illustrate the paradoxical bourgeois critical gesture and the conflicted core of the bourgeois subject once again.

The second part examines the work of the three directors already mentioned. Michael Thalheimer's productions of canonical plays from the early period of representational theatre, namely *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust*, form the subject of chapter four. His radically reworked versions of these plays, in an abstract and formalistic contemporary aesthetic, which rejects historical context and psychological realism, are analysed in relation to the concept of canon. Are his new versions a radical subversion of the canon, or should his work rather be described as lending these plays a new relevance, and therefore as revitalising the canon? I will argue that Thalheimer in fact does both, in a typical bourgeois gesture of simultaneous criticism and reinforcement. In chapter five, I will turn to a director who criticises bourgeois culture more explicitly on the level of content: Thomas Ostermeier, whose productions of Henrik Ibsen's plays *Nora*, *Hedda Gabler* and *John Gabriel Borkmann* are also set in the present day. These productions are strongly critical of the bourgeois values and lifestyles that persist today and yet employ the conventional aesthetic of 'bourgeois' realism. Arguably, however, his theatre and his audience represent precisely the milieu his criticism is aimed at, thus embodying the bourgeois self-critical tendency once again. Finally in chapter six, I will explore the work of René Pollesch, who most radically rejects 'bourgeois' representational theatre and performs a deconstruction of the bourgeois subject on the stage. Here I will ask to what extent it is possible to escape representation and the structures of bourgeois culture which Pollesch opposes. Pollesch's almost absurd theatre of theory refuses synthesis and potentially provokes new subjective positions, but at the same time exposes the problem of the impotence of bourgeoisie self-criticism.

Introduction

The starting point for my research was the work of two German directors: Michael Thalheimer's production of *Emilia Galotti* at the Deutsches Theater and Thomas Ostermeier's *Hedda Gabler* at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz. Both depict the world of the German middle class, the *Bürgertum*, which developed in Germany from the eighteenth century onwards, in parallel with the German nation state, capitalism and the institution of theatre as we know it. Thalheimer's *Emilia Galotti* was a new, radically cut version of Lessing's seldomly performed classic, a dramatic text that played such a fundamental role in the establishment of German bourgeois and national theatre, and which no doubt many in the German theatre-going public have encountered at least at some stage during their education. Its themes of power struggle – between the aristocracy and the emerging *Bürgertum* – are also deeply connected to the institution of theatre itself, as a part of the public sphere, which grew alongside this class as it tried to wrestle power from the hands of the aristocracy and build a modern nation state. The theatre was instrumental in propagating and reinforcing the value system that belonged to this emergent class and was one of the spaces in which its identity was constituted and literally performed. This makes Germany unique in some respects as theatre has been a middle class project almost from the start, unlike in France or England, where it developed first as part of a court system. Ostermeier's *Hedda Gabler* too examined this value system, though Ibsen's play from the latter half of the nineteenth century is much more critical of the *Bürgertum* as the dominant class and its double moral standards. This criticism of the middle class seemed to strike a chord with the contemporary audience, despite the fact that in all likelihood they probably belonged to a similar social milieu themselves.

Both productions took the plays out of their historical settings. Ostermeier's production was explicitly contemporary, with Hedda and Jürgen Tesman in a slick concrete and glass apartment that could have been somewhere in nearby Charlottenburg. Thalheimer's production, though not obviously set in any particular historical period, used a stripped-back set and stylishly modern costumes. These productions were also extremely successful; evidently they addressed issues that were still important for the audience, or they reinforced some self-image of the theatre-going public in terms of cultural inheritance. Not only did the plays address themes which are still relevant, such as the materialism that leaves Hedda empty and the patriarchal dominance that takes Emilia's life, but they also examined a system of values which still has relevance today, indeed values upon which today's society was ultimately built. The largely middle class audiences

who attend theatre today are the inheritors of that value system, and the institution of theatre which played an important role in creating and upholding it in Germany. This work therefore seemed the perfect opportunity to explore the existence or transformation of the German *Bürgertum* in today's society and its relation to cultural phenomena and its own history.

But who are this *Bürgertum*? '*Bürgertum*' is a social category often taken for granted in literary and theatre histories, but one which has only begun to attract focused attention from historians and social historians in the last twenty years or so, who by no means agree on who the *Bürgertum* were. The most significant development in this regard was two research centres established in the 1980s at Bielefeld and Frankfurt, which I will discuss in chapter two.[1] Even if some consensus can be reached about the *Bürgertum* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (often involving an emphasis on its heterogeneity), the question as to whether this segment of society continues to exist remains equally lacking a definitive answer, though many argue for the persistence of the values associated with *Bürgerlichkeit*.[2] Recently, the topic was discussed in German public discourse for the first time in many years, when a debate arose in the *Feuilletons* of the Germans newspapers concerning a putative *Neue Bürgerlichkeit*. This debate however, though it involved some prominent *Bürgertum* scholars, was often covertly or sometimes openly entangled with political positions, making it difficult to differentiate between political ideals and sociological analysis (a problem inherent in the concepts of *Bürgertum* and *Bürgerlichkeit*).

Furthermore, for numerous reasons the conventional concept of class has been discredited in the last twenty years or so. With the crisis and collapse of the USSR and the Eastern Bloc in 1989/90, orthodox Marxists were faced with the failure of their class model in many respects.[3] Many now argue that discussing the bourgeoisie as a class, based on a Marxist conception of society in class conflict, no longer has any relevance.[4] The influence of feminism, gender and race politics in social debate from the 1980s onwards

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[1] See *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums: eine Bilanz des Bielefelder Sonderforschungsbereichs 1986-1997*, ed. by Peter Lundgreen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); and from the Frankfurt group, *Stadt und Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Lothar Gall (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990). An important publication in English is: *The German Bourgeoisie*, ed. by David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (London: Routledge, 1991).

[2] Cf. *Bürgertum nach dem bürgerlichen Zeitalter: Leitbilder und Praxis seit 1945*, ed. by Gunilla Budde, Eckhard Conze and Cornelia Rauh (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Joachim Fest and Wolf-Jobst Siedler, *Der lange Abschied vom Bürgertum* (Berlin: Siedler, 2005); and *Bürgertum nach 1945*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Bernd Ulrich (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005).

[3] Cf. *Rethinking Class: Literary Studies and Social Formations*, ed. by Wai Chee Dimock and Michael T. Gilmore (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), which examines this problem in relation to literature, not long after the collapse of state communism.

[4] Cf. David J. Lee and Brian S. Turner, *Conflicts about Class: Debating Inequality in Late Industrialism* (London: Longman, 1996).

resulted in the argument that the concept of class painted a picture of society in brush strokes that were far too broad and did not take other differences into account. The death of class was thus proclaimed in 1992[5] (one among so many other apparently deceased concepts). Others insist that with the apparently unstoppable spread of capitalism across the globe, class remains an indispensible category, though the battle-lines have been dramatically redrawn in a globalised world.[6] Some models divide societies into milieus, examining these on the basis of status, lifestyle or culture, using an approach more orientated towards Max Weber or Pierre Bourdieu.[7] Stratification models based on occupation and income are also still frequently employed, especially by governments, but once again there are a variety of approaches and there is little agreement.[8] Despite the fact that Germany is a society which still streams its students into three different tiers of the education system at a very young age, defining quite clearly their options later in life, Germans tend to be more comfortable talking about 'milieus' rather than class.[9]

Whether the *Bürgertum* exists or not and whether class is dead or alive, all depends of course on how each term is defined. As is well-known, Marx defined class differences as based on the relation between a group of people and the means of production, dividing his society into the proletariat (workers), the capitalists (the owners of the means of production) and the aristocracy (wealth by inheritance alone). Rather obviously this does not seem to describe the complexity of today's situation. Ownership of capital is now much more dispersed and hidden in the form of many shareholders rather than in the hands of a few 'big bad' capitalists. The conditions of workers may have been vastly improved since the nineteenth century as a result of the increasing wealth caused by the transformation to a service-based economy, however, arguably a large part of industrial production and the working class has merely been outsourced to other poorer countries in the 'developing' world, and there is still a significant portion of the population in the West who are extremely poor (both in financial and educational terms).[10] The poor in wealthy countries in Europe are however usually 'taken care of' by the welfare system, which often

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[5] Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London: Sage, 1996). There they argue that class is largely an historical construct and that today's society requires different methods of analysis.

[6] Cf. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Harvey's central thesis is that political and economic neoliberalism has served to restore class power and economic elites (or creating them in the case of Russia and China). See ibid., pp. 14-19.

[7] Cf. *Rethinking Class: Cultures, Identities and Lifestyles*, ed. by Fiona Devine et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), in particular: Michael Vester, "Class and Culture in Germany", in ibid., pp. 69-94.

[8] See Stephen Edgell, *Class* (London: Routledge, 1993), especially "The Measurement of Class", pp. 38-52.

[9] See Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System* (= *Arbeitspapier des Internationalen Graduiertenkollegs Halle-Toyko: Formenwandel der Bürgergesellschaft*, 9 (2010)), p. 6. Cf. *Soziale Milieus und Wandel der Sozialstruktur*, ed. by Helmut Bremer and Andrea Lange-Vester (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaft, 2006).

[10] Cf. *The Working Poor in Europe: Employment, Poverty and Globalization*, ed. by Hans-Jürgen Andress and Henning Lohmann (Cheltenham: Elgar, 2008).

makes them the subject of resentment (for example Guido Westerwelle's comments about the "late-Roman decadence" of those on welfare[11]) and leaves them with less political bargaining power in comparison to older forms of the working class. The working class has thus not vanished altogether but has perhaps merely disappeared from view. The remains of the aristocracy also no longer has any direct political power to speak of in most Western countries (though some are of course politicians), and many may even integrate into the world of work in order to survive. At the same time new elites such as top-level CEOs and celebrities have emerged. A swelling of the middle classes most certainly occurred in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s (see chapter two). It may therefore appear that Western society is classless because more people have a basic standard of living than ever before, as many argue.[12] But what about the high number of low-level office workers, call centre staff and the increasing number of temporary, migrant and freelance workers? Which class do they belong to? Class relations have not evaporated but have rather become vastly more complex and at the same time less visible in our globalised world.[13] Society is still divided into groups which have different access to particular careers, life chances, education, resources (which will become increasingly important as the effects of climate change are felt) and wealth.

My investigation is based on the assumption that class can be understood as a group sharing a particular set of values (regarding concrete life choices such as work and family) and can be identified through lifestyle, taste and cultural practices, related to but not just based on occupation or income. My understanding of class as a combination of social class, status and 'Lebenswelt' is therefore similar to Max Weber's.[14] While work is still an important sphere in relation to class, the process of the production and transmission of class values belongs in my view primarily to the sphere of education (both in educational institutions and the family) and depends on access to and engagement with cultural practices. In this sense, I also follow Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu's theories have also made culture of central importance in social

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[11] Cited in Albrecht von Lucke, "Die Neue Bürgerlichkeit: von der Projektion zum Projekt – und wieder zurück", in *Neue Bürgerlichkeit*, ed. by Thomas Meyer (= *Neue Gesellschaft: Frankfurter Hefte*, 57 (2010), no. 4), pp. 24-30; p. 25.
[12] An important early German article on this topic is: Ulrich Beck, "Jenseits von Klasse und Stand: Soziale Ungleichheiten, gesellschaftliche Individualisierungsprozesse und die Entstehung neuer sozialer Formationen und Identitäten", in *Soziale Ungleichheiten*, ed. by Reinhard Kreckel (= special edition no. 2 (1983) of *Soziale Welt*), pp. 35-74.
[13] Cf. *Globalisation and Equality*, ed. by Keith Horton and Haig Patapan (London: Routledge, 2004).
[14] See Charles Tilly, "Social History" in *Encyclopaedia of European Social History*, vol. iii, ed. by Peter Stearns, (New York: Scribner, 2001), pp. 3-17, who describes five different aspects of the concept social class, p. 5

history.[15] According to him, everyday things such as clothing, furniture, décor and cooking are a manifestation of habitus, which is the objectification of social reality on the level of subjective experience, expressed in dispositions, behaviour, values, taste and mentalities. Bourdieu emphasises that habitus is a dynamic rather than a static concept; it is generative and therefore also leaves space to account for heterogeneity in a particular social group.[16] Furthermore, culture and cultural taste offer a particularly complex reflection of habitus, no less than hard facts such as occupation and income. In my view, what has made the situation even more complex today is that cultural capital appears to be more easily acquired through consumption than ever before: products correspond to a variety of lifestyles and values, and lifestyle magazines, blogs and marketing companies serve as guides as to how to acquire the props to perform these different lifestyles. With the breakdown of strict class loyalties and a vastly greater freedom of choice, the market of cultural capital has also been liberalised, so to speak.

The second assumption of my work is that the core values of the middle class tend largely to correspond to those of capitalism. In this sense, the middle class are those individuals most integrated into the capitalist system and also those who uphold and propagate its values (one reason why the middle class is most associated with managers, the media, teachers and lawyers), even if they do not own economic capital *per se*. As capitalism increasingly spreads to all spheres of life and corners of the globe, these values also appear to pervade all levels of society, though they are not always identified with the middle class, but rather are viewed as general moral or ethical principles.[17] At the very least, these include a particular work ethic which encourages us to work hard now and enjoy life at some indefinite point in the future (Weber's protestant work ethic, which I will discuss in chapter three).[18] Though not all members of society may be middle class as the bourgeoisie were in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unwittingly (or not) the majority often act in compliance with its values. On the other hand, as I will show, a central ideal of *Bürgerlichkeit* is an autonomous public sphere in which critical views may be voiced. Paradoxically, therefore, this may also involve criticism of aspects of this value system from those most integrated, particularly from the ranks of the educated middle class

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[15] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 2010 [1984]).

[16] See Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus" in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (London: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 43-52. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992).

[17] Cf. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009).

[18] Admittedly, modern financial markets and business models, along with the system of celebrity, allow a certain elite to become extremely wealthy without much hard work. This is however often viewed critically by the educated and 'hard-working' classes, and the media. This group could therefore be seen as a new form of aristocracy. Unfortunately, this question cannot be dealt with in depth here.

in the context of culture and the university (exemplified by the fact that the terms 'middle class' or 'bourgeois' are often used negatively about others rather than positively about oneself). This curious relationship of denial and self-criticism (though this is rarely open *self*-criticism, but usually directed at some 'other' middle class, to which the critic apparently only belongs peripherally) will be a recurring theme of this dissertation.

What kind of lifestyle and values do the contemporary middle class or bourgeoisie then share? Ralf and Stefan Heidenreich have argued (albeit rather briefly) in *Mehr Geld*[19] that it is patterns of consumption that now define categories of class. They define the new middle class as those that can afford to consume that which is not a necessity. This middle class may however no longer conform to the traditional or conservative values of their parents or grandparents; in fact they may be decidedly bohemian or liberal in terms of their world-view. David Brooks has examined this new hybrid of bourgeoisie and bohemian in his book, *Bobos in Paradise*,[20] which examines the wealthy and educated, but liberal and hip 'upper classes' in America ('bobo' is a portmanteau of bourgeois and bohemian). Though they may be wealthy enough to be able to consume beyond necessity and to an extent function as the taste trend-setters (defining patterns of consumption), the contemporary middle class may also no longer work in the kinds of jobs traditionally associated with the bourgeoisie.

The economist and sociologist Richard Florida has charted the rise of the creative class in his book of the same name.[21] According to him, a massive 30% of the American workforce belongs to this category (though he includes knowledge-based and traditional bourgeois professions such as engineers and lawyers, as well as the more obvious sectors such as media, design and the arts). He also identifies this class as a key factor in economic growth. In Germany, Sascha Lobo and Holm Friebe have examined a related and rapidly growing social milieu, that of the freelancer, or to use their term, the "digitale Bohème". *Wir nennen es Arbeit*[22] describes the liberalisation of the job market and the radical changes the internet has brought to a generation's careers and lifestyles, generally in a positive light (though they emphasise that the great opportunities the internet brings must be balanced by a functioning social democratic state). Success as a freelancer however still depends on many factors that are arguably related to class or even to the traditional bourgeoisie: education, social networks, cultural capital and some financial security

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[19] Ralf Heidenreich and Stefan Heidenreich, *Mehr Geld* (Berlin: Merve, 2008).

[20] David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

[21] Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

[22] Holm Friebe and Sascha Lobo, *Wir nennen es Arbeit: Die digitale Bohème oder intelligentes Leben jenseits der Festanstellung* (Munich: Heyne, 2006).

(starting off as freelancer certainly entails some risk, especially in the 'blogosphere', which is championed as a route to success by Lobo and Friebe). Moreover, both the creative class and professional freelancers share a key characteristic with the historical bourgeoisie: that of earning a living independently (*Selbstständigkeit*).[23]

Along with these various popular studies of new forms of the wealthy and educated classes, in common parlance the terms 'bourgeoisie' and 'middle class' have also certainly not disappeared, though they are usually connoted negatively, as mentioned above. Especially since the counter-culture movements of the 1960s and beyond, these terms are often used to describe some sort of faceless enemy, conjuring up prejudice, bigotry and repression at worst, and mediocrity, conformism and outdated conservative values at best. Traditional conservative values have witnessed something of a renaissance in recent years in Germany, however. There have been countless books published on manners and etiquette, perhaps the most well-known (apart from the surprisingly enduring Knigge publications) by an Egyptian prince who has lived in Germany since the 1970s, Asfa-Wossen Asserate, entitled simply *Manieren*.[24]

The *Feuilleton* debate touched on briefly above also included calls for a return to traditional values such as the family and sometimes the *Sekundärtugenden* (obedience, faithfulness, cleanliness, order, punctuality and so forth) in defence against the increasing liberalisation of society. In an interview with *Deutschland Radio*, Paul Nolte suggests that *Bürgerlichkeit* can provide security against what he seems to perceive as a threat from non-European culture:

> Was sind die Werte im Bürgerlichen, die nicht nur uns erlauben, uns radikal in Frage zu stellen, sondern die uns auch erlauben uns Halt zu geben, uns Versicherung in einer unsicheren Welt zu geben, auch die uns über unsere eigene Herkunft vergewissern angesichts einer Konkurrenz von anderen Wertsystemen? Wie halten wir es angesichts von entstehenden Modernen in China mit unserem eigenen Wertesystem, wie halten wir es angesichts des Islams und eines politischen Islams mit unserem eigenen Wertesystem?[25]

Manfred Hettling has also argued in an interview with *Die Zeit* that *Bürgerlichkeit* has now broken through the 'illusion' of the welfare state and that liberal values associated with a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (such as civil society) should be strengthened.[26] This kind of

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[23] See Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 8.

[24] Asfa-Wossen Asserate, *Manieren* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2005), 14th edition.

[25] Paul Nolte interview with *Deutschland Radio*, "Das Comeback der Bürgerlichkeit", 27.12.2005 (transcript available online at: http://www.dradio.de/dkultur/sendungen/kulturinterview/451770/, accessed on 18.7.2009).

[26] Thomas Assheuer, "Wie sollen wir leben?", interview with Manfred Hettling (a Bielefeld scholar), in *Die Zeit*, 9.3.2006 (http://www.zeit.de/2006/11/Brger_2fInterview, accessed on 19.7.2011). Cf. *Bürgerlichkeit*

belief in the usefulness of the values of *Bürgerlichkeit* (in Nolte's case apparently as a defence against the other) is contrasted by the resigned mourning for its loss, for example by Wolf-Jobst Siedler, who has diagnosed the end of the *Bürgertum* in a book written with Joachim Fest.[27] Others, such as Christian Rickens, disagree and perceive a regeneration occurring in the conservative *Bürgertum*.[28] More recently the neologism *Wutbürger*, coined by the media to describe protesters against 'Stuttgart 21', seems to describe a more traditionally left-wing protest milieu merging with traditional bourgeois values (the movement's members however refer to themselves as *Mutbürger*).

The neoliberal and neoconservative colouring of the *Neue Bürgerlichkeit* debate highlights the political origins of the *Bürgertum*. Arguably though, in their earliest formation the *Bürgertum* was a group that wished to change society and not maintain the status quo: at its roots it therefore has more in common with liberalism than conservatism. This is one reason why I believe the debate has flared up in recent years, and also why in my view examining the *Bürgertum* and its values and politics is important today. For, more than any other political persuasion, it is liberalism and neoliberalism that have arguably shaped the last thirty years. The "digitale Bohème", the knowledge economy and therefore the creative class, the globalised and unequal world, indeed even the fluidity of social structures based on conspicuous consumption, can all be seen as results of the liberalisation of markets, regulations and states. With neoliberalism comes individualism, along with calls for more social engagement from the ground up, to replace the failed or dismantled state (depending on your view), concepts which echo the responsibility and autonomy of the original *Bürger*. As David Harvey writes:

> The founding figures of neoliberal thought took the political ideals of human dignity and individual freedom as fundamental, as 'the central values of civilisation'. In so doing they chose wisely, for these are indeed compelling and seductive ideas."[29]

Arguably, the successful young generation of today (bobos, 'hipsters', digital bohemians, the creative class – whatever moniker one assigns) have this one aspect in common: the valuing of individual freedom, or liberalism. It has also been argued (by David Harvey for example) that the counter-culture movement of the 1960s contributed to or at least played into the hands of the neoliberal politics that emerged in 1980s and 1990s,

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ohne Bürgertum: In welchem Land leben wir?, ed. by Heinz Bude, Joachim Fischer and Bernd Kaufmann (Munich: Fink, 2010).

[27] Joachim Fest and Wolf-Jobst Siedler, *Der lange Abschied vom Bürgertum*.

[28] Christian Rickens, *Die neuen Spießer: Von der fatalen Sehnsucht nach einer überholten Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2007).

[29] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p. 5. See also ibid., pp. 31-36 on class in neoliberalist societies.

by creating a generation which valued freedom and individualism above all else. The generation that came afterwards – the 'Spaßgeneration' – was one primed towards the kind of ironic, double-standard and hedonistic consumption Mark Fisher describes as being fundamental to neoliberal capitalism.[30] This "Generation Golf"[31] is indeed one defined by consumption above all else and even the commodification of counter-culture and rebellion.[32] In another scuffle on the sidelines of the *Neue Bürgerlichkeit* debate, former colleagues Diedrich Diederichsen and Ulf Poschardt (Diedrichsen had been an examiner for Poschardt's dissertation on DJ culture and they had both worked together in *Spex* magazine) argued fiercely about whether the logical conclusion was for the *Spaßgeneration* to vote Liberal, the only ideology that suited their lifestyles (which was Poschardt's argument). Diederichsen vehemently maintained his anti-bourgeois, leftist position, attacking the egotism of the cultural and intellectual urban elite (of which he is part).[33] For even the left ultimately has its roots in the bourgeoisie.

By examining the historical *Bürgertum*, new light may thus be shed on some of the defining principles and ideals of our time. The issue of the segment of society that is culturally and politically dominant has therefore not become irrelevant, but in fact has become even more pressing due to the more complex social relations in a globalised and digitally-connected world, not least in light of the recent financial crisis. Dismissing inequality as inevitable or natural is simply not sufficient. As Terry Eagleton writes, to say that "some people are destitute while others are prosperous is rather like claiming that the world contains both detectives and criminals. So it does, but this obscures the truth that there are detectives because there are criminals [...]".[34] While this dissertation is not primarily a sociological study, or an analysis of capitalism, the theatrical productions I will explore reveal this nexus between the ideals and values of the *Bürgertum* in the past and our own present condition, as well as our own relationship to this often obscured and certainly complex concept, the bourgeoisie, who just might turn out to be ourselves.

The main focus of this dissertation is however the specific cultural practice of theatre. The conventional, modern institution of theatre in Germany is a particular form of theatre which developed during the Enlightenment period and throughout the nineteenth

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[30] Cf. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 12f.

[31] See Florian Illies, *Generation Golf* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2004; 10th edition), who effectively defines his entire generation through products and pop culture.

[32] Cf. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); and *Commodify Your Dissent*, ed. by Thomas Frank and Matt Weiland (New York: Norton, 1997), especially Frank's essay, "Why Johnny Can't Dissent", pp. 31-45.

[33] A good summary of this argument can be read in the *Die TAZ*: Tobias Rapp, "Lass uns nicht über Spex reden", 15.11.2005 (http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/?id=archivseite&dig=2005/11/15/a0155, accessed on 17.7.2011).

[34] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 11.

century, in parallel with the *Bürgertum*. This theatre is often viewed as a primarily representational, literary theatre and is sometimes also referred to as 'dramatic theatre'. Unlike the forms of theatre that went before it, such as folk theatre at annual festivals and markets, *Commedia dell'arte* and the theatre of the *Wandertruppen*, and in contrast to that which came after it in the avant-garde of the early twentieth century and the neo-avantgarde since the 1960s, literary or dramatic theatre sought to create a representation of the world and individuals on the stage, a mimesis of reality, in which the audience would become totally immersed, albeit temporarily. Despite the more recent development of *Regietheater* in Germany and thus a strong tradition of experimentation, this form of nineteenth century representational theatre is still considered by most theatre-goers to be the traditional and conventional form of theatre, the basis of which is the dramatic text, even if this only serves as a norm against which this experimentation defines itself. This continues to operate even though most contemporary audiences do not actually expect theatre to conform to this unspoken traditional norm of representational theatre.

The centrality of the dramatic text for theatre and its study since Gottsched did however remain largely unchallenged until the late twentieth century. Ensuring its central place in the theatre was the passionate cause of many a playwright, critic and academic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and beyond, the effect of which was a hierarchy between the dramatic text, theatre and performance that seemed it had always been there and always would. Theatre in bourgeois culture was primarily regarded as a means to communicate a piece of literature and appropriate morals and values to the audience – an institution for the moral education of society. For theatre criticism and academics, the dramatic text also offered the only seemingly fixed object of study (the theatre performance being ephemeral), which meant that the study of theatre was largely subordinated to the study of literature, focusing mainly on the drama as literary form.

Since the 1960s this situation has changed dramatically, a transformation which has come to be known by many as the performative turn. This occurred primarily for two reasons. Firstly, the new theories of structuralism and semiotics allowed the theatrical performance to be analysed in terms of a system of signs just as a literary text might be, according to its own theatrical language.[35] This led to a focus on the actual conditions and phenomena of a theatrical performance, its materiality. Secondly, theatre practitioners and artists began to experiment with new forms which blurred the boundaries between traditional art forms, such as theatrical events without a traditional drama, and artistic events in galleries that involved live bodies or actors. More recently, the influence of

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[35] For example, Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Semiotik des Theaters*, 3 vols (Tübingen: Narr, 1983).

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poststructuralist theories which called into question the reliability of language and absolutist truth claims (Jean-François Lyotard's diagnosis of the collapse of 'grand narratives' for example), problematised representation and hermeneutics, and further encouraged a move away from a focus on the interpretation of literary text in the study of theatre, or indeed the performance as a semiotic system functioning like a text, to the subjective aesthetic experience of the spectator. The relationship between actors and audience, the theatrical performance as an ephemeral and unique event in time, and issues of presence and corporeality became central concerns. Furthermore, the proliferation of new media has contributed to new art forms, such as video art, while they have also been employed within traditional ones, creating inter- or plurimedial forms for which a new approach to aesthetics is required. The debate as to what this aesthetics should be rages on.

As much as this shift of focus was necessary and as much as new art forms do indeed require new methodologies to understand them, this became, so to speak, an equal but opposite reaction. While the materiality of the theatrical performance had been previously excluded, there is now a tendency towards an equally forceful exclusion of literary text and any questions regarding content. In some cases of course, there is no literary text *per se* upon which the performance is based, but most repertoire theatres continue regularly to perform Shakespeare, Lessing, Schiller, Chekhov, Ibsen and other 'canonical' dramatists and the general theatre-going public generally still expects to see the production of a dramatic work most of the time in the theatre. Indeed, even if some 'postdramatic' practitioners no longer revere the classical dramatists, they often make use of other forms of literary texts, such as the novel. And of course, people still go on writing plays. Though I work from the basis of viewing theatrical performance as event rather than as artefact, taking a mainly phenomenological approach, I hope to redress this imbalance by combining a number of approaches, including literary analysis in some cases, but without ever losing from view the performance as an experience and an event. The theatrical text and the performance, and their corresponding media – language and the body – are in my view the most central (intermedial) interrelationships of the theatre, and the interplay between them is one of theatre's unique characteristics. As Michael Fried once wrote (disparagingly), "What lies between the arts is theatre".[36]

The relationship between drama and theatre, or drama and performance (language/body, artefact/event, absence/presence) is also one associated with the *Bürgertum* in Germany, though this is not always explicitly stated or examined. As

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[36] Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood", in ibid., *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148-172; p. 164.

mentioned above, in Germany the dramatic form of theatre, the theatre as public institution and the aesthetics with which to analyse it all developed almost in parallel to the *Bürgertum*. The performative turn and the more experimental theatre since the 1960s are both a reaction against this putative aesthetic norm of a nineteenth century "bourgeois theatre of illusion"[37] or dramatic theatre, and to a certain extent a rejection of it. This can be linked to a rejection of repressive bourgeois values and norms in the social and political spheres, for example in the counter-culture movements or New Left criticism of capitalism in the 1960s. However, the institution of theatre remains fundamentally a *bürgerliche* one and directors working within a theatre landscape dominated by discussions of the performative continue to produce plays from the period of 'illusion'. Does this then mean that the bourgeois theatre of illusion persists unaltered, separate from a more performative or avant-garde theatre? Given that much of contemporary performance, which rejects representation and a preoccupation with meaning, can be inaccessible to an audience without a theoretical understanding of it, do these 'postdramatic' forms represent a new elitist form of cultural capital? How can we ever get out of transmitting some kind of value system through our cultural practices? How did and do these classical plays contribute to a performance of bourgeois identity? Though they are dramatic texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, does that mean that they always communicate the same values? How is a literary text performative in the context of the stage? These are some of the questions I will pursue.

I would like to underline here that I am not arguing for a return to an exclusively literary-based understanding of theatre or making a qualitative assessment that one form is better than the other; rather I am trying to resist a tendency to reinforce the same old opposition, where the privileging of one term over the other is merely reversed. I am interested in the interrelationships of all the elements in the production or performance as a whole, their tensions, oscillations and fusions. Furthermore, I wish to investigate whether the historical opposition between a bourgeois theatre aesthetic as norm and 'performative' and 'postdramatic' theatre in Germany since the twentieth century can be quite so clearly drawn, and how both influence contemporary practice. The work of the directors I have chosen to examine demonstrates characteristics ascribed to both these aesthetic forms, and

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[37] I take this term from the English translation of Erika Fischer-Lichte's *Geschichte des Dramas*, 2 vols (Tübingen: Francke, 1990): Erika Fischer-Lichte, *A History of European Drama and Theatre*, trans. by Jo Riley (London: Routledge, 2004); see Chapter 3, "The Rise of the Middle Classes and the Theatre of Illusion", pp. 146-201.

in their own way, each production problematises these broad oppositions.[38] I will argue that directors such as Thalheimer and Ostermeier are staging productions of canonical, bourgeois, dramatic texts, but do something new with these texts (perhaps incorporating performative elements) and also, that these texts themselves are not always as fixed as they are sometimes judged as being. On the other hand, if the theatre is still a space in which a certain milieu plays out and negotiates its identity, then the success of Thalheimer for example and the simultaneous rejection of a bourgeois aesthetic or *Bürgerlichkeit* by a primarily well-educated and intellectual milieu (theatre practitioners; theatre academics and critics; regular theatre-goers) seems paradoxical or at least problematic. Although René Pollesch is certainly not producing canonical plays, his theatre is a case in point of this paradox. He completely rejects conventional 'bourgeois' representational theatre aesthetics and criticises bourgeois culture and subjectivity, but often employs complex critical and cultural theory to do this, which arguably appeals to a certain intellectual milieu. Nevertheless, his work demonstrates an awareness of this problem and tries to engage with it at the same time.

This dissertation is divided broadly into two sections, the first theoretical and historical, and the second focused on the analysis of contemporary productions. In the first chapter I will explore contemporary theories of performance, performativity, 'postdramatic' theatre and the tension between the dramatic and the performative, with a specific focus on language. I will also examine theories of performative identity and group identity, such as that of the *Bürgertum*. In the second chapter, I will provide an historical overview of the emergence of the *Bürgertum* and attempt to unravel the complex of ideals, values and perhaps social groups behind the concept *Bürgerlichkeit*. Here I will also ask questions about the existence or demise of the *Bürgertum* in our times. In the third chapter, I will explore the historical circumstances around the emergence of the literary drama and a bourgeois 'theatre of illusion' as well as the performance of bourgeois identity on the stage and in the genre most associated with the *Bürgertum*: the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*. In the following three chapters in the second part, I will focus on the analysis of contemporary productions by individual directors that deal with the *Bürgertum* in different ways: in the fourth, on Michael Thalheimer's productions of canonical plays from the early period of representational theatre, namely *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust*, where I will also discuss the concept of canon; in the fifth, on Thomas Ostermeier's productions of Ibsen plays from the later part of this period, *Hedda Gabler*, *Nora* and *John Gabriel Borkmann*;

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[38] Indeed, this blurring of aesthetic categories is one reason why I have chosen these particular productions, rather than examine the work of other playwrights, such as Falk Richter for example, who arguably also deals with the modern bourgeois subject in his plays.

and in the final chapter on René Pollesch's contemporary productions of his own plays, which make the bourgeois subject and its deconstruction their explicit theme, while at the same time foregrounding text.

Finally, a short note on terms: the German terms *bürgerlich*, *Bürgerlichkeit* and *Bürgertum* are not sufficiently expressed by a translation as middle class, since *bürgerlich* and *Bürgerlichkeit* connote a sense of citizenship and civil society that middle class certainly does not convey, and so occasionally I will employ the German term, despite the risk of irritating the reader. Though the terms *bourgeois* and *bourgeoisie* are far from perfect translations and are also enmeshed in other discourses (for example Marxism), in my view this is the most accurate (and conventional) translation of *Bürgertum*, and so these are the terms I will use in general. I intend the term 'bourgeoisie' to include both the commercial bourgeoisie (*Wirtschaftsbürgertum*) and the academic bourgeoisie (*Bildungsbürgertum*). For reasons that will soon become clear, I also differentiate between the *Stadtbürgertum* (traditional urban bourgeoisie) and the modern or new bourgeoisie, by which I mean those businessmen and professionals whose number grew rapidly from the mid-eighteenth century onwards. When discussing today's relatively affluent and educated middle segment of society, which also includes lower-level employees, I will however occasionally use the broader term middle class, as distinct from the German bourgeoisie. Finally, though 'domestic tragedy' is a perfectly acceptable translation for *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, in keeping with my theme I will use 'bourgeois tragedy', which is the other standard translation.

Chapter One

Contemporary Theories of Performance and Performativity

As described in the introduction, this chapter will outline the theoretical methodology that will guide the performance analyses in the second part (which to varying degrees also informs the performances I will analyse) and my understanding of identity in a social context. Throughout this dissertation I will be concerned with two central issues: firstly, the end or persistence of an apparently bourgeois theatre of representation or illusion (aesthetic *Bürgerlichkeit* so to speak) and secondly, the criticism or reinforcement of the values and ideals of the *Bürgertum* (ethical or political *Bürgerlichkeit*) in the theatre. I have also already briefly referred to the term 'performative' in the introduction and this concept has provided the basic foundation for my thinking about these two issues, as well as how they might intersect.

In this chapter I will therefore firstly investigate this term, its theoretical background and its potential for analysing productions of plays which deal with bourgeois identity, and also the emergence of social or group identity through language. I will firstly examine Erika Fischer-Lichte's concept of performative aesthetics,[1] which directly relates to theatre and informs my basic understanding of theatre and methodological approach, which is primarily focused on performance analysis rather than solely literary analysis. In order for an aesthetics of the performative to be useful for understanding the constitution of social identity and analyses of theatrical productions of representational drama, I will also examine two preceding theories of the performative, to which Fischer-Lichte also refers briefly: that of J. L. Austin, who coined the term in his lecture series on language and performative speech acts, and Judith Butler's theory of performative identity. As well as that, I will outline the concept of habitus and the theoretical basis for a "bürgerliche Kultur" rather than a class identity in the traditional sense. I will also refer to Hans-Thies Lehmann and his work on 'postdramatic' theatre as well as to a lesser-known analysis of tragedy and performance by him.

According to Fischer-Lichte, one of the reasons for the necessity of a new aesthetics of the performative is a seismic shift that has taken place in theatre and artistic practice since the 1960s.[2] She attempts to provide a new framework for understanding new types of performance which have breached the traditional boundaries of theatre since then,

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[1] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).
[2] Cf. *Theater seit den 60er Jahren: Grenzgänge der Neo-Avantgarde*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Friedemann Kreuder and Isabel Pflug (Tübingen: Francke, 1998).

providing an alternative to the terms postmodern or postdramatic. To name just a few characteristics of this 'other' theatre since the 1960s: these new kinds of performances have ceased to attempt to create the 'illusion' of reality that bourgeois theatre had as its highest ideal, tend to reveal or emphasise the relationship between performer and audience, question the institutional framework that enables these performances to take place and often dispense with a traditional drama or at least no longer regard fidelity to the drama as a central aim. Another major term is postdramatic theatre, from Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatisches Theater*,[3] which focuses on the shift away from literary or dramatic theatre. At the very least these extremely influential theories have contributed to a general consensus that the literary drama is no longer the central, most important aspect of a theatrical performance; in some cases Lehmann is alluded to in order to champion the demise of 'literary theatre' and its bourgeois concerns with authorship, realism and even meaning. However, Lehmann repeatedly emphasises that postdramatic theatre also involves new forms of theatrical literature, which is yet always in relation to the dramatic – indeed this is implied by the very term 'postdramatic', just as the term postmodern implies a particular relationship to the modern.

In contemporary theatre and performance studies circles, it is often implied or claimed that we are 'beyond representation'.[4] Moreover, the explicit or implicit critique of conventional representational theatre often relates it in passing to an outdated bourgeois self-understanding, which since the social and cultural revolutions of the 1960s, has supposedly also been left behind. In an interview with *Theater der Zeit* in 2009, Hasko Weber, the artistic director of the Schauspiel Stuttgart, is asked why some of his artistic programme was perceived as scandalous:

> TdZ: Skandal finde ich eine interessante Kategorie. Die Konfliktlinie verläuft doch gegenüber der Repräsentationsästhetik, die natürlich eng an das bürgerliche Selbstbewusstsein des 19. Jahrhunderts gebunden ist.
> HW: Welcher Intendant nimmt sich eine Repräsentationsästhetik vor? Den möchte ich mal kennenlernen. Das will ja niemand. Das kann sich auch niemand leisten. Ich wüsste nicht, wer das macht.[5]

As the interviewer suggests, realism or representational theatre is linked to a nineteenth century bourgeois sense of identity, while the presence of a "Konfliktlinie" implies that some (or according to Hasko Weber, all) theatre practitioners today are beyond such an

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[3] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 1999).
[4] Cf. *Reality Strikes Back II: Tod der Repräsentation*, ed. by Frank Raddatz and Kathrin Tiedemann (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2010).
[5] Frank Raddatz, "Die Zukunft hat begonnen", in *Theater der Zeit*, no. 11, November (2009), pp. 11-15; p. 13 (interview with Sebastian Hartmann, artistic director of the Centraltheater Leipzig, and Hasko Weber, artistic director of the Schauspiel Stuttgart).

with literature, theatre often uses video, visual artists incorporate theatrical elements into installations and many examples no longer seem to fit into any category.[6] Greater interest in intermediality also led to the important recognition in theatre studies that its object of study is by definition a paradigmatic instance of an intermedial art form. The increasing pervasiveness of digital media in our lives, and digitalised experiences and social relations, has also highlighted the theatre's potential for providing a social space in which real, physical beings come together and experience something directly. This has resulted in a fruitful exploration of ideas of presence in theatre, as well as of theatre as a fundamentally social practice. Theatre however rarely exists without language in some form, unless it is mime, and even dance theatre practitioners, such as Laurent Chétouane and Constanza Macras also use speech or text in their pieces. In fact, arguably language and physical bodies are usually the two basic media used for a theatrical performance. In this chapter then, I also wish to explore the intermedial relationship of language (or the literary) and performance (or performativity). For my purposes of thinking about social identity (the *Bürgertum*) and the theatre, I am interested in how group identity might be constructed, deconstructed, or even destroyed through a performative use of language on the stage and also, as the etymological roots of the word 'drama' suggests, how drama can therefore also be performative.[7]

Postdramatic Theatre

While the aesthetics of the performative shifted the focus of an analysis of theatre away from literary hermeneutics to viewing the performance as process, Hans-Thies Lehmann more explicitly discusses the change in the status of drama in the theatre on the basis of a concrete overview of theatre since roughly the 1970s. He takes this timeframe, rather than starting with the neo-avantgarde in the 1960s, because he links the changes in theatre practice to the emergence and proliferation of new media. As already mentioned, the increase of immaterial, mediated experiences in our daily lives has brought the potential for unmediated experiences in the theatre into sharp focus. The establishment of the dominance of the textual or literary dramatic form is a pivotal point in the history of the

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[6] To name but one example, the Hebbel am Ufer Theatre in Berlin recently staged a series of site-specific events entitled "Ciudades Paralelas/Parallele Städte" (Berlin, 17-24 September, 2010), curated by Stefan Kaegi and Lola Arias. One of the events was an audio tour of the shopping mall Alexa at Alexanderplatz, in which the shopping mall became the theatre and the 'audience' the actors, guided by a radio broadcast and instructed to interact with the environment in particular ways.

[7] The word *drama* is derived from the Ancient Greek *drān*, related to the verb meaning to act or do. See Hans-Peter Beyerdörfer, "Drama/Dramentheorie", in *Metzler Lexikon: Theatertheorie*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Doris Kolesch and Matthias Warstadt (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), pp. 72-80; p. 72.

German *Bürgertum* and theatre; postdramatic theatre can also therefore be viewed in relation to the rejection of 'bourgeois' representational forms already discussed. Both theoretical positions, the aesthetics of the performative and the postdramatic, are based on a foregrounding of the material conditions in which the process of performance occurs, and therefore the term 'postdramatic' can sometimes be misinterpreted as implying that texts are, or should, no longer form the basis of the theatre. In an article arguing for the preservation of the dramatic, Bernd Stegemann writes of *Postdramatisches Theater*:

> Der Reiz des Titels, der zum Schlagwort einer ästhetischen Position geworden ist, ist offensichtlich. Das Buch verspricht ein neues ästhetisches Paradigma und liefert gleich eine Anzahl neuer Beschreibungsvokabeln. Zugleich verspricht es die lange ersehnte Befreiung des Theaters aus der Vorherrschaft des Dramas. Was heute mit Postdramatik gemeint ist, meint jeder Zuschauer zu wissen.[8]

However, Hans-Thies Lehmann never actually asserts in *Postdramatisches Theater* that theatrical text or literature has disappeared or will disappear, but rather attempts to show how text is used and functions differently in the theatre of roughly the last thirty years. Texts are still important starting-points for creating a production, though they may no longer be presented or treated as the dominant medium. René Pollesch, whose work will be the subject of the final chapter, incorporates or reworks dense pieces of text from philosophy, cultural criticism and academic writing into his performances, which however also display many performative or postdramatic characteristics, such as a lack of narrative or psychological characters. Rimini Protokoll, a theatre group famous for working with non-actors and 'presenting' reality rather than representing it, have also used texts as starting-points for their productions, including dramatic texts.[9] Lehmann also cites Heiner Müller and Elfriede Jelinek as examples of postdramatic writing for the theatre. It is therefore extremely important to maintain the distinction between drama and theatre on the one hand, and drama and theatrical texts on the other. As Lehmann notes, the fact that they are often used as synonyms for each other in everyday speech reveals how strongly the assumption that theatre is the presentation of a literary drama is embedded in our culture.

Lehmann's main argument is that for centuries the paradigm of the dramatic has dominated the theatre in Western Europe, in contrast to theatre outside Europe (for example Japanese Noh or Kabuki theatre or the Indian dance-drama Kathkali, which are non-dramatic forms). Since the emergence of the modern institution of theatre, "hieß

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[8] Bernd Stegemann, "Nach der Postdramatik", *Theater heute*, ed. by Eva Behrendt, Barbara Burckhardt and Franz Wille, no. 10, October (2008), pp. 14-21; p. 14.

[9] For example the piece *Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Erster Band*, directed by Helgard Haug and Daniel Wetzel (premiere: Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf, 4.11.06) and *Wahlkampf Wallenstein*, also directed by Haug and Wetzel, based on real people's relationship to Schiller's drama (premiere: 3. Internationale Schillertage Mannheim, Probenzentrum Neckerau, 5.6.05).

Theater in Europa Vergegenwärtigung von Reden und Taten auf der Bühne durch das nachahmende dramatische Spiel."[10] Even where there was music and dance, the dramatic text remained the defining factor and, despite the broadening of the repertoire of physical acting techniques in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, realist-psychological characters were still primarily expressed through dramatic dialogue. Lehmann emphasises that though there were many interventions in the form (interludes, music and so forth) and later subversions (epic theatre for example), theatrical performance was ultimately still dominated by the dramatic paradigm.

Dramatic theatre has also tended to involve a mimetic representation of the real world, a temporary space of 'as-if', based on the complicity of the audience. Lehmann argues that the diverse forms of dramatic theatre all tend to create a unified, fictive world, usually in the form of a fable-based narrative: "Ganzheit, Illusion, Repräsentation von Welt sind dem Modell 'Drama' unterlegt, umgekehrt behauptet dramatisches Theater durch seine Form Ganzheit als *Modell* des Realen."[11] Dramatic theatre is the mimesis or representation of the real, involving a chain of repetition or imitation: the actors repeat the instructions of the director and the words written by the dramatist, which have also been written by the dramatist as a representation of reality. Moreover, according to Lehmann, dramatic theatre is usually an abstraction of the real world that tends to reduce the heterogeneity of the reality it mirrors. Its main structure is dialectic, consisting of a dramatic conflict between two different positions, values or ideals. These opposing positions are either reconciled (comedy) or cannot be resolved (tragedy). Following Peter Szondi's reading of modernist drama,[12] Lehmann argues that this irresolvable opposition in tragedy later became a conflict between form and content, resulting in a crisis in the modernist period. The dialectic of drama therefore harboured the potential for its own deconstruction.

'Postdramatic' describes a theatre that sees itself as operating beyond the limits of drama, in a time where the drama is no longer the dominating paradigm. Theatre is postdramatic when the elements described above are no longer the regulating principle but *possible variants* of theatrical art forms. In his reading of Lehmann in *Theaterwissenschaft*,

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[10] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 20.

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

[12] Ibid., pp. 41-44 and p. 59f. Cf. Peter Szondi, *Schriften 1: Theorie des modernen Dramas (1880 - 1950); Versuch über das Tragische: Hölderlin-Studien; Mit einem Traktat über philologische Erkenntnis*, ed. by Wolfgang Fietkau (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978). In his discussion of the dialectic structure of drama, Lehmann also refers to G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, vol. 3, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, and *Werke*, vol. 13, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik 1*, both ed. by Eva Moldenhauer und Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986). The dialectical structure of drama can also be related to that of bourgeois subjectivity, see chapter two of this dissertation.

Andreas Kotte proposes the alternative but similar model of literary and non-literary theatre, existing side by side throughout the history of the theatre, arguing that the terms pre-dramatic, dramatic and postdramatic may be too strictly defined as historical categories.[13] This is an equally valid approach, but Lehmann is not simply interested in theatre with or without texts or literature, but a specific relationship to the dramatic aesthetic, which does not necessarily represent a total rejection or a teleological historical development. This does not preclude that the postdramatic can exist at the same time as the dramatic, which might yet persist in a weaker form, nor that elements of the pre-dramatic, which Lehmann strongly associates with ritual, ceased to exist in the period when the dramatic dominated. He understands the postdramatic as a response to the aporia of dramatic conflict, for which the dramatic form can no longer provide a suitable response:

> Das beschreibt postdramatisches Theater: Die Glieder oder Äste des dramatischen Organismus sind, wenn auch als abgestorbenes Material, noch anwesend und bilden den Raum einer im doppelten Sinn 'aufbrechenden' Erinnerung [...] Postdramatisches Theater schließt also die Gegenwart/die Wiederaufnahme/das Weiterwirken älterer Ästhetiken ein, auch solcher, die schon früher der dramatischen Idee auf der Ebene des Textes oder des Theaters den Abschied gegeben haben.[14]

Many of the aesthetic characteristics of postdramatic theatre are similar to those in Fischer-Lichte's *Ästhetik des Performativen*. The role of the audience becomes more important and is often active; there is no traditional narrative based on fable; there are fewer or no fixed characters and the actors often emphasise their own physical presence or individual identities. Also, postdramatic theatre tends not to present a cohesive abstraction of reality but collapses the distinction between the real and the performed. Just as modernist painting abandoned realistic, three-dimensional representation and began to play with its own media of representation (such as colour and texture), "so problematisiert radikale Inszenierungspraxis ihren Status scheinhafter Realität."[15] Postdramatic theatre creates a process in which multiple perspectives and subjects can be played out, displaced and replaced. In this Lehmann differs from Fischer-Lichte, whose aesthetics of the performative takes as its basis the creation of an unproblematic community or group identity in 'the audience', which could be seen as the relocation of dramatic unity from the stage or drama to the audience, although she also argues that the performative has the potential to collapse dichotomies and focuses completely on the subjective experience of the spectator (this will be discussed further below). Furthermore, Lehmann also addresses

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[13] Andreas Kotte, *Theaterwissenschaft* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), p. 113.
[14] Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, p. 31.
[15] Ibid., p. 13.

the possibility of postdramatic theatrical texts or literature, while Fischer-Lichte places a much stronger emphasis on materiality and the aesthetic experience. Just as modern literature also often problematises its own use of language as a means of reference to the 'real', so too can contemporary writing for the stage.

Lehmann also takes great pains to emphasise that *Postdramatisches Theater* can only be a tentative sketch of tendencies and should not be understood as a new norm replacing the old, though by now the theatre he describes is far less marginal than when he wrote the book. When something new arises, he insists, the distinction between the old and the new is often blurry and the new may often incorporate aspects of preceding forms. One of my concerns, especially in chapter four when I will discuss Thalheimer's productions of *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust*, will be to investigate whether there might be postdramatic elements in the contemporary staging of a traditional drama. The relation between a representation of a historical image of the *Bürgertum* and the contemporary social context contains the potential to disrupt cohesive 'dramatic' subjectivities.

The Performative Turn

The development away from a dramatic or representational form of theatre is viewed by Fischer-Lichte as part of a broader performative turn in culture and the humanities.[16] This began primarily with the neo-avantgarde performance and action art of the 1960s, but in the last twenty years has also had a major influence on mainstream theatre, in Germany particularly. This kind of artistic practice displays many of the traits briefly identified above: a transformation of the traditional subject/object relationship between audience and actors, an emphasis on materiality and the body, intermediality and a blurring of traditional borders between different art forms. This 'performative' theatre tends to either not use traditional dramas at all or heavily adapts and edits them, resulting in a kind of assemblage of text, for example in the work of Frank Castorf. This new work in turn had an impact on theatre studies, since traditional methodology and theory seemed ill-equipped to provide a framework for analysis, resulting in a 'performative turn' eventually taking place in the university too. Before the 1990s, the study of theatre was generally focused on the study of drama not of the performance, but since the performative turn there has been a general trend in theatre studies firstly to focus on the actual performance as the object of analysis and secondly to take more of an interest in productions which foreground performative aspects and the performance process itself. This was also influenced by developments in

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[16] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Zwischen Text und Performance", in *Ästhetische Erfahrung: das Semiotische und das Performative* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001), pp. 9-23. Cf. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996).

critical theory and a shift away from semiotic or structuralist approaches towards poststructuralist approaches, although Fischer-Lichte does not attest to any direct poststructuralist influence on her own work

A central issue of this shift is, as just described, the status of 'text' both in terms of theatre practice and criticism or theory. In the 1960s and 1970s, structuralism or semiotics was one of the dominant working methods in the humanities. This approach was based on Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of language as a closed system of signs, made up of signifiers and signifieds, which could be interpreted in a methodical, structured manner. This model could also be applied to other objects of interpretation such as literary texts. In fact, anything that had the potential to be interpreted – photographs, films, theatre, culture itself – could become a 'text' to be deciphered. In *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, Erika Fischer-Lichte traces the semiotic turn back to the linguistics of Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure as well as the Russian and Prague Structuralists in the early twentieth century, but also views nineteenth-century Western European culture in general as one which valued text as its mode of self-understanding and self-definition:

> Im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert sah die moderne europäische Kultur ihr Selbstbild und Selbstverständnis in Texten und Monumenten formuliert. Entsprechend bildeten diese die bevorzugten, wenn nicht einzigen Gegenstände der Geisteswissenschaften. Die moderne europäische Kultur wurde in diesem Sinne als eine "Text"-Kultur verstanden.[17]

This can also be viewed in relation to the *Bürgertum* and bourgeois literary theatre. The process of the literarisation of theatre and the establishment of realist-psychological dramas as the dominant form in the nineteenth century helped to establish a common group identity located in texts, which could be disseminated through print to a wide audience for the first time (see chapters two and three). Through literary theatre and its aesthetic form of 'representational' realism, the 'bourgeois subject' could be represented but also constituted, forming responsible, moral citizens (*Bürger*) through *Bildung* and culture. In the dichotomy *Geist/Körper*, *Geist* distinctly took the upper hand. The bourgeois subject was also seen as the sole producer of uniquely original cultural texts and artefacts, the author, in contrast to older cultural practices, which were produced and shared collectively.

Though Fischer-Lichte shows that performative cultural events foregrounding a communal and corporeal experience did take place in the nineteenth century, such as the circus, or exhibitions of colonised peoples, as well as folk traditions such as carnival that had survived since the Middle Ages, these were largely a representation of the 'other' for the Western-European bourgeois, against which he defined himself and his power over

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[17] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Zwischen Text und Performance", in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, p. 11

nature, the irrational and other cultures. According to Fischer-Lichte, the educated *Bildungsbürger*, "[hat] alles Körperliche, alles Performative aus seinem Kulturbegriff ausgeschlossen."[18] Especially in the theatre, it was the text as drama which was valued above all in the 'bürgerlichen' nineteenth century, and not performative aspects.[19] In 1918, for example, the theatre critic Alfred Klaar wrote: "Die Bühne kann nur ihren vollen Wert behaupten wenn ihr die Dichtung den Gehalt zufügt."[20] The function of theatre was therefore mainly understood as providing access to and passing on a canon of texts, which embodied and confirmed a Western European sense of cultural identity for the audience (from this perspective, this is also one of the reasons why empathy and identification were repeatedly emphasised as one of the primary aims of bourgeois theatre). Fischer-Lichte thus sets up an opposition between an eighteenth and nineteenth century "text culture" or culture as text (related to semiotics and structuralism) and a twentieth century "performative culture" and her own aesthetics of the performative.

Fischer-Lichte locates the beginnings of the shift to a performative culture around the start of the twentieth century. She describes the beginning of a new cult of the body in culture, exemplified by interest in sports, hygiene, the outdoors, activities such as walking, the naturist movement and the Olympic Games. Historians researching the *Bürgertum* often interpret this movement as part of the beginning of a crisis of bourgeois identity, as a youth (counter-) culture movement which criticised nineteenth-century repressive bourgeois values and morals.[21] Once again therefore, the "performative" can be seen to involve the rejection or criticism of a certain bourgeois element. Around the same time, Max Hermann, whom Fischer-Lichte describes as the first *Theaterwissenschaftler*,[22] and theatre practitioners such as Max Reinhardt, began to focus on the performative aspect of the theatre, placing emphasis on the physical bodies of the actors and other non-textual elements, such as light, sound and other imagery. Reinhardt also argued that the unique quality of theatre lay in the relationship it created between actors and audience at a unique moment in time: a social ritual.

This understanding of theatre as social ritual, argues Fischer-Lichte, occurs at the same time as a new understanding of Greek theatre proposed by a group of Cambridge

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[18] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Zwischen Text und Performance", in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, p. 13. I will discuss *Bildung* and *Bildungsbürgertum* in more detail in chapter two.
[19] Although, Fischer-Lichte cites Goethe's "Über Wahrheit und die Wahrscheinlichkeit der Kunstwerke" and Wagner's "Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" as exceptions to this tendency. See ibid., p. 15.
[20] Cited in Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Zwischen Text und Performance", in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, p. 16.
[21] See Hans Mommsen, "Die Auflösung des Bürgertums seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert", in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Jürgen Kocka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 288-315; p. 290.
[22] It is no surprise that Hermann was actually a Medievalist, notes Fischer-Lichte – medieval theatre can be understood in performative terms because it was largely non-textual and contains strong ritual elements.

anthropologists, including Jane Ellen Harrison, Gilbert Murray and Francis MacDonald Cornford, known as the 'Ritualists'.[23] This reversed the hierarchy of myth and ritual, insofar as the ritual aspect of the performance – the actions carried out – was no longer viewed as the vehicle for myth (which corresponds to the content or meaning of the drama), but rather as equally if not more significant:

> Diese Handlungen waren einerseits als ebenso beudeutungsvoll wie ein Text gedacht, andererseits als fähig, auf alle am Ritual beteiligten eine spezifische gemeinschaftsstiftende Wirkung auszuüben. [24]

Particularly the work of Murray and Cornford on the origins of Greek tragedy and comedy in ritual respectively, has significance for Fischer-Lichte as it places the emphasis on the ritual, for her performative aspects of Greek drama, perhaps the most canonical of European 'literary' dramas. The view that ritual has a "gemeinschaftsstiftende Wirkung" is central for her own aesthetics of the performative. Like Max Hermann and Max Reinhardt, for Fischer-Lichte the Cambridge anthropologists mark the early signs of the performative turn in the twentieth century.

As the twentieth century progressed, especially in Germany under National Socialism, public life and politics also became increasingly aestheticised, which Fischer-Lichte also links to the performative turn in culture that had begun a few decades earlier. Partly as a result of the experience of fascism, a notable return to traditional, canonical (bourgeois) drama and a retreat of performative elements is evident in the theatre of the immediate post-war period. However, the performative erupts again in the 1960s, especially in counter-culture and the neo-avantgarde in the visual arts, such as video installation, action painting and happenings, but also in the theatre, for example in the environmental theatre of Richard Schechner's Performance Group, which in *Dionysus in '69* for example, invited the audience to take part directly in the performance, an orgiastic, unstructured dance performance, by touching and dancing with the performers, creating a communal ritual experience. At the same time new critical theory emerging particularly from French poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes began to call into question the stable relationship between signifier and signified, asking how meaning is generated in language, literature and culture and how identity and the subject are constituted.

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[23] Cf. Robert Ackerman, *The Myth and Ritual School: J. G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists* (New York: Garland, 1991).
[24] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Zwischen Text und Performance", in *Ästhetische Erfahrung*, p. 14.

Aesthetics of the Performative

Fischer-Lichte's subsequent book *Ästhetik des Performativen* (2004) aims to provide a theoretical framework for this 'performative' theatre. It is informed by the understanding of ritual described above, as well as J. L. Austin's speech act theory and Judith Butler's theory of performative gender identity (both to be discussed in more detail below). Both these theories propose that performative actions are self-referential and have the capacity to constitute reality. This provides the foundation for Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative, but she also significantly expands the term. After all, Brecht's epic theatre has both these characteristics, and arguably, so does the bourgeois theatre of illusion, in that it played a role in the constitution of the identity of the *Bürgertum* and was self-referential in its reinforcement of particular values shared by the audience and in its portrayal of a particular class to themselves. What is central to Fischer-Lichte's concept of the performative is firstly the change in the relationship between signifier and signified (performance and text/meaning; performance as action rather than representation), and that between the performers and the audience. Secondly, as the performative collapses the "Zwei-Welten-Ontologie"[25] of semiotic and linguistic theory (based on an opposition between medium and message, sign and meaning) by placing the *process* of the production of signs, sense or meaning in the foreground, the material conditions of their production, their mediality, gain a new significance.[26] Performative signs or actions do not represent an absent referent or reality, but have a direct and transformative relationship to the reality of the subject that produces them and its present environment.

Fischer-Lichte's primary example in her introductory chapter to *Ästhetik des Performativen* is Marina Abramović's *Lips of Thomas*, performed in 1975 at the Galerie Krinzinger, Innsbruck. In this piece, the performer carried out actions which visibly and physically changed her body, such as cutting herself with razors, whipping herself, eating large amounts of honey and drinking large amounts of wine, and finally lying on a block of ice shaped like a cross. The pain and discomfort she caused herself (but did not visibly show a reaction to) often eventually motivated the audience to intervene and lift her bleeding body from the block of ice. This is an example of Fischer-Lichte's 'autopoietic feedback loop' of interactive responses between the actors and audience,[27] which constitutes the aesthetic experience or 'meaning' of the performance, or even the

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[25] See Sybille Krämer, "Sprache, Stimme, Schrift: Sieben Gedanken über Performativität als Medialität", in *Performanz: Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. by Uwe Wirth (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 323-346.
[26] Cf. Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Bote, Übertragung: Kleine Metaphysik der Medialität* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).
[27] See Erika Fischer-Lichter, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, pp. 58-62.

performance itself if the audience is more actively involved, such as is arguably the case here. The intervention transforms the audience into 'actors' who change the course of the performance, while at the same asks questions about the relationship between the performer and the observers (when should they step in; are they destroying the piece by intervening; is human empathy more important than the success of the piece?). In *Lips of Thomas* it is no longer clear who is in control or who is observing whom:

> Durch diesen Prozeß wurde die dichotomische Subjekt-Objekt-Relation in ein eher oszillierendes Verhältnis überführt, in dem sich Subjekt- und Objektposition kaum mehr klar bestimmen noch auch deutlich von einander unterscheiden ließen.[28]

According to Fischer-Lichte, the process of signification functions fundamentally differently in this piece than in a representational work of art or piece of theatre. Like in other performances since the 1960s, the theatrical elements tend to appear out of context, disappear again, be repeated or otherwise disrupted in some manner. These elements or signs are no longer presented as stable signifiers to be interpreted, but draw attention to their own materiality, their 'signness'. They are primarily experienced rather than interpreted: "Das Objekt, das als etwas wahrgenommen wird, bedeutet das, als was es wahrgenommen wird."[29]

Fischer-Lichte acknowledges, however, that any of these signs or elements may cause mental or emotional associations to arise in the observer – in the Abramović piece, possibly rather strong ones. There are many possible interpretations an observer could arrive at for the meaning of Abramović's actions and the symbolic nature of some the elements of her piece, such as for example the religious significance of the cross or the relation of self-harm to the practice of penance, but the artist's actions in the context of the performance, that is to a certain extent *without* context, dominate and provoke the strongest reaction in the observer: "Die Körper- bzw. Materialhaftigkeit der Handlung dominierte hier also bei weitem ihre Zeichenhaftigkeit."[30] According to Fischer-Lichte, rather than the observer arriving at any intellectual conclusions, he or she is far more likely to feel a sense of crisis when faced with a woman doing herself visible harm. This causes affective reactions, manifested as physical responses.[31] These audience responses, subtle or direct, form part of the feedback loop and thus constitute the aesthetic experience of everyone

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[28] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, p. 20.

[29] Ibid., p. 245. For her full discussion of the emergence of meaning and the process of signification, see ibid., pp. 243-283.

[30] Ibid., p. 21.

[31] Fischer-Lichte is influenced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in her understanding of emotions. Rather than expressing some inner state, emotions are only generated by and in the body and are simultaneously 'felt' by the subject and perceived by others. See ibid., pp. 263-264. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002 [1962]).

involved in the performance, which in turn causes more responses and so on. This does not mean that there is no longer any 'meaning', but rather that the signification process is open, in that it is revealed as a process the observer is implicated in and does not primarily refer to an anterior object or signified outside of the experience of this process itself. The audience is left to make what it wishes from its aesthetic experience.

Though not all performances are as explicitly physical as Abramović's *Lips of Thomas*, both contemporary theatre and Fischer-Lichte's aesthetics of the performative clearly emphasise materiality and mediality. Her four main criteria for an aesthetics of the performative – the elements which primarily evoke responses of the kind she is interested in – are corporeality, spatiality, tonality and temporality.[32] Though she identifies the inclination of some audience members to attempt to interpret the experience within the "Ordnung der Repräsentation"[33], that is to establish meaningful connections between elements, imagine psychological characters, question their own reaction in relation to their past experiences and so forth, she asserts that this is constantly disrupted by the "Ordnung der Präsenz", that is the experience of the 'signness' of the signs and primarily emotional and physical affects. Like the subject/object relationship, these two 'orders' are constantly in oscillation, drawing attention to the process of signification and the part the subject plays in it.[34] However, in her discussion of the signification process, she does not discuss the function of linguistic signs and their potential generation of another level of meaning more complex than physical responses, as she insists the performances she examines tend to be primarily of a non-linguistic nature, although she does draw attention to the fact that representational theatre, such as that of the eighteenth century, also provoked strongly emotional reactions through different means.[35] Yet, in her initial definition of the term, she refers to the linguistic foundations of the term performative. In order to pursue the question of how language and therefore drama might also be performative, I will now briefly examine some aspects of the linguistic discourse on the performative.

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[32] In German: *Körperlichkeit, Räumlichkeit, Stimmlichkeit* and *Zeitlichkeit*. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, pp. 129-242.

[33] See ibid., pp. 255-261.

[34] Perhaps rather surprisingly, as someone who writes about theatre, she also rejects the idea of a mental, linguistic or hermeneutic interpretation after the performance, due to the unreliability of memory and the difficulty of 'translating' the experience of the sign in its materiality into language. Any attempt to do so will merely result in another related but autonomous text, which has no bearing on the experience of the performance. See ibid., pp. 270-280.

[35] Ibid., p. 262f.

Linguistic Foundations of the Performative

Fischer-Lichte traces the term 'performative' back to the linguistics of John L. Austin and his 1955 Harvard University lecture series *How to Do Things with Words*.[36] Austin uses the term performative to describe certain types of speech acts, which are both self-referential and capable of constituting reality.[37] For example, if a priest says, "I now pronounce you man and wife," the utterance does not merely convey information, but has a direct effect on reality, and is therefore simultaneously an act and an utterance – a speech act – describing what it also carries out. In order for the speech act to be successful it must be uttered in certain circumstances and conform to certain accepted social norms (conventions), often represented by the presence of others. In the example mentioned above then, the speech act would not be binding if it were not a priest who uttered it, nor would it be if he changed his utterance to "I now pronounce you man and goat", as this is against accepted social norms. All this must also be witnessed by others, who represent the general agreement on these social norms. The necessity of the presence of witnesses and the unstated agreement on certain rules and norms are of particular importance for Fischer-Lichte, as it relates to the necessity of an audience in theatre, participating in the feedback loop of the performance, and I would add, the cultural affirmation of performative utterances. However, Austin explicitly excludes 'unserious' speech acts, such as those uttered by an actor on stage, in poetry or by a speaker to themselves, as these do not conform to the requirements of his theory. This exclusion has sparked a philosophical debate about language that continues to this day, but which Fischer-Lichte excludes from her own work focused on non-literary theatre.

Austin's lecture series was never intended for publication and can be described in the first instance as an attempt, or a series of attempts, to establish a clear set of rules for performative utterances. Each time Austin sets up such a scheme however, he finds examples which cause his own system to break down. Three times he abandons his system of classification and proposes a new one: the first distinction between ways in which a performative utterance can be felicitous or infelicitous; the attempt to make a list of performative verbs and types of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary); and finally the distinction between performative and constative utterances. Some scholars viewed Austin's work on performatives as unfortunately incomplete and attempted to finally establish the clear taxonomy of speech acts that Austin has failed to,

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[36] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, ed. by J.O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
[37] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, pp. 31-36.

for example John Searle.[38] In contrast, J. Hillis Miller[39] views this very failure to establish a clear scheme for classification and Austin's dismantling of his own distinctions as in fact the most ingenious aspect of *How to do Things with Words* and argues that it should be understood as a deliberately incomplete scheme of speech acts. It is rather a demonstration of "how to do things with words" and the performance of the impossibility of such clear distinctions (this is a characteristic which Fischer-Lichte also attributes to the performative – the potential to collapse dichotomies).

The 'unserious uses' of language mentioned above (utterances on stage, poetry, talking to oneself, citations), which Austin also calls 'parasitic' uses of language and repeatedly excludes from his investigation, but at the same time frequently mentions, also formed the basis for poststructuralist investigations of Austin's theory. The much-discussed and frequently quoted passage is:

> Secondly, as *utterances* our performatives are *also* heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect *all* utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance – a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of *etoliations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration [Austin's emphasis].[40]

Precisely this parasitic type of language use was later taken up by Jacques Derrida, who focused on the citation, or 'iterability', as an inherent characteristic of language and viewed it as the rule rather than the exception. Many of Austin's felicitous performative utterances depend on a citational quality of the utterance: saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony only has performative force because it is a repetition of an utterance said many times before, which has established its convention. The distinction between 'serious' and 'unserious' usage in Austin depends on the speaker's intention, but as Derrida points out, writing is primarily characterised by the fact that it may be decoupled from the producer

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[38] See John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

[39] See J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001). Cf. also Shoshana Felmann, *The Literary Speech Act: Don Juan with J.L. Austin; or Seduction in two Languages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Sybille Krämer and Marco Stahlhut "Das 'Performative' als Thema der Sprach- und Kulturphilosophie", in *Theorien des Performativen*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Christoph Wulf (= *Paragrana*, 10 (2001), no. 1), pp. 35-65.

[40] J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 22. He also mentions this again on p. 104. This is one of the many examples of Austin undoing his own performative: he says he will not discuss something (a promise) and then goes on to discuss it immediately afterwards. In this sense, *How to do Things with Words* is riddled with contradictory or infelicitous performatives.

and his or her intention, and reproduced or recontextualised repeatedly.[41] Derrida argues that all speech is in fact a kind of writing, because every utterance is inscribed with this trace of repetition and difference.

Hillis Miller, who was a friend of Derrida and translated many of his works, argues that literature is avoided by Austin because it complicates his classification of speech acts. Literary speech acts must either always be infelicitous or they cannot be judged in those terms. In a sense, literary language suspends the conditions by which it could be judged as a felicitous or infelicitous speech act, or as true or false, because it is a citation of 'normal' language usage:

> A citation, it would appear is denatured, 'etoliated' to use another of Austin's figures. It is "mention" not "use". This means it [the citation] can never be a felicitous way of doing things with words, whatever it may have been when Austin first used it. To cite an utterance is to suspend it, as with the clothes-pins of quotation marks I have used. Citation turns an utterance, in a manner of speaking, into literature, into fiction.[42]

On the other hand, as just mentioned, many of Austin's paradigmatic examples of felicitous performatives require 'convention', that is they must be a repetition or citation of previous speech acts, which have established the force of the utterance. Just as the performative utterance is always contaminated by the constative and vice versa, so too is literature always contaminated by the (real) speech act and the speech act is always contaminated by the citational or the fictional. As Hillis Miller writes:

> Austin is like a man who has exorcised a ghost only to find that it keeps coming back. Literature is the ghost that haunts *How to do Things with Words*. It keeps creeping back in and vitiating the attempt to establish the conditions of a felicitous performative.[43]

Literary language performed or speech acts on the stage add yet another dimension to the complexity of these distinctions. An utterance on the stage is a real locutionary act,[44] in that to say something at all is to do something: it is to make an utterance on the stage, to *act* in both senses. But it is also illocutionary in that it convinces the audience implicitly to take it both seriously and unseriously simultaneously. Sometimes it is also an implicit

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[41] In for example "Signature, Event, Context", a response to Austin's theory, in Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, ed. by Gerald Graff, trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlmann (Evanstown: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 1-23. Cf. also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

[42] J. Hillis Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature*, p. 3.

[43] Ibid., p. 18.

[44] A locutionary act is the act *of* saying something: we do something by saying anything. An illocutionary act is the performance of an act *in* saying something, usually implicitly, for example, "It looks like it might rain", could implicitly be a warning. A perlocutionary act is an explicit performative, the performance of an act *by* saying something, for example, "I warn you, it will rain". See J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp. 94-108.

'promise' to follow the conventions of 'real' situations, especially in forms of realist theatre. It does something *in* saying something and depends on the acceptance of the audience and the convention of theatre. By saying it is taken seriously and unseriously at the same time, I mean that a promise on the stage does not have the same consequences as a promise in 'real life', but still it has consequences, for though in one way it is bracketed-off from serious usages of language, it is still a real situation in which the performative utterance is created and received immediately by the other actors and an audience who are physically present. It is therefore also perlocutionary (and this is the aspect that Fischer-Lichte focuses on without referring to these categories in detail) in that it does something *by* saying something: it is an explicit performative, it creates the performance, it is an *act* or it *acts*. Furthermore, within the brackets of the stage, it may have consequences for the other actors (or characters), both on a fictional and a 'real' level (such as a cue). At the same time then, it has the citational characteristic described above, but one of a second order, so to speak. If all speech acts depend on convention for performative force (on the stage the convention *of* the stage), it is also a performance, in the sense of a demonstration, of this aspect of speech acts offstage. It is a performance of the performative act, which is a performative act itself. Language on the stage (and perhaps all literary language) quotes the citational quality of language. In that case, if there is a performative dimension to language and literary language, then there must be also such a dimension to dramatic texts of the type usually opposed to performative aesthetics.

What then are the effects or consequences of a performative utterance on the stage? What do speech acts do on stage? The effects could be divided into three different levels. One is within the logic of the stage itself, within the brackets of its unseriousness. A speech act within these brackets mimics the way in which speech acts function in 'real life', its performative effects are on the 'reality' of the stage world. This is especially applicable to realist theatre, but also to other types of performance, which though they may not set up the illusion of a fictional 'real' world onstage, still may set up an internal logic, the rules of the game as it were. The second is on the level of the performance in the context of the space of the theatre, of the relationship between the actors and the audience. Performative stage language implicitly asks the audience to be complicit with its 'unseriousness', to accept the temporary boundaries of the stage. This can be compared to Fischer-Lichte's *autopoiesis*, the feedback loop between the audience and the actors that generates the 'meaning' of the performance. The third level of effect is a social one. The performance/performative affects the audience directly, and as Fischer-Lichte says, has the potential to break down dichotomies and thus the potential to transform the audience. A

performative utterance constitutes reality to a certain extent, and the stage is one field in which convention and identities are negotiated and constructed. A theatrical performance is both real, in the sense of really present, and unreal, in Austin's sense of being unserious. By being ultimately irreducible to either 'real speech acts' or false or infelicitous ones, it reveals the 'contamination' and element of performance (or fictionality) that is present in all speech acts, the convention (based on citation) which forms their basis and thus this convention's contingency. This is not to say that reality is mere fiction – a criticism often levelled at deconstruction and theories of performative identity – but rather that reality has elements of the fictional and that play, performance and fiction have both a direct 'real' relationship with reality, while being both serious and unserious at the same time.

Performative Identities

As the concept of the 'performative' lost its importance in linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s, it experienced a second life in cultural studies at the same time. Fischer-Lichte refers to Judith Butler's gender theory as the beginning of the performative turn proper in cultural studies.[45] In her essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Butler argues that gender, like identity, is a continuous process of constitution made up of a repetition of performative acts by the body:

> In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts* [Butler's emphasis].[46]

The important link for Fischer-Lichte is that Butler compares the constitution of identity with the performance of dramatic text:

> So wie ein und derselbe Text auf verschiedene Weise inszeniert werden kann und die Schauspieler im Rahmen der textuellen Vorgaben frei sind, ihre Rolle jeweils neu und anders zu entwerfen und zu realisieren, agiert der geschlechtsspezifische Körper innerhalb eines körperlichen Raumes, der durch bestimmte Vorgaben eingeschränkt ist, und setzt Interpretationen innerhalb der Grenzen vorgegebener Regieanweisungen in Szene.[47]

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[45] Although Butler does not directly refer to Austin in her early work and uses the term slightly differently to Austin, as Fischer-Lichte notes. In fact Butler is largely responding to Derrida, which Fischer-Lichte does not comment on.

[46] Judith Butler "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, ed. by Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 270-282; p. 270. Cf. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

[47] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, p. 39.

Fischer-Lichte thus builds on Butler's concept of the performative to argue for the transformative power of theatre in *Ästhetik des Performativen*. In both cases the emphasis is on the process and the physical action, rather than the expression of some pre-determined meaning or identity. Also, in both cases the performative is self-referential and has the ability to constitute reality.

If Austin's speech acts defined language as continuous action, then Butler's theory placed the physical body in a central role: the performative act must always be embodied by a medium and can take non-linguistic forms. According to Butler, these performative acts are *non*-referential, in that they do not express some inner essence of male or female identity, and also constitute reality, in that they create the identity in the process of the act: "One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body."[48] Like Austin's speech-acts, however, one is not completely free to 'do one's body' as one likes, but must always operate within a given range of social and historical possibilities, embodying and dramatising these possibilities, though these are not completely fixed by social norms either. The body's material "facticity" as Butler calls it, is not completely denied: biological sex is one of the factors in the process, however the body becomes the sign or site where biological sex acquires meaning. To be a woman, argues Butler, is a fact that has no meaning until culture imbues it with one, or until the subject articulates or performs what it means to be 'factually' a woman. Because the 'project' of gender has cultural survival as its aim, it is a kind of strategy under the duress of historical possibilities. Ultimately though, identity results neither from a predetermined inner world, nor is completely defined by some outer social world, but results from the process and flux between both.

Though Butler's theory of identity can be interpreted as part of a generally perceived postmodern 'death of the subject' at the time[49] – the subject as subjugation – Butler repeatedly emphasises, particularly in this early essay,[50] that there is a degree of agency still involved in a subject's relation to its own performance and its openness to moments of 'improvisation' by others. It is also important to note that she contrasts performative acts of gender constitution on the stage with those that occur in real life (she compares for example the reaction to a transvestite on the stage and on a public bus). This

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[48] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in *Performing Feminisms*, p. 272.
[49] Cf. Derrida's deconstruction of subjectivity and fascism: Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. by Geoffery Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). Foucault's work on the subject as constructed through discourse is of course also important here.
[50] Some of her later work does however emphasise the aspect of subjugation. See for example Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: University Press, 1997).

distinction rests once again on the suspension of the 'real' rules in a theatre, the bracketing-off described above:

> Because of this distinction, one can maintain one's sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that 'this is only a play' allow strict lines to be drawn between performance and life.[51]

In reality such an act can be perceived as threatening (and become dangerous to the transvestite) precisely because there are no conventions to ordinarily delimit the imaginary character of the act – the performance of gender is not recognisable unless it is being subverted. However, even if this distinction between fiction and reality is maintained (which as I have shown may not be possible), the temporary or contingent quality of the reality constituted on the stage may shed light or reveal the temporary or contingent basis of our identities in 'real' life. In this sense the theatre can be seen as a kind of testing ground for alternative identities (something which Butler suggests her theory should encourage).

Here it is worth noting already, that though we may now view the kind of identities constructed by traditional bourgeois theatre as reinforcing dominant conventions these too were once *alternative identities* being tested out. Indeed arguably the construction of the bourgeois subject is related to the emergence of modern subjectivity itself (a subject negotiating between the individual self and social norms, as described by Butler), as I will discuss in the following two chapters. Furthermore, as I have already argued, a performative on the stage *does* have a direct effect on reality: it has the potential to transform the social script by precisely challenging "our existing ontological assumptions". Finally, in much of contemporary non-representational theatre, these very distinctions between art and life are blurred or suspended, the act is "not contrasted with the real, but *constitutes* a reality that is in some sense new."[52] This is the transformative power that Fischer-Lichte also ascribes to theatrical performance.

The broader implication of these theories for cultural studies was that culture should no longer be viewed as a closed system of signs to be interpreted by an objective observer, but rather as a continuous process. From this perspective, culture is the field of the constant negotiation of identities and subject constitution, which are also always in continuous process. Fischer-Lichte writes:

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[51] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", in *Performing Feminisms*, p. 278.
[52] Ibid., p. 278. Butler refers to Richard Schechner's work as an example.

In den 1990er Jahren bahnte sich ein Wechsel der Forschungsperspektiven an. Nun traten die bisher weitgehend übersehenen performativen Züge von Kultur in den Blick, die eine eigenständige Weise der – praktischen – Bezugnahme auf bereits existierende oder für möglich gehaltene Wirklichkeiten begründen und den erzeugten kulturellen Handlungen und Ereignissen einen spezifischen, vom traditionellen Text-Modell nicht erfassten Wirklichkeitscharakter verleihen. Die Metapher von 'Kultur als Performance' begann ihren Aufstieg. Damit wurde zugleich eine Rekonzeptionalisierung des Begriffs des Performativen notwendig, die ganz explizit körperliche Handlungen einschließt.[53]

However, one criticism often levelled at performative theatre and performance, or postmodern art in general, is that if nothing is 'represented' but the open process of signification or the performance, then there can no longer be any space for the political on the stage. Can or should a political or ethical position be taken towards the 'real', for example the 'real' social world of the audience if the aesthetic experience is all that matters?

The Subject and Agency

This leads to the complex issue of the subject's agency in a wider cultural context. On the one hand, poststructuralist and postmodern theories of the subject, like postmodern art, were often accused of an excessive subjectivity and relativism because of their scepticism towards conventional ideas of objectivity and truth. In this view, poststructuralism reduces the subject to a seemingly random nexus of language, ideology, media or historical and cultural circumstances.[54] On the other hand, the subject also seems to be over-determined by external factors. This led others to fear or proclaim of the death of the subject due to its 'subjugation' to external factors in the process of subjectivication.[55] In her later work *The Psychic Life of Power*, Judith Butler follows Foucault in the view that subjectivity is the process of the internalisation of discourses of power. But, she asks, "how can it be that the subject, taken to be the condition for and instrument of agency, is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency?"[56] In other words, can the subject still act autonomously?

In her work on gender discussed above, Judith Butler insists that gender identity is not the result of some prior and predetermined inner subject, but that identity is constructed

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[53] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Performativität/performativ", in *Metzler Lexikon: Theatertheorie*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Doris Kolesch and Matthias Warstadt, p. 236.

[54] Derrida goes even further and insists that any practice of deconstruction must also target the subject, the greatest grand narrative of all. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 16.

[55] Cf. Peter V. Zima, *Theorie des Subjekts: Subjektivität und Identität zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000); and Peter Bürger, *Das Verschwinden des Subjekts: Eine Geschichte der Subjektivität von Montaigne bis Barthes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).

[56] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 10.

in a process of subjectivication, largely determined by culture or society. Though the subject has a certain amount of choice in what kind of social scripts to perform or subvert, it still operates within a given range of options. The same could be said of Fischer-Lichte's subject in the theatre: it may be actively involved in the feedback loop, subjectively constituting the meaning in collaboration with others, but even in the most open of performances, this involves some constraints or a framework set up by the artist(s),[57] to say nothing of the many linguistic, cultural, social and historical associations that may influence this process. It could therefore be argued that theatre or indeed art is no different from any other discourse in which the subject is trapped into reinforcing established collective subjectivities. There is no doubt that this is sometimes the case. However, if the subject is to be understood as neither predetermined by something internal nor *only* by external structures, and if agency is not to be completely denied, a conception of the subject as negotiating with these external structures and cultural and historical situations must be pursued. Butler also emphasises that the subject is continuously in the process of negotiation and of embodying concrete realisations itself in her earlier work on gender. The theatre is one site in which such negotiations can be played out. Furthermore, language cannot be understood as a structure wholly external to the subject – there are innumerable theories of language's integral role in subjectivity, for example those of Jacques Lacan or Julia Kristeva. Language is perhaps the main interface between the subject's negotiation with its social and cultural environment in the process of subjectivity, between its body as the site of that process and the external structures which influence it. Language then must form part of an understanding of performative processes.

Fischer-Lichte clearly ascribes an active role to the subject in the constitution of the aesthetic experience, and a social role to performative theatre in that it has the capacity to collapse dichotomies and therefore transform the audience. By remaining an open process of signification, this kind of performance has the potential to open up perspectives and test out processes of subjectivication and can therefore clearly still have a social or political effect in the manner I have already described. However, Fischer-Lichte's argument that by 'activating' the audience and involving them in the process of signification, a temporary 'togetherness' or 'community' (*Gemeinschaft*) is created, may in fact have rather traditional political implications, when viewed in the context of *Bürgerlichkeit*. As I will show in the next chapter, processes of *Vergemeinschaftung*, that is the forming of communal relationships, were a central factor in the development of the *Bürgertum* or a

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[57] I will discuss this issue at more length in chapter six when I examine René Pollesch's theatre.

bürgerliche Gesellschaft.[58] Indeed, a *Gemeinschaft* based on feedback and negotiation, and regulated by autonomous subjects is a classic bourgeois ideal. The fundamental difference to Fischer-Lichte's model however, is her focus on the material rather than the linguistic, the process rather than the meaning, the body rather than the *Geist*, which somehow seems to free performative signs and actions from their wider social context.

The question therefore remains whether it is possible to completely escape representation, even if it is constantly disrupted by an 'order of presence', or how it functions in 'oscillation' with presence. In the example of *Lips of Thomas*, the cross cannot be freed from what it has represented in cultural and historical terms and become a neutral or new sign, indeed it was probably deliberately chosen by the artist for this very reason. As Derrida and Sybille Krämer point out,[59] a sign can only function as a sign because of its iterability, its repeatability. This means that the process of signification can never be completely reduced to the event of materialisation (what Fischer-Lichte calls *Emergenz*) – if that were the case, each process would generate completely new signs that would be indecipherable.[60] Something is still referred to beyond the sign itself: past convention perhaps, or the social script? Any emergence or 'presentation' of signs is therefore always shadowed by representation. In the performances I will examine, the function of the signs in Michael Thalheimer's work may be said to come closest to self-referentiality (the experience of the sign as its 'signness'), while Pollesch uses all kinds of techniques to disrupt a logical connection between signs, however, neither fully reduce the signification process to self-referentiality and emergence.

Tragedy and Performance

Fischer-Lichte's performative model involves the creation of a temporary *Gemeinschaft* between the actors and the audience through a common emotional experience. A similar model has long been associated with the theatre of the late eighteenth century and the German bourgeoisie, which though dramatic and therefore dominated by the literary or the linguistic, also aimed at a common emotional experience through *Mitleid*, and was a contributing factor in the creation of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. This emotional experience is what Aristotle and many other philosophers of drama have defined as catharsis, though

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[58] The complex relation between these two terms will be discussed in the next chapter.

[59] See Sybille Krämer, "Sprache, Stimme, Schrift: Sieben Gedanken über Performativität als Medialität", in *Performanz: Zwischen Sprachphilosophie und Kulturwissenschaften*, p. 330f.

[60] Which Antonin Artaud planned but failed to achieve in his theatre of cruelty. See Antonin Artaud, *Artaud on Theatre*, ed. and trans. by Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton (London: Methuen, 2001). Cf. Jacques Derrida, "The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation", in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001; new edition), pp. 292-316.

what exactly catharsis is, its specific purpose or effects, and precisely how it is achieved, have been interpreted differently throughout history and remain fiercely debated.[61] In *The Death of Character* for example, Elinor Fuchs shows that Aristotle's examination of the relative importance of plot and character can also be read as the subordination of character to action, rather than the other way around, as was usual for most of the 'dramatic' period.[62] This allows for a performative reading of Aristotle, which undermines the interpretation of catharsis as transmitting a univocal, moral message, or as the purging of excesses that so many scholars from the neo-classicist period onwards have read into Aristotle. What then is the effect of catharsis? This is linked to an important question already raised: if the new performative and postdramatic aesthetics are open processes of signification, what kind of aesthetic effect does this open process of signification have on the audience beyond feeding back into the process of the performance? Is its main effect the provocation of an extreme emotional reaction, such as disgust or shock?

Fischer-Lichte's primary example, Abramović's *Lips of Thomas*, seemed to result in precisely these emotional responses, which she also focuses on. Though she reminds her reader of the unreliability of memory as an aid to interpreting a performance after the fact, arguably most viewers of or participants in Abramović's *Lips of Thomas* will probably remember the crisis they experienced about whether or not to intervene and the unpleasant experience (for most people) of watching someone else inflict physical pain on themselves, far more vividly than the colour of the honey or the smell of the wine. This is likely to cause the participant to become aware of their subjectivity, not just as part of the aesthetic experience, but in relation to another subject in a much wider context. It seems to me that a highly significant effect of Abramović's piece, beyond physical responses such as closing one's eyes or turning away, is in fact *empathy*. In what way then, is this pity and fear elicited by Abramović's pain different from or similar to sympathy for Emilia Galotti, for example? From Fischer-Lichte's perspective, it would be possible to argue that the physical intervention (lifting the artist from the cross) is the embodied moment of empathy. However, even for those who are not theatre professionals or experts, the trope of empathy is likely to call forth associations on an intellectual (or at least mental or linguistic) level of a political, ethical, meta-theatrical or intertextual nature. The intervention of the audience, their transformation through the pity and fear they experience in the face of someone else's physical pain, can therefore be viewed as fitting into the model of catharsis, albeit a

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[61] See Andrew Ford, "Catharsis: The Ancient Problem", in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 109-132.
[62] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theatre after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 21-25.

'postdramatic' one which does not involve empathy with a fictional character but with a real person in a real situation. Abramović's piece involves a cathartic aesthetic experience, but explores it using different means, and could therefore be said to be also 'about' empathy and therefore catharsis. I do not wish to suggest that this is the 'correct' reading of *Lips of Thomas*, but wish merely to point out that even in a typically performative piece there is a level of representation beyond the aesthetic experience at work.

In a later essay entitled "Tragödie und Performance: Skizzen aus einem *work in progress*",[63] Lehmann explores the potential link between contemporary performance and tragedy, also arguing that *Affekt* or emotional impact is what connects them. He does not argue for the 'death of tragedy',[64] but views it as having taken numerous forms in the past, including Greek tragedy and bourgeois tragic drama, and identifies a radical change in the form of that which engenders what he calls "tragische Erfahrung" currently taking place.[65] Performative forms or performance art, he argues, are capable of creating this tragic experience today. Tragedy, of all forms associated with theatre, seems most bound to the literary drama. He admits that it seems impossible to imagine tragedy without a text and asserts that language is integrally related to tragedy, but precisely in relation to what it cannot represent:

> Tragödie ist als Pantomime kaum denkbar, auch nicht als reiner Tanz, sofern sie nämlich nicht einfach ein (zur Not mit ganz unterschiedlichen Mitteln) darstellbares Unglück betrifft, sondern stets eine komplexe mentale Verarbeitung der unglücklichen Vorgänge, eine Verarbeitung, die das sprechende Subjekt impliziert, gerade weil das, was tragische Erfahrung ausmacht, eine Grenze des Darstellbaren berührt. Die Tragödie bedarf der Sprache gerade wenn und weil es in ihr darum geht, einen Vorgang darzustellen, den die Sprache im Grunde nicht erreicht. Tragisch ist ein Vorgang, der soviel vom Paradoxen enthält, dass er den Sinn brechen lässt.[66]

The tragic is unspeakable; it is difficult to represent in language, but neither can its paradoxes be simply collapsed. Thus it is no surprise, says Lehmann, that Greek tragedy was significantly comprised of music, choral singing and gestures of pathos, along with poetry. It could only be articulated theatrically, that is in dialogue, monologue and choric speech, yet it must also involve something which goes beyond language.

In order to examine these ideas in relation to contemporary performance, Lehmann explores the work of the French performance artist Orlan, who takes her own body as her

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[63] Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance: Skizzen aus einem *work in progress*", in *Theater des Fragments: Performative Strategien im Theater zwischen Antike und Postmoderne*, ed. by Anton Bierl and Gerald Siegmund (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2009), pp. 165-179.
[64] Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Nach der Tragödie*, trans. by Jörn Etzold and Helga Finter (Stuttgart: Legueil, 2008).
[65] Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance", in *Theater des Fragments*, p. 165.
[66] Ibid., p. 167.

artistic material. Using plastic surgery, Orlan physically altered her appearance to incorporate features of female figures from famous paintings and sculptures (such as the chin from Botticelli's Venus and the Mona Lisa's forehead). This 'carnal art' as she calls it, was carried out in a series of surgical operations between 1990 and 1993, recorded on video and in photographs, which were made publicly available afterwards. As she only used local anaesthetic, she remained conscious during the operations, reading texts, commenting on the procedures and giving instructions during the operation. One operation in 1993, entitled *Omniprésence*, was broadcast live in fifteen galleries. Orlan has always placed her work in the tradition of the self-portrait,[67] rather than necessarily a feminist commentary on beauty, but instead a reflection on her own malleable identity and an intervention into that which could not be radically altered until recently: the biological body. The operations were, needless to say, quite gruesome (especially considering the fact that Orlan remained conscious) and were graphically shown in the various media. Discarded tissue and flesh were even offered for sale on the art market as artefacts.

Despite its ostensibly sensational nature, Lehmann draws a link between this multimedial performance and classical tragedy: even listening to a description of Orlan's gory operations could produce disgust or shock. Lehmann argues that in this situation, we cannot help but imagine for ourselves the physical pain she experienced – we cannot help but empathise. This is Lehmann's connection to tragedy and the Greek concepts of *eleos* and *phobos*: fear and pity, shock and empathy. For Lehmann, however, these affects themselves are not the main purpose of tragedy, nor were they in ancient Athens, but the medium for a unique kind of mental experience related to the subjectivity of the artist:

> Dies aber betrifft [...] zentral das Selbst selber, die Frage des Ich, des Willens, der *agency* der Handlungsmöglichkeit – nur aber abgelöst von einer dramatischen Repräsentation, einer Fabel, und konzentriert auf Person und Körper der Performance-Künstlerin.[68]

Lehmann reminds us that Aristotle defined tragedy through its *effect* on the observer. The effects Aristotle describes were later transformed into norms in the European reception of the *Poetics*. The means through which *eleos* and *phobos*, and therefore catharsis are achieved however, argues Lehmann, are not inextricably bound to the classicist rules of dramaturgy. Traditional theories of drama conflated means with ends, effects with dramaturgy and this has dominated our understanding of theatre for many centuries. Contemporary performance however, seeks similar effects through different means. These

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[67] Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance", in *Theater des Fragments*, p. 169.
[68] Ibid., p. 171.

emotional states are more like a kind of shock therapy, a physically experienced terror,[69] however they still involve empathy.

As mentioned, catharsis has remained much disputed and difficult to define, "da der Begriff rituell, medizinisch und psychologisch zugleich konnotiert ist."[70] Lehmann relates the effect catharsis has on the audience – their transformation – to ritual: "Ein Ritual soll etwas, soll eine Situation, soll die Beteiligten einer Transformation unterziehen, Unterhaltung grundsätzlich nicht."[71] But, writes Lehmann, entertainment and transformation through ritual are not as strictly opposed as they may appear or have appeared in traditional drama. No artist creates something without hoping to affect their audience, reader or observer on some way, just as every ritual also always contains elements of irony and playfulness. In dramatic theatre since the Renaissance, argues Lehmann, aesthetics and entertainment have taken the upper hand, leaving the ritual – cathartic – aspect in the background, while a serious ritual may also leave the entertaining or aesthetic aspects in the background or not explicitly recognise that they form an equally important part of the process. In bourgeois or dramatic theatre, he writes, ritual is usually only present "im Sinne eines schlechten Bestätigungsrituals einer Kultur, die im Alltag ihre Bezüge zu allem abgeschnitten hatte, was nicht in Kalkulation und rationaler Fixierung aufgeht, und sich im Theater gespenstisch feiert, als sei dem nicht so."[72]

According to Lehmann, new theatrical forms no longer dominated by the dramatic aesthetic, psychological and entertaining elements, have returned to the ritual, transformative element of theatre. Performance art has theatricalised visual art and detached the tragic, cathartic aspects of theatre from the literary dramatic form. This model of tragedy related to transformative, emotional ritual experiences is not radically new, however. Lehmann describes two historical models of tragedy: one is the traditional dramatic model based on conflict (political, moral or social) between the individual and society. This was the dominant European model from Aeschylus to Schiller.[73] Traditionally these conflicts have been seen to be based on the ethical or political issues of

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[69] Cf. Karl-Heinz Bohrer, *Ästhetik des Schreckens* (Munich: Hanser, 1978).

[70] Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance", in *Theater des Fragments*, p. 172.

[71] Ibid., p. 173. Transformation through ritual is also an important idea for Fischer-Lichte as discussed. Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theatre, Sacrifice, Ritual: Exploring Forms of Political Theatre*, written in English by the author (London: Routledge, 2005); and *Ritualität und Grenze*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte (Tübingen: Francke, 2003).

[72] Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance", in *Theater des Fragments*, p. 174. In my view, it is more complex than this, considering the emotional behaviour of audiences in early bourgeois theatre; see chapter three.

[73] Lehmann acknowledges, referring to Raymond Williams, that it is possible to distinguish between this type of tragedy and modern tragedy, e.g. Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Bertolt Brecht, but he does not explore this further here.

the age.[74] The second model of tragedy is not based on the ethical foundations of conflict, but views tragedy as a mode of the articulation, across different historical periods, of the condition of being human: the human's precariousness, its search for that which is beyond its limitations, at the risk of its own self-destruction. Hubris is understood in this model as this drive or impulse towards transgression. This tendency towards the catastrophic, or at least crisis, caused by the desire to transgress boundaries manifests in different forms of expression rather than particular instances of conflict. The conflict model depends on a particular dramaturgy, while the latter model does not and can therefore take other forms, such as the intense, emotional experience of a transgression.

The subject's act of transgression and its potential conflict with intention constitutes Lehmann's concept of tragic experience. In traditional tragedy, the tragic hero is often caught between free will and fate. The hero's radical assertion of his or her autonomy in the face of circumstances in the world often fails. In this 'other' form of tragedy, Lehmann draws a connection with ritual sacrifice and self-sacrifice (references to religion and specifically martyrdom appear in both Orlan's and Abramović's work). The suffering of the martyr and of the artist is an act of will. Orlan exercises her total free will over her self and transforms her predetermined physical body, though this free will is also ambivalent, because all of the choices that she makes, the signs she employs (Venus' chin and so forth), the interventions that are possible, are still determined by culture and history:

> Was ist das für ein Wille, der sich als Sklave von Wünschen, Ideen, Idealen manifestiert, die dem Selbst von außen zuwachsen? Also ein Wille, der von anderswoher gelenkt ist? An dieser Stelle gewinnt beides, die spezifische künstlerische Praxis der *Art charnel* wie auch die Dimension des Tragischen ihre beunruhigende Pointe.[75]

Freedom of will is also paradoxically subject to Lacan's 'law of the father' and where we exert our will to be ourselves the most, that is where our self is also annihilated or at least absent. In this sense, according to Lehmann, Orlan is just as much a tragic hero as Hamlet:

> Indem die Künstlerin, nicht anders als der tragische Held, aufbegehrt gegen das von den Göttern verhängte Schicksal, sich damit misst und menschliche Technik und Techne gegen das Fatum aufbietet um Auto-Nomie, Freiheit zu manifestieren, macht sie zugleich in radikaler Unheimlichkeit erfahrbar, dass in diesem Aufbegehren das Subjekt nur umso gründlicher das Vorbestimmte befolgt, dass Freiheit die andere Seite eines Gehorsams ist, der das Selbst zum *double* des kulturellen Diskurses werden lässt.[76]

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[74] For Hegel classical tragic conflict belongs to an earlier manifestation of the *Weltgeist* in the ancient world. Walter Benjamin sees classical Greek tragedy as the transformation of myth, while modern tragic conflict since Shakespeare is based on Christian values, according to Lehmann's summary. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, "Tragödie und Performance", in *Theater des Fragments*, p. 175.

[75] Ibid., p. 178.

[76] Ibid., p. 179.

Here I return to the issue of the split subject, torn between the freedom to make itself and the factors which determine its constitution, between autonomy and subjection, as discussed in relation to Butler. Lehmann shows, however, that both traditional drama and performance art have the capacity to express this fundamental human paradox or tragedy. All attempts to make art, or perhaps even to act or speak at all, must confront this, no less bourgeois tragedy, and in my view, this conflicted experience of subjectivity is just as identifiable in classical tragedy's conflict between the individual and society, as in the contemporary examples described. The answer to the question posed earlier in relation to Butler – can the subject still act autonomously? – seems to require the recognition of both the subject's autonomy and its subjection. Indeed, as I will argue in the following chapters, this split self, the relation between the individual subject and the social environment may be a fundamentally constituent part of what it means to be *bürgerlich*.

Performative Cultures

A final, important question to be pursued here in respect of performative conceptions of the subject is that of social group identity, and specifically for my purposes here, that of the *Bürgertum*. Lehmann identifies a fundamental experience of conflict in the subject between its own autonomy and its social, historical or cultural subjection, but does not shed any light on how the wider objective factors operate. Butler's analysis of gendered identity allows her to anchor her concept of gender so strongly in the body, precisely because of the 'facticity of sex', which conversely creates the alternative space in which the subject can potentially subvert the social script, by choosing elements or performed identities that may be opposed to the cultured meaning of that sex. How though can such a concept be applied to bourgeois identity, when this rests on a much more complicated matrix of 'facticity' and is not so directly situated in the body? How does the 'bourgeois' body become a cultural sign? If the gendered subject chooses from a repertoire of socially available 'stylised acts', where do these come from in the first place? As I have shown in my discussion of Austin and Derrida, the convention required for performative force depends on repetition (or iterability in language). If there is no inner essence of identity (or meaning of a word), these repetitions (convention) must be anchored in the social world, but if the social world constructs the individual, what constructs the social world?

The term 'performative' has mainly been applied to contemporary art and theatre performances but has also been extended to describe all kinds of cultural activity in everyday life – from rituals and festivals, games and sports to political events. Indeed, it has been argued that our contemporary culture and society is highly aestheticised and

characterised by performance or staging, and that therefore the performative model is a useful one for examining social practices in general.[77] The performative turn in cultural studies rejects the nineteenth century (bourgeois) idea that culture is created through and manifested in artefacts, that is in "Texten und Monumenten, verstanden als Werken",[78] and views culture as practice and process as already described to some extent. A performative approach allows cultural practice to be viewed as the collective processes of subjectivication, negotiation and the performance of identities (*Selbstinszenierung*). This approach understands a cultural practice as creating a liminal space in which meaning is generated and negotiated in the process of production, in a similar manner to the aesthetic experience in the *Ästhetik des Performativen*.[79] Although contemporary cultural practice displays the tendency towards emphasising these processes, this does not mean that they have been newly invented or discovered. In fact, such an approach may be especially fruitful for shedding new light on the very 'monuments' and conventions which appear to be so culturally reified, such as my subject here.

The performative approach has also been used to investigate these practices and processes as capable of constituting social reality in social studies. Here, social groups are seen as constituting themselves in everyday life in a similar manner as I have been describing in the field of culture. Every day we go through various forms of stylised ritual activities, which cement the feeling of belonging to a particular social group and stage this sense of group identity.[80] Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas used this method of analysis and the analogy of staging to investigate family and school social rituals in an inner-city school in Berlin.[81] One of their conclusions is as follows:

> *Soziale Gemeinschaften konstituieren sich durch verbale und non-verbale ritualisierte Formen der Interaktion und Kommunikation.* Diese werden ständig auf einer 'Bühne' aufgeführt, und auf diesem performativen Weg werden Rollen, Zusammenhalt, Intimität, Solidarität und Integration der Gemeinschaft als Gemeinschaft erst möglich. Das heißt, (institutionalisierte) Gemeinschaften zeichnen sich nicht nur durch ein kollektiv geteiltes symbolisches Wissen aus […], sondern sie handeln auch, indem sie dieses Wissen durch Rituale inszenieren, die

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[77] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Auf dem Wege zu einer Performativen Kultur", in *Kulturen des Performativen*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte (= *Paragrana* 7 (1998), no. 1; journal ed. by Christoph Wulf), pp. 23-25. Cf. also Guy Dubord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994).

[78] Fischer-Lichte, "Auf dem Wege zu einer Performativen Kultur", in *Kulturen des Performativen*, p. 26.

[79] "Das liminale Feld ist zu verstehen als Frei- und Spielraum, welchen die künstlerische Performance allen Beteiligten – Performern und Zuschauern – eröffnet, um alles mit allem in Beziehung setzen, mit allen möglichen Relationen und Bedeutungen experimentieren sowie mit allen möglichen Selbstentwürfen spielen zu können." Ibid., p. 27.

[80] Cf. *Ritual and Identity: Performative Practices as Effective Transformations of Social Reality*, ed. by Klaus-Peter Köpping, Bernhard Leistle and Michael Rudolph (Berlin: Lit, 2006).

[81] See Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas, "Die performative Bildung von Gemeinschaften: Zur Hervorbringung des Sozialen in Ritualen und Ritualisierungen," in *Theorien des Performativen*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Christoph Wulf, pp. 93-116.

eine Selbstdarstellung und Reproduktion der sozialen Ordnung und Integrität bestätigen.[82]

This creation of a *Gemeinschaft* was referred to by Max Weber as *Vergemeinschaftung*, the formation of communal relationships already mentioned, which are also related to associative relationships or *Vergesellschaftung*.[83] These communal relationships are formed when groups (which may be quite heterogeneous) have a cultural, ideal- or value-orientated sense of belonging together, while associative relationships depend on material or rational interests (though Weber emphasises that most social relationships contain elements of both). As I will explore in the next two chapters, the theatre is one sphere in which processes of both *Vergemeinschaftung* and *Vergesellschaftung* took place for the *Bürgertum*. The theatre served to reproduce and reinforce social rituals, values, ideals and even rational interests to an extent, in its representation of this social group. The question remains, however, as to how or why this process occurs in the first place. How is the convention established for performative force in a social context?

Problems tend to arise when either one side or the other is overly emphasised: the subject is either entirely constructed by society, or it creates society from some pre-existing self. Both views do not leave room for the negotiation process argued for above. Norbert Elias explores this problem in *Gesellschaft der Individuen*, in which he argues for a view which takes both aspects into account. He understands the process of cultural change and social group identity formation as a social *and* an individual-psychic process, neither of which can be completely isolated from one another, but are in a dynamic relationship of exchange and interdependence.[84] Rather than viewing society as a competition between many social units, each with their individual model of society, one of which eventually succeeds and dominates, society is seen by Elias as the web of interdependencies created by many individuals together. Together they create the possibility for new social forms (for example a democracy), and in turn these social forms influence and alter the individual's mentality. Elias also makes reference to the concept of habitus, usually associated with Bourdieu, which forms an important foundation for my understanding of the *Bürgertum* and *bürgerliche Kultur*:

> Jeder einzelne Mensch, verschieden wie er von allen anderen ist, [trägt] ein spezifisches Gepräge an sich, das er mit anderen Angehörigen seiner Gesellschaft

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[82] See Christoph Wulf and Jörg Zirfas, "Die performative Bildung von Gemeinschaften", in *Theorien des Performativen*, p. 96.

[83] See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft 1: Gemeinschaften*, ed. by Wolfgang J. Mommsen and Michael Meyer, part 1, vol. 22 of *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Horst Baier et al (Tübingen: Mohr, 2001), especially chapter 1, pp. 77-107.

[84] Norbert Elias, *Gesellschaft der Individuen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999 [1987]).

teilt. Dieses Gepräge, also der soziale Habitus der Individuen, bildet gewissermaßen den Mutterboden, aus dem diejenigen persönlichen Merkmale herauswachsen, durch die sich ein einzelner Mensch von anderen Mitgliedern seiner Gesellschaft unterscheidet.[85]

Habitus involves a set of learned dispositions and mentalities that also constitute social fields and can be passed down from one generation to another, for Bourdieu, through cultural and social capital.[86] This process must however always be understood as dynamic in Elias' sense. In "Habitus", Bourdieu writes that habitus "is a principle of invention, a principle of improvisation. The habitus generates inventions and improvisations, but within limits."[87] It can therefore be seen as a type of performative practice, but one which involves the accrual of processes over time, and which affects society as much as it is affected by society.[88] Thus someone can be born into a field and can easily acquire knowledge of 'the rules of the game', though that person is not born with some innate gift which enables them to operate or succeed in the field. Although Bourdieu emphasises that as each field is a set of dynamic relations, conflicts are inevitable (which can subsequently produce innovations in habitus, like Austin's linguistic performatives), habitus must be recognised by others (and thus must involve some repetition):

> The countless acts of recognition which are the small change of the compliance inseparable from belonging to the social field, and in which collective misrecognition is ceaselessly generated, are both the precondition and the product of the functioning of the field.[89]

Bourdieu (and indeed Elias) were also interested in the body's role in this process. Also influenced by Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu describes the body as embodied practice, as that which allows belief to appear *sensible*, that is, an undisputable matter of common sense, rather than a subjective mental decision.[90] In this sense an individual may become a 'bourgeois' body in that he or she incorporates his or her belief (values, ideals, mentality), which become the condition for social practice. Though the complex relation between field

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[85] Norbert Elias, *Gesellschaft der Individuen*, p. 244.

[86] See Pierre Bourdieu "Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital und soziales Kapital", in *Soziale Ungleichheiten*, ed. by Reinhard Kreckel (= special edition no. 2 (1983) of *Soziale Welt*), pp. 183-198. Published in English as: "The Forms of Capital", trans. by Richard Nice, in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

[87] Pierre Bourdieu, "Habitus", in *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, ed. by Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby, pp. 43-52; p. 46. Here he compares it to Chomsky's generative grammar, a structured generative system, though one which individuals are not born with.

[88] Judith Butler has engaged with Bourdieu's theory of habitus, accusing him of the neglect of the ambivalence at the core of subject formation. See "Performativity's Social Magic", in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Richard Schusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 113-128.

[89] Pierre Bourdieu, "Belief and the Body", in *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), pp. 66-79; p.68.

[90] Cf. ibid.

and habitus, and belief and the body cannot be examined at length here, Bourdieu's habitus model links practice and action with beliefs and mentality in a way which makes culture a highly relevant field for the discussion of social group identity.

In an important essay entitled "Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System" (to be discussed in more detail presently), Manfred Hettling also writes of bourgeois culture as a process of *Vergesellschaftung*, one which requires self-reflexivity in the subject to interpret reality beyond the limits of the social:

> Vergesellschaftsformen enstehen aus der Spannung zwischen ökonomischen Interessenlagen und Ordnungsvorstellungen (Lepsius), oder [...] 'kulturelle Vergesellschaftung' lässt sich begreifen als Deutung und Interpretation der Wirklichkeit über soziale Grenzen hinweg. Bürgerliche Kultur beschreibt dann die spezifische Form von Wirklichkeitsdeutung, welche sich nur durch Selbstreflexion über diese Wirklichkeit, nicht durch soziale Interessen konstitutiert.[91]

Hettling also makes reference to the historical anthropology of Clifford Geertz, who understands culture as a set of values, opinions and assumptions, with which the world is cognitively and affectively experienced.[92] Firstly, according to Geertz, culture is a process of assigning meaning. Every human action is imbued with meaning and significance. Secondly, these meanings themselves are also the result of human action; though they exist prior to action, they are not permanent and fixed, but emerge in the interaction between humans. Thirdly, individuals themselves are caught up in their own meaning constructions, though they appear to them as natural facts. Geertz thus divides culture into different cultural systems (religion or art for example), which constitute different modes of understanding the world.

Hettling applies this idea to the *Bürgertum* in order to argue for understanding it as a culture rather than a class, and consequently divides his analysis into three different dimensions: firstly, the symbolic system of values, ideals and practices which appear to the individual as given conditions. This, he argues, can be easily shown to exist for the *Bürgertum*. He summarises the ideal bourgeois system of values, which he emphasises is an ideal and not a rigid set of demands imposed by bourgeois culture:

> Mit erstens Besitz und Bildung, zweitens Eigeninteresse und Gemeinwohlorientierung, drittens (zweckfreier) Kreativität und (zweckgebundener) Rationalität und Nützlichkeit, viertens Emotion und Vernunft lassen sich sowohl die grundsätzlichen idealtypischen Charakteristika eines Bürgers als auch von 'Bürgerlichkeit' beschreiben.[93]

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[91] Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 10.
[92] Cf. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, Basic Books, 2000 [1973]).
[93] Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 13.

Secondly, *Bürgerlichkeit* also involves the process of absorbing and learning social practices and internalising values. This can succeed or fail, and this process is especially apparent when new values are being established as the norm. The literature of the eighteenth century articulates this learning process especially strongly. The third dimension of Hettling's bourgeois culture is the sociocultural practice associated with particular cultural systems. For example, for the *Bürgertum*, sociability and entertaining guests (*Geselligkeit*) was especially important.

Hettling argues that this is because the individual was essentially alone and no longer part of a clan, guild or estate, and that therefore how to deal with one's community and how to develop trust for one's fellow citizen became a central issue. This is also the reason why associations, societies and self-organisation became so important. Indeed, the arts became a particularly important field for self-organisation. Art societies organised exhibitions, acquired exhibits for museums and encouraged the growth of the art market. For Hettling, the field of art and culture in particular provides an extremely useful basis for the analysis of the bourgeois cultural system: "Die Kunst schuf [...] zugleich einen gesonderten sozialen Raum, in welchem grundsätzliche Fragen der Lebensführung artikuliert und dargestellt werden können."[94]

In July 2010, at the final conference, entitled "Performing the Future", of the *Sonderforschungsbereich* "Kulturen des Performativen" headed by Erika Fischer-Lichte at the Freie Universität in Berlin (which was funded for an extraordinary twelve years), Fischer-Lichte gave a concluding summary of their research in the area of theatre and a forecast of what may be left to do. She once again emphasised the aspect of the performative which has a direct effect on the audience. While it was possible to analyse how a performance has an effect on the bodies and emotions of the audience in an individual unique performance, she suggested that one of the methodological obstacles was finding a way to analyse more long-term effects on an audience or indeed a group of society, that is, in what way theatre actually contributes to constituting our social and political reality. She claimed that this was extremely difficult to do so in contemporary theatre because the theatre audience no longer represents a homogenous social group. Future research should therefore focus on periods of theatre history in which a homogenous social group could be identified and thus the effect of the theatre on them examined. It seems that the *Bürgertum* provides just such a social group for this investigation, though it may not turn out to be as homogenous as is often assumed.

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[94] Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 17.

I hope to have shown in this chapter that the often assumed opposition between traditional 'bourgeois' dramatic theatre and performance art, or between a representational aesthetic and a performative one is not as solid as it may first appear, and certainly not reducible to an opposition between literature and performance. We constitute our identities, singular and plural, through a myriad of media, some of which are more open than others to challenging convention. Theatre, which confronts language with bodies, ideas with actions, fiction with reality and performers with the audience, is a uniquely complex artistic space of subjectivication. How this functioned in relation to a particular social group in the past and in the present, as a public space of subjectivication, and the confrontation between the two aesthetic currents I have been discussing, will be the subject of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.

Chapter Two

Bürgertum and *Bürgerlichkeit*: Class or Culture?

As discussed in the previous chapter, some discourse on theatre tends to reject a certain aesthetic as "bürgerlich", implicitly or explicitly associated with the dominant class of the nineteenth century, which is seen as no longer having any relevance to theatre or society today. However, the very rejection of a "bürgerliches Illusionstheater" reveals what an important category 'bürgerlich' is in the German historical and cultural consciousness. Despite the fact that the concept of 'class' has fallen out of favour, there has been a significant increase in research interest in the social history of the *Bürgertum* in the last thirty years – it is an aspect of central importance for understanding the unique development of 'Western' culture[1] and that of Germany – but this is still generally limited to historical research. Moreover, many historians argue that the *Bürgertum* ceased to exist, at various different points, depending on how the term is defined. Until the *Neue Bürgerlichkeit* debate in the *Feuilletons* of German newspapers in the last ten years, there seemed to be a consensus that the social group described by *Bürgertum* was only to be found in history books: in retreat towards the end of the nineteenth century, in crisis during the Weimar Republic, largely destroyed by the Second World War, and finally defeated by the cultural liberalisation and economic growth that took place in the 1960s. Furthermore, what particular social formation the term *Bürgertum* actually denotes historically is by no means agreed upon.

The term *Bürgerlichkeit* is more obviously ambivalent, denoting a sense of citizenship and participation in society and revealing an etymology that is also present in *Bürgertum*, but not as readily perceived. For while in the French language the concept of *Bürger* was separated into *bourgeois* and *citoyen* (in English 'burgess' or later 'middle class' and 'citizen'), in German the words *Bürger* and *Bürgerlichkeit* still encompass both meanings. Thus, on the one hand the *Bürgertum* is a descriptive term for a group in society which emerged in the industrialisation of Western society, on the other *Bürgerlichkeit* is a set of values associated with that class, which may or may not be limited to the social group *Bürgertum*, which may or may not still exist. Indeed, as I will show in this chapter, *Bürgerlichkeit* may be understood better in cultural terms, as a set of values that may even be aspired to or adopted by those traditionally seen as excluded from the *Bürgertum*.

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[1] See Bernd Roeck, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011 [1991]), postscript to the second edition describing the state of research on the early *Bürgertum* in 2011, pp. 121-128.

The Early Urban *Bürgertum*

In 1967, the *Brockhaus* Encyclopaedia defined the *Bürgertum* as follows:

> Bürgertum, eine Gesellschaftsschicht, die von den übrigen Gruppen nur schwer
> abzugrenzen ist; früher meist mit städtischem Wohnsitz, Haus- und Grundbesitz,
> wirtschaftl. Selbstständigkeit, Ausübung bestimmter Berufe, guter Schulbildung.
> Doch sind diese Merkmale für das B. nicht mehr kennzeichend: B. ist kein einheitl.
> Stand mehr, sondern ein Sammelbecken, die breite Mitte zwischen der Besitz- und
> Geburts-Oberschicht auf der einen, dem Bauerntum auf der anderen und der
> Arbeiterschaft auf der dritten Seite.[2]

Unsurprisingly, even the *Brockhaus* claims this group is hard to define, but the association
with cities and towns points to the etymological root of *Bürgertum*: the medieval *burg*,
which meant a non-agricultural community, usually with a market square, first built around
castles but later towns and cities in their own right, which developed from roughly the
eleventh century onwards. The *Bürger* were the residents of these towns.[3] These *Bürger*,
later referred to as the *Stadtbürgertum* (urban bourgeoisie),[4] were mainly craftsmen or
merchants of some kind and were thus defined primarily in legal terms as being permitted
to engage in commercial activity as free men (unlike serfs who worked the land
exclusively for their landlord). This entitlement was based on the ownership of property in
the town and usually a certain level of income (*Selbstständigkeit*), and also provided some
degree of legal protection within the community. They also had the rights to purchase and
inherit property, were free to marry as they wished and were not legally tied to a specific
location.[5] However, even if all the requirements were fulfilled, the community was not
obliged to grant these rights – they alone decided who would be accepted and who would
not – and thus it was not a generally applicable status or fundamental legal right.[6]

Though initially these communities were under the full authority of some form of
landlord, or more often a bishop, gradually administration was delegated to a council made
up of the wealthiest *Bürger*, who eventually also established magistrates. Politically the
medieval towns thus resembled the *polis* of Ancient Greece and were often referred to as a

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[2] "Bürgertum", *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*, 20 vols (Wiedbaden: Brockhaus, 1967), vol. III, p. 497.

[3] In Old High German: *burgāri*; in Middle High German: *burgaere. Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 8 vols, ed.
by Otto Brunner et al (Stuttgart: Klett, 1972-1997), vol. I: A-D (1972), "Bürger, Staatsbürger, Bürgertum",
section 1, p. 672.

[4] This *Stadtbürgertum* was the main focus of the group conducting research on the *Bürgertum* based in
Frankfurt in the 1980s and 1990s (see below).

[5] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2009), p. 20.

[6] The population was therefore further subdivided into full citizens (the *Bürger*), residents (*Inwohner* or
Beisassen) as well as immigrants (*Gäste*) and those who had no rights. David Blackbourn, *A History of
Germany 1780-1918: The Long Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003; 2nd edition), pp. 6-7. Cf.
Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, vol. I, p. 676.

societas civilus in medieval texts. In Aristotle's definition,[7] citizens (*polites*) are those with a right to partake in the public life of a city, in political judgement and decision-making. This was not a given right but an obligation to the community derived from the ownership of private property (*oikos*).[8] The citizens of the *polis* were therefore equivalent with its political class and political power. Full rights as a *Bürger* in medieval German towns also involved political influence on the running of the community, though within the *Stadtbürgertum* there were also divisions between a more powerful patriciate linked to the lord's administration and those whose wealth was based on commercial activity.[9] Consequently, from roughly the twelfth century, these merchants and craftsmen formed associations and guilds to protect their monopoly on the production of goods. This proto-*Wirtschaftsbürgertum* had a certain degree of autonomous culture, which was independent from that of the aristocracy, farmers and the clergy, and was governed by convention, tradition and symbolism.[10] Work and personal achievement for example were valued more than in the aristocracy, as well as independence and community. Although later often resistant to change and modernisation, this group contained the potential for the growth of the capitalist system and the *Bürgertum*.

Only in the late middle ages, however, did this group attain legal recognition in the estate system outside of their own communities, as the third estate alongside the *Bauer*, *Adel* and *Pfaffen*.[11] However, in the following centuries with the rise of absolutism, the urban bourgeoisie gradually lost much of the power it had acquired, as all citizens began to be redefined as 'subjects' (*Untertanen*) of the sovereign ruler and the state (though in Germany this meant the numerous, largely independent territories established at the end of the Thirty Years' War). Many of the towns were gradually assimilated into these principalities.[12] Often, however, administration was left to the original magistrates, who were often happy to cooperate, despite being demoted to the second tier of power.[13]

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[7] See *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. by Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1946; repr. Oxford University Press, 1995), book III, pp. 84-132.

[8] See *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, p. 672f.

[9] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 21-22.

[10] Cf. Bernd Roeck, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums in der frühen Neuzeit*. Roeck argues that the early urban bourgeoisie were an important cultural force even after the decline of the cities in the sixteenth century.

[11] After the thirteenth century the towns also began to be represented in the *Reichs- und Landtage*. See *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, p. 677.

[12] See Mack Walker, *German Home Towns* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

[13] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 25.

The Rise of the *Bürgertum*

As the autonomy of the towns dwindled and the *Bürger* began to assert their political and private rights, the two meanings of *Bürger* as a member of a new estate and a citizen of the state took precedence, though this was much debated in the early modern period.[14] While the right to the title of *Bürger* had initially been limited to those who owned property within the limits of a city's walls, with the end of feudalism the term begins to take on its democratic hue; one began to speak of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, based on democratic and liberal principles, as well as civil law and a constitutional state (*Bürgerrecht*).[15] Influenced by Scottish Enlightenment figures such as John Locke and Adam Smith, a liberal model of society was developed in which the state intervened in the self-government of its citizens as little as possible (a model which today is often referred to as *Zivilgesellschaft* or civil society). In Germany, Immanuel Kant formulated a theory of a civil society based on autonomous individuals with a capacity for reason developed through public debate, who would be thus capable of autonomous self-government. His 1793 definition of *Bürger* is as follows:

> Derjenige, welcher das Stimmrecht in dieser Gesetzgebung hat, heißt ein Bürger (citoyen, d. i. Staatsbürger, nicht Stadtbürger, bourgeois). Die dazu erforderliche Qualität ist außer der natürlichen (daß er kein Kind, kein Weib sei), die einzige: daß er sein eigener Herr (sui juris) sei, mithin irgend ein Eigentum habe (wozu auch jede Kunst, Handwerk oder schöne Kunst oder Wissenschaft gezählt werden kann), welches ihn ernährt.[16]

The *Bürger* was thus defined less as a member of a social group but primarily as an individual, whose participation in civil society was his own responsibility and depended on his success, personal virtues and education – embodied in the concept of *Bildung*.

The ideal citizen was therefore a self-regulating, responsible and rational individual – autocephalous, to use Max Weber's term. As Jürgen Kocka also notes, a society of free and responsible individuals required certain institutions: the market, a critical public sphere, a constitutional state, a parliament and the rule of law,[17] as well as education and the possibility of self-improvement. The individual would work for the good of the many

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[14] Jürgen Kocka also emphasises the triple meaning corresponding to the three historical phases of *Bürgertum* as a) a member of the early modern urban community or town b) a member of the state c) a social formation in civil society. See Jürgen Kocka, "Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Probleme der Geschichte vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert", in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), pp. 21-63; see pp. 21-30.

[15] *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, pp. 683-698.

[16] Immanuel Kant, "Über den Gemeinspruch: das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis", cited in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, p. 696.

[17] Jürgen Kocka, "Das europäische Muster und der deutsche Fall", in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), p. 5.

but also enter into competition for success and wealth with other individuals[18]. The bourgeois model of civil society claimed to be intended for all members of society and to create equality. Its ideals were represented as universal ones, 'the rights of man' at all times, in all places and as the destiny of historical progress. It scarcely needs to be said that this was rarely the case in reality, both because of various set-backs and failures preventing the *Bürger* from achieving their goals and because the ideal of universality was often modified to their own advantage. Though by the mid-nineteenth century, the culture of the *Bürgertum* increasingly defined all aspects of society, it remained a social minority in actuality: Jürgen Kocka estimates 7% to 10% at the end of the nineteenth century.[19]

The eighteenth century also saw the increase of the political influence of the *Bürgertum* in the rest of Europe, in France culminating in the French Revolution of 1798, when the *bourgeoisie* declared a national assembly of citizens. In contrast to absolutism which defined those living within its system as subjects of an all-powerful ruler, it is in this period that the word *Bürger* acquires the modern sense of citizen (in French, *citoyen*). In Germany it was argued that all citizens of a state should be included in the category *Staatsbürger*.[20] In 1792, Christian Garve writes that the word *Bürgertum*:

> ...hat im Deutschen mehr Würde als das französische bourgeois..., und zwar deswegen hat es mehr, weil es bei uns zwei Sachen zugleich bezeichnet, die im Französichen zwei verschiedene Benennungen haben. Es heißt einmal ein jedes Mitglied einer bürgerlichen Gesellschaft – das ist das französische citoyen –, es bedeutet zum anderen den unadligen Stadteinwohner, der von einem gewissen Gewerbe lebt – und das ist bourgeois.[21]

Some other writers, such as Lessing and Schiller extended the term *Bürger* even wider, to *Weltbürger*, a citizen of the world who belonged above all to humanity and answered only to the principle of reason. As Schiller writes in 1784: "Ich schreibe als Weltbürger, der keinem Fürsten dient."[22]

This can be viewed as a reflection of both the lack of a centralised German nation state to provide a more localised sense of citizenship and the frustration with the absence of real autonomy as a *Bürger* at the end of the eighteenth century. For in Germany, there

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[18] This idea was explored further by Hegel who opposed the private and the public *Bürger*. See *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, pp. 706-709.

[19] Jürgen Kocka, "Das europäische Muster und der deutsche Fall", in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 6.

[20] This democratic concept of citizen is related to the Ancient Greek model discussed above. This is also reflected in Lessing's universal concept of *Mitleid* (see chapter three); for this reason one could also translate *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* simply as citizen's drama.

[21] Christian Garve, *Versuche über die verschiedenen Gegenstände aus der Moral, der Literatur und dem gesellschaftlichen Leben*, vol. 1 (Breslau: 1792). Cited in Jürgen Kocka, "Das europäische Muster und der deutsche Fall", in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 22-23.

[22] Cited in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, p. 686. Adam Smith had already asserted in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) that the merchant is a citizen of no nation.

was not to be a revolution for another fifty years and the concept of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* remained a largely unrealised ideal. Initially, however, absolutism contributed to the rise of the *Bürgertum*, as the administration of the state was increasingly delegated to educated experts, such as lawyers, rather than self-interested landlords and the nobility, who gradually lost much of their political function. Taxes also provided a new form of more reliable income for the state, which were generally paid by the commercially active bourgeoisie. In contrast to other European countries however, the German *Bürgertum* remained relatively powerless. The English bourgeoisie had gained significant power a century earlier in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 and England was economically more advanced due to international maritime trade and its exploitation of the resources of its colonies. In France the situation was largely the opposite: a more extreme and centralised absolutist monarchy, one which had flaunted its luxury in the reign of the Sun King, eventually became its downfall, prompting full-scale revolution. Germany, on the other hand, lacked a central leader to focus revolutionary sentiments on. The individual principalities and small states established after the Thirty Years War in fact increased their power over the eighteenth century, often ruled by despotic princes, for example Karl Eugen von Württemberg, the reason for Schiller's scorn for the aristocracy and exile from Württemberg.

The focus in Germany was instead on reforms and strengthening the bourgeois public sphere. The fact that the ideals of *Bürgerlichkeit* were not solely associated with a specific social group meant that even absolutist rulers could adopt an Enlightenment position, and members of the nobility were also often involved in civil societies and associations. This also led to the unique relationship of the German bourgeoisie to the aristocracy. The *Bürgertum* scorned and defined itself against the aristocracy, but yet the two groups often mixed, and the *Bürgertum* often mimicked the aristocratic lifestyle or integrated completely (most famously Goethe). This is mirrored in politics. 'Enlightened' absolutist rulers such as Friedrich II of Prussia and Josef II of Austria introduced some reforms that helped to strengthen a proto-democratic public sphere, such as the reduction of the power of the church or the abolition of torture, however, the privileges of the aristocracy remained largely in place and public debate subject to strict censorship. The advent of printing, however, and the differing laws of the many German states enabled a fledgling public sphere to develop in which opinions could be spread and debated on a much larger scale than ever before, despite this censorship.

In his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*,[23] Jürgen Habermas examines this process and argues that through the emergence of a public sphere the new *Bürgertum* was able to develop critical reasoning which it would eventually turn on the absolutist ruling powers in order to realise a more democratic nation state. At first coffee houses, language and reading circles, gentlemen's and patriotic clubs,[24] and later the more openly politicised *Burschenschaften* (student societies) provided a public sphere that was essentially still restricted to the members of specific social groups, but one in which different individuals came together to discuss matters of common interest. The more radical advocates of Enlightenment thinking met in secret societies such as the Masonic Lodges or the 'Illuminaten', who planned to infiltrate positions of power and secretly change society from within. Singing and gymnastics clubs also played an important role later in the nineteenth century.

With the advent of journals, newspapers and periodicals in the second half of the eighteenth century these dialogues could be documented, providing a public printed sphere open to a wider variety of individuals. Habermas argues it is the critical reasoning or "Argumentationsfähigkeit" developed there that created political awareness and the basis for democracy (and eventually the parliamentary system). It is the early *Bürgertum*, the *Stadtbürgertum*, which Habermas identifies as the carrier of this public sphere, which threatened the court's domination of representation and discourse:

> Diese Schicht der 'Bürgerlichen' ist der eigentliche Träger des Publikums, das von Anbeginn ein Lesepublikum ist. Sie kann nicht mehr, wie seinerzeit die städtischen Großkaufleute und Beamten der Adelskultur der italienischen Renaissancehöfe, als ganze der Adelskultur des ausgehenden Barocks integriert werden. Ihre beherrschende Stellung in der neuen Sphäre der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft führt vielmehr zu einer Spannung zwischen 'Stadt' und 'Hof' [...][25]

Literature, especially the new forms of plays and novels, was also read more widely than ever before,[26] contributing to the sense of a common identity embodied in ideals and values, in what can be described as an ethical community (see chapter three). Reading circles and literary societies, as well as the establishment of permanent and national theatres, provided a space for this community to meet. Academies were also established all over Germany to encourage science and the arts. Although the term *Bürgerlichkeit* was understood as a general principle as described above, this public sphere was dominated by certain educated social groups. At first this was mainly the *Bürger* of the towns, but

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[23] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1976 [1962]; 8th edition).
[24] See Bernd Roeck, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums in der frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 64-66.
[25] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 37f.
[26] See ibid., p.67f.

gradually new occupational groups emerged which also contributed to its development. These included academics, students, lawyers, doctors, civil servants, protestant pastors and merchants, although as mentioned, members of the nobility also often participated, particularly in the *Residenzstädte*.[27] This group is generally referred to as the 'neues Bürgertum' or simply the 'Bürgertum' and I will therefore refer to it as such, or as the new or modern bourgeoisie.

It is important to emphasise that any attempt to chart the development of the *Bürgertum* in summary will always fall short. Research has consistently shown that it was an extremely heterogeneous group and furthermore, the regional differences in historical development in the German-speaking region make it difficult to make broad statements which apply across the board. What is the case in Prussia is often the opposite in the smaller towns; what can be said of the manufacturer cannot often be applied to the writer. As a generalisation, it can be stated however, that the rise of the modern *Bürgertum* as a social group or class occurred in parallel with industrialisation, the emergence of the capitalist system and the establishment of the modern nation state. Secondly, two characteristics can be identified which are of central importance for the modern German bourgeoisie and to a certain extent the old urban bourgeoisie of the medieval and early modern towns: education and the ability to earn a living independently.

Wirtschaftsbürgertum

It is not until as late as the 1840s that *Bürgertum* begins to be used as description of a class equivalent with the bourgeoisie, differentiated from the old *Stadtbürgertum*.[28] Jürgen Kocka argues that the new *Bürgertum* did retain connections with the old *Stadtbürgertum*, through marriage and a shared culture for example, but primarily through their common political opposition to the power of the aristocracy and the clergy.[29] However, important new groups had emerged during the course of the eighteenth century, who displayed more liberal attitudes to business and were not necessarily tied to towns. A major factor in this was the growth of industrialisation.

With the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 and the resulting consolidation of the territorial state, some reforms were achieved and the constitutions of the different states were brought more in line with each other. In the southern German states (Bavaria, Baden and Württemberg) this included the abolition of tax exemptions for

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[27] See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 35.
[28] *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, p. 715f.
[29] Jürgen Kocka, "Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im Wandel" in *Bürger, Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit*, ed. by Katharina Belwe (= *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 58 (2008), no. 9/10), pp. 3-9; p. 5.

the aristocracy. In many of the towns and cities in the western German areas that had been under French occupation, the power of the old *Stadtbürgertum* was largely dissolved, opening them up to outsiders and providing all male inhabitants over the age of twenty-five with equal status. Although in many southern German towns this right remained contingent on a basic income, the decision now lay in the hands of the state rather than with the local magistrate.[30] Paradoxically, the next step towards a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* meant breaking the dominance of those who had laid its foundations in the towns. After defeat by Napoleon at Jena in 1806, reformers also managed to push through significant changes in politically-dominant Prussia, which finally destroyed the feudal system and paved the way for an economy regulated by competition and the market. However, in all of these states a fully democratic constitution recognising the rights of all its citizens remained unrealised.[31]

Nonetheless, the loosening of trade and property restrictions as well as the dismantling of the guild system encouraged market growth and led to a significant increase in industrialised manufacturing after around 1850 (a second phase of industrialisation occurred after around 1900) and the emergence of 'captains of industry', or the *Wirtschafts-* or *Besitzbürgertum*. This group included firstly the factory owners, such as Alfred Krupp, whose businesses grew at a rapid rate during the nineteenth century.[32] In contrast to the myth of making a success of oneself in spite of humble beginnings, research has shown that the major figures of the industrial bourgeoisie tended to come from a similar background, because of the financial capital required to set up a large-scale project, but also because of their access to social networks, or social capital to use Bourdieu's term – knowing the bank manager has always made things a little easier for those with ambitious plans.[33] Cultural capital was also important, especially in family businesses, where the sons of a successful businessman could be exposed to specific knowledge related to the company as well as codes of behaviour from an early age. The founders of small businesses, however, did often come from the lower strata, such as craftsmen who had earned enough to start a bigger production operation, or who had created or benefitted from some innovation. Technical training and education was therefore also important in this regard.

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[30] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 54-57.

[31] This is reflected in the debate around how much of society the term *Staatsbürger* should encompass, with some equating it with all individuals living in a state and others defining it on the basis of property and education. See *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, I, pp. 702-706.

[32] Krupp employed just 60 men in 1836; over 1,000 by 1858; 8,000 by 1865, and by 1873, 16,000 – a massive growth in just over 35 years. See David Blackbourn, *A History of Germany*, p. 136. Cf. Lothar Gall, *Krupp: der Aufstieg eines Industrieimperiums* (Berlin: Siedler, 2001).

[33] See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 83.

The *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* in general, however, had diverse origins. They occasionally came from the aristocracy who had invested in industry, the old *Stadtbürgertum*, those lucky few peasants who earned enough to become independent and of course the merchant class, which had become especially significant as imperial capitalism grew and foreign trade became more important. Arguably this milieu was also important for cultural and political development, given its exposure to other cultures through merchant activity and travel abroad; it is likely that it fostered cultural exchange. With the increase of trade and communications networks by the end of the nineteenth century, many small shopkeepers and merchants also built up bigger businesses: the first chain and large department stores. Many entrepreneurs, merchants and bankers, as Max Weber also notes, were outsiders, for example Huguenots, Jews and Englishmen. Weber suggests the reason for this is that, excluded from positions of influence, these minority groups were forced into the economic sphere as the only way in which they could engage in public life and access power.[34] This was especially true of large-scale merchants involved in trading between regions and countries, and especially bankers, for success in this business also depended on tight-knit social networks. This was however often at a high price – entrance to the *Bürgertum* usually meant approximation, assimilation and the sacrifice of one's own minority identity.

However, in the many associations and societies that flourished in the early years of the nineteenth century, the intermingling of different groups was sometimes encouraged: merchants met and exchanged knowledge with civil servants and university professors, wealthy businessmen sponsored art and cultural activities, and newcomers and foreigners mixed with the old urban elites. Even those from different religious backgrounds, including Jews, engaged in critical exchange.[35] Although it is important not to completely equate one with the other, in many ways, the new *Bürgertum* was the social group which further developed the public sphere, and though certainly not unified in opinion, the liberal programme of a civil society and the ultimate aim of a national constitutional state. The spread of industrialisation led, however, not just to an increase of the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* but also to a massive growth in the working class, especially in the cities. For this reason, the ambitious aims of the Enlightenment were pursued with a caveat by the liberals of the late nineteenth century: total deregulation was viewed sceptically for fears that it would

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[34] Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapialismus*, ed. by Dirk Kaesler, (Munich: Beck, 2004), p. 68.

[35] See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 59. Women were also a more important presence in the public sphere than often assumed, often participating in or running salons, circles and societies. Cf. Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), pp. 66-69.

swell the working class even further and replicate the dire conditions in England. Furthermore, the rights originally intended for all were often reconceived as applicable only to those who met certain prerequisites, which meant that the original vision of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* was once again restricted to a wealthy and educated elite – the *Bürgertum* themselves.

This *Großbourgeoisie* acquired more and more power as industrialisation progressed, and after the trade restrictions between states were abolished with the founding of the German nation in 1871, there was a significant increase in companies founded, many on an ever larger scale – it is no surprise that the period is known as the *Gründerzeit*.[36] These large scale industrial projects such as the railway or coal mining also required significantly larger sums of capital, which resulted in the formation of shareholder companies. These companies created a new form of the commercial bourgeoisie, the managers, who often came from educated but not necessarily wealthy backgrounds.[37] In many cases, they were civil servants whose bureaucratic skills could be transferred from the public to the private sector. These shareholder companies also created a new class of wealthy men and women who could afford to live a life of leisure on inheritance or shareholder returns, some of whom were thus able to pursue the arts, creating a wealthy bohemian milieu, a lifestyle previously restricted to the aristocracy. However, it should be noted that wealth was not necessarily a guarantee of reputation in bourgeois society: the ability to earn a living independently and be successful for oneself was the yardstick against which one was judged, regardless of one's inheritance.[38]

The rapid industrial growth that created the wealthiest of the new bourgeoisie also had some adverse effects on a section of the old urban bourgeoisie: the craftsmen and the cottage industries. The reforms of the 1860s that finally destroyed the monopoly of the guild system combined with the effects of mass-produced, cheaper goods left many exposed to fierce competition that they could not survive. Some crafts therefore died out, such as the blacksmiths and weavers, although there were some that found themselves in higher demand, such as stone masons and carpenters, because of the massive construction boom. In urban areas small goods-sellers also enjoyed a bigger market.[39]

This historical change illustrates the problem with defining the bourgeoisie through economic factors alone: though this old bourgeoisie had partly driven the changes it now faced the consequences of, in some cases it now found itself living at a level not much

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[36] Though many failed in the spectacular market crash of 1873 – see my discussion of Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkmann* in chapter five.
[37] See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 87.
[38] Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 11.
[39] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 89-92.

higher than that of the working class. This group therefore had to adapt to industrial capitalism and in some cases had to integrate itself into the new bourgeoisie if it were to survive (for example a stone mason founding a construction company). Its unique position has resulted in another category of description: the *Kleinbürgertum* or petite bourgeoisie,[40] though as just described, this covers a social group that varied rather a lot in terms of wealth and income. What links these individuals, however, is a certain cultural heritage from the old guilds and *Stadtbürgertum*, which expressed itself again in the late nineteenth century in the arts and crafts movement.

In roughly the same period, a second occupational group emerged that can be viewed as part of the *Kleinbürgertum*, though its affinity to the *Bürgertum* has often been questioned. Referred to as the *neue Mittelstand* (new middle class), it includes the new employees of factories and companies who were paid a salary rather than a wage and had a higher status and level of job security.[41] These 'white collar workers' often had some level of expertise or education and worked in supervisory positions in factories, as book-keepers, administrators and low-level civil servants. It can be argued, however, as Michael Schäfer does, that if independence is a central characteristic of the bourgeoisie, then the new middle class cannot be included in that social category.[42] By definition they were dependent on their employment and unlike the managing directors of the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* described above, had little influence on the company they worked for, and only enjoyed marginally more status than the workers they supervised. It was also rare that they became wealthy enough to start a business independently and rise socially. However, in terms of culture and habitus, they seemed to identify with and strive for bourgeois values, and can thus be seen as a group that is part of bourgeois culture, but one which also blurs the lines somewhat between the working class and the bourgeoisie, in a manner similar to the 'bohemians' and artists.

Bildungsbürgertum

Along with the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum*, the bourgeoisie is usually divided into a second overall group, the *Bildungsbürgertum*.[43] In the eighteenth century, with the exception of doing an apprenticeship and subsequently becoming a master (perhaps harbouring hopes of scraping together enough to become a merchant), the best opportunity for climbing the

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[40] See Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Geoffery Krossick, *Die Kleinbürger: Eine europäische Sozialgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Beck, 1998).

[41] See Günther Schulz, *Angestellte seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2000).

[42] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 105-107.

[43] The most comprehensive survey, though it restricts itself to the nineteenth century is *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Werner Conze et al, 4 vols, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985-1992).

social ladder was probably education. If one succeeded, one could earn a decent salary, enjoy some time off to pursue other (sometimes political) interests and gain membership of the unofficial elite of the 'nobilitas literaria': "Diese fast autonome Nebenhierarchie der Gelehrten war, was die soziale Mobilität angeht, die Avantgarde des Bürgertums."[44] The university thus offered one area of work in which a career outside of business or the state administration could be developed (though how far the university can be seen as an arm of the state is a debatable topic). The university also diversified into many new subjects: classical philology, history of art, modern history, languages and literature, and idealist philosophy. It therefore not only created more citizens who could contribute to the state but also created new careers for those who were educated. As secondary education became more widely available and the academic system became more organised during the nineteenth century, this group grew along with the status of anyone with an academic qualification. A common education based on neo-humanist principles also ensured common cultural capital, a certain degree of shared values and a common sense of identity. This was underscored by the fact that education was provided by the state at a relatively consistent standard, rather than categorised by different fees and varying degrees of elitism, as it was in England, although it was still expensive. It therefore required an already wealthy background or many years of self-sacrifice and saving on the part of the petit bourgeoisie and new middle classes.

As described above, the power of the *Stadt* (town) was gradually replaced by the power of the *Staat* (state), first in the period of absolutism and the process of territorial state-building, and later in the nineteenth century with the establishment of cross-territorial agreements and eventually the German Empire in 1871. These administrative systems required a new class of clerks, copyists, notaries, lawyers and so forth, which further swelled the ranks of the *Bürgertum*.[45] From the early nineteenth century, the Prussian state required that its higher-level civil servants had sat the *Abitur* at a *Gymnasium* and attended university.[46] Until 1848, civil servants also enjoyed a privileged legal status, but even subsequently, working for the state provided many benefits such as a guaranteed level of security (such as job security and a pension) and a high level of social status, especially in their own eyes. Many university professors and teachers also had the status of civil servants, and therefore all of the legal and tax benefits.

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[44] Karl Eibl, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Miß Sara Sampson, ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, with commentary and source materials (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1971), p. 99.
[45] See Hansjoachim Henning, *Die deutsche Beamtenschaft im 19. Jahrhundert zwischen Stand und Beruf* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1984).
[46] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 93.

Another significant group was the protestant ministers, most of whom had been educated at universities since the Reformation.[47] They were also often closely involved with the state authorities and therefore had some degree of political influence. It is an often noted fact that a very large number of Enlightenment writers and philosophers came from this background or had studied theology. Added to the civil servants, university professors and ministers, were all the other educated citizens of the state who were able to establish themselves in independent professional careers based on a university education, serving the state indirectly, such as doctors, independent lawyers, teachers in *Gymnasien* and scientists. Though they did not require a university degree to work in their field, many writers and critics had also studied other subjects first (Schiller studied medicine; Lessing theology and medicine) and almost always had some higher level of education.

Culture was therefore just as important as politics, arguably more important, in creating a sense of connection and communal identity, or *Vergemeinschaftung*.[48] As the *Bürgertum* grew and became more differentiated in the nineteenth century, art and culture offered spaces such as the museum and the *Stadttheater* – which were often funded in some way by private citizens' foundations – where communal and associative relationships could form, despite different religious or political opinions. An active public sphere also required those who took critical exchange and engagement with public and cultural life to a professional level, the interlocutors of the new civil society: the printers, publishers, journalists, political commentators, intellectuals, philosophers, literary critics and aestheticians. These critical mediators were able to adopt this role on the basis of a now far more widely available and valued education, based on an ideal of meritocracy for all (which was of course not a reality). Print was the major form in which these critical mediators practiced their trade. As I will discuss in the following chapter, Benedict Anderson argues that printing was an essential factor in the formation of national identity,[49] and for Habermas too, it was one of the prerequisites for the public sphere. As I will also explore in the next chapter, literature and the drama can also be viewed from this perspective.[50]

Once again though, the *Bildungsbürgertum* appears to be a category which comprises many diverse professions and backgrounds. However, if hard work and profit

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[47] Oliver Janz, *Bürger besonderer Art: Evangelische Pfarrer in Preußen 1850-1914* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994).

[48] Max Weber's term, see chapter one of this dissertation.

[49] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

[50] It may be apt to note at this point, that as my area of investigation is theatre, the performances and plays I will analyse are generally the products of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, though some of them do deal with the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum*.

can be said to be the defining ideals of the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum*, then it is the concept of *Bildung* which is the ideal that linked the different groups in the educated classes.[51] In his essay of 1794, "Über die Frage: Was heißt Aufklären?"[52] Moses Mendelssohn equates the concept of *Bildung* with the ideals of the Enlightenment: the development of the individual in order to become capable of autonomous rational thinking, free from superstition and religious dogma. Culture is the collective expression of each individual's *Bildung*. Johann Gottfried von Herder also emphasised the cultural aspect of *Bildung* in numerous philosophical works, such as *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (1774), which he argued was necessary for developing a free and classless *Volk*. It should be noted also, that once again the aristocracy was not excluded from acquiring *Bildung*, as it was conceived as a universal ideal. Indeed, one of its most important theorists was from the nobility: Wilhelm von Humboldt, whose grandfather had been ennobled for his services to the Prussian military. His concept of *Bildung* was most influential in the early years of the nineteenth century, when he advanced the reforms that would essentially create the modern university. This ideal prescribed fashioning oneself through learning, science and experience, achievement through meritocracy, acquiring 'personality' and inner depth (as well as the famous "Einsamkeit und Freiheit", which can be equated with the bourgeois values of hard work and autonomy):

> A remodelled educational system was to produce good citizens, as well as officials to man the administrative machine. But that was not all. The educational reforms also sought to reward merit rather than birth, through the system of examinations, and embodied a humanistic commitment to the ideal of cultivation and self-realisation.[53]

However, on closer inspection one may detect a paradox in this bourgeois ideal: on the one hand *Bildung* was seen as important for acquiring useful knowledge, expertise for running a business and getting scientific results, and on a broader scale, creating a healthy society. On the other, it expresses the rather abstract aim of 'becoming a personality', which might involve travel, engagement with the arts or even experiences which would normally fall outside the bourgeois set of norms. Schiller, for example, famously argued that aesthetic education and 'play', in opposition to the bourgeois work ethic of usefulness, is the only route to a free and happy society.[54]

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[51] For a concise overview of the concept of *Bildung* around 1800, see Michael Maurer, "Bildung", in *Bürgerliche Werte um 1800: Entwurf, Vermittelung, Rezeption*, ed. by Hans Werner Hahn and Dieter Hein (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005), pp. 227-238.
[52] Moses Mendelssohn, "Über die Frage: was heißt aufklären?", in *Berlinische Monatschriften*, 4 (1784), pp. 192-200.
[53] David Blackbourn, *History of Germany*, p. 63.
[54] Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1970).

The significance of the concept of *Bildung* is demonstrated by the fact that it engendered its own literary form, the *Bildungsroman*. Franco Moretti calls the *Bildungsroman* "the most contradictory of modern symbolic forms".[55] Its most famous example illustrates this problem well. In Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm longs to escape his constrictive bourgeois background and become an actor. His *Bildung* does not take place in the world of the merchant and work, as is recommended to him by Werner, but through travel and the arts. After attaching himself to a bohemian crowd of theatre players and travelling with them, he ostensibly achieves his dream. But in the end he must ultimately reintegrate into the Society of the Tower (which also resembles early secret bourgeois organisations such as the Freemasons), who have been monitoring his educational progress all along, and to an extent revert to a bourgeois norm, by accepting his responsibility as a father to Felix. Moreover, the very pursuit of *Bildung*, the development of his own individuality, was a bourgeois norm all along.

Wilhelm also expresses his own disdain for the concept of *Bildung*, castigating precisely the typical bourgeois concern with usefulness and profit, and expressing envy for the anti-utilitarian aristocratic lifestyle:

> Er [the bourgeois] darf nicht fragen: 'Was bist du?' sondern nur: 'Was hast du? Welche Einsicht, welche Kenntnis, welche Fähigkeit, wieviel Vermögen?' Wenn der Edelmann durch die Darstellung seiner Person alles gibt, so gibt der Bürger durch seine Persönlichkeit nichts und soll nichts geben. [...] Jener soll tun und wirken, dieser soll leisten und schaffen; er soll einzelne Fähigkeiten ausbilden, um brauchbar zu werden, und es wird schon vorausgesetzt, daß in seinem Wesen keine Harmonie sei, noch sein dürfe, weil er, um sich auf *eine* Weise brauchbar zu machen, alles übrige vernachlässigen muß.[56]

While Wilhelm criticises the utilitarian or philistine bourgeois concept of *Bildung*, as a literary figure, Wilhelm is an example of broader *Bildung* and the acquisition of 'life experience'. However, he must pursue the goal of *Bildung* without knowing in advance what the path or the end result will entail: the subject is formed to a certain extent in ignorance. When Wilhelm is shown his 'Lehrbrief', it is revealed that the Society's aim is the education of individuals in order to create a somewhat utopian society. However, Goethe's ironic treatment of Wilhelm and his eventual reintegration place a question mark over what this *Bildung* ultimately achieves. In both the figure of Wilhelm and Goethe's treatment of him, there can be "keine Harmonie", for *Bildung* necessarily entails an ironic distance from the self and therefore self-criticism, as well as a certain amount of

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[55] Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 2000 [1987]; new edition), p. 10.

[56] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1982), book 5, chapter 3, p. 302f. Cf. Jürgen Jacobs, *Wilhelm Meister und seine Brüder* (Munich: Fink, 1972), pp. 75-89.

disorientation. Wilhelm ultimately can only submit his conflicted self to the harmony of the social group once again, but his 'problem' remains ostensibly unsolved.

Class or Culture?

From even such a brief survey, it becomes clear that the *Bürgertum* is difficult to describe as a unified group. Commercial bourgeois values often conflict with those of the academic bourgeoisie and vice versa. Even as a social class, as defined by Max Weber, it presents problems, for there was not always a great deal of social mobility between the different groups (class situations) of the *Bürgertum*.[57] Upward social mobility from the *Kleinbürgertum* certainly involved quite a struggle and even movement between the academic and the commercial bourgeoisie was not that common. Though there were exceptions, members of both groups tended to marry partners from similar backgrounds, and first sons particularly were expected to join the family company or pursue the patriarchal profession.[58] Rather than a social class, the *Bürgertum* can instead be viewed as the carrier of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (civil society), but this model also starts to becomes problematic as the nineteenth century progressed and the bourgeoisie began to redefine their ideals to protect their own advantage from the working classes. The canon of values is interpreted differently by the various different milieus, sometimes even directly criticised from within the bourgeoisie (for example the criticism of the philistine and the profit-obsessed businessman by the *Bildungsbürgertum*, later expressed in the opposition between *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*). Though as a social class the *Bürgertum* did acquire sharper contours after 1850 as it became more culturally and politically dominant, this was often at the expense of the original ideal of an equal and democratic society, especially in the period of *Kulturkritik* around the turn of the twentieth century, when it became decisively more conservative and nationalist (which I will discuss in more detail below). However, the fact remains that throughout this period a certain number of German citizens perceived themselves as members of the *Bürgertum* and defined themselves as *bürgerlich*, indeed the very 'defence of its borders' from the working class displays a strong and coherent sense of identity that appeared threatened by the less educated and supposedly uncultivated masses.

The question of the relation between the *Bürgertum* as a social formation and the principles of *Bürgerlichkeit* has remained a central problem for historians researching in this area. In his history of the *Bürgertum*, Michael Schäfer writes:

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[57] Max Weber defines social class as the sum total of different class situations, between which there is a significant amount of social mobility. See Micheal Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 108-111.
[58] Ibid., p. 112.

> Ein Grundproblem der Bürgertumsforschung besteht darin, einen sinnvollen und empirisch belegbaren Bezug zwischen dem Bürgertum als sozialer Formation und den Prinzipien und Werten der Bürgerlichen Gesellschaft herzustellen.[59]

As I have shown, on the one hand the old urban bourgeoisie must be differentiated from the modern bourgeoisie, on the other the differences within the *Bürgertum* itself must be taken into account. Moreover, the political pursuit of a civil society, conceived as *bürgerlich*, must be seen in relation to the rise of the new social class but cannot be completely reduced to a bourgeois project either. As mentioned, in many cases the nobility or rural landlords were engaged with the public sphere and even absolutist leaders sometimes subscribed to Enlightenment ideals, or at least appeared to. In the 1980s and 1990s two research groups, at Frankfurt and Bielefeld universities, examined these problems and adopted two different approaches to them.

One way to link the concepts *Bürgertum*, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* and *Bürgerlichkeit* is by focusing on *Bürger* as participating citizens of a shared political community, a *societas civilas*, the common thread from Aristotle to Kant. This was the approach taken by the scholars around Lothar Gall at Frankfurt, one which pursues the development of civil society from a historico-political perspective and focuses on the transformation of the *Stadtbürgertum* into the new *Bürgertum* of the eighteenth century. This was investigated using numerous case studies.[60] The focus was mainly on the posited development of a concrete, existing bourgeois public sphere, primarily in the towns, consisting of the councils, associations and societies already described. A *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* did, according to the Frankfurt researchers, actually become a reality in the reform period of the early nineteenth century. A key concept was also the largely liberal idea of a 'classless civil society' and this group examined in what ways this actually came to fruition.[61]

Taking the *Stadtbürgertum* or town community as an ideal model for a wider civil society however, and a classless one at that, is arguably in itself a bourgeois perspective, which in my view neglects to take account of the failure of the reforms to include the majority of society and the frustrations experienced by both those who were excluded from the old and new urban elites, such as those discriminated against for religious reasons, *parvenus* and other more 'bohemian' groups, as well as the poorer classes. For the civil society of the minority urban bourgeoisie did remain very much an ideal, which the less

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[59] Micheal Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 38.
[60] For example Lothar Gall's book on the Bassermann family: Lothar Gall, *Bürgertum in Deutschland* (Berlin: Siedler, 1989); or the already cited *Krupp: der Aufstieg eines Industrieimperiums*.
[61] See Lothar Gall, *Bürgertum, liberale Bewegung und Nation*, ed. by Dieter Hein (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996).

educated majority (for example women, ethnic minorities or rural farmers) by no means always had access to. It is also problematic to view the development of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* as the work of one clearly defined social group (in this case the *Stadtbürgertum*).[62] Furthermore, their research tended to restrict itself to the period before the real impacts of the industrial revolution in Germany were felt (after around 1850), when the 'classless civil society' became a bourgeois class society, as a class society appears to break the framework of their model.

In contrast, the Bielefeld group argued that *Bürgertum* should be understood as a "kulturelle Formation",

> […] deren Angehörige bestimmte 'bürgerliche' Einstellungen, Überzeugungen und Werthaltungen teilten. Gemeinsam war den 'Bürgerlichen' etwa die Grundeinnahme, dass der Mensch ein vorraussetzungsloses Einzelwesen sei, das seine inneren Anlagen, Interessen, und Fähigkeiten erst entfalten und anzuwenden lernen musste.[63]

Rather than view the German bourgeoisie as a class in the strict sense, it is viewed as a culture, which consists of a canon of values, including hard-work, duty, usefulness, reason and independence.[64] This means that even those who were in reality excluded from the *Bürgertum* could nonetheless aspire to or even adopt these ideals. However, it can be argued that the values and ideals propagated in bourgeois cultural formations do have a striking affinity with the needs and interests of the new social formations of the *Bürgertum* that emerged in the late eighteenth century: the academics, businessmen and other free professions. Furthermore, many of the forms of association involved in a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* could only be undertaken by those of a certain means: "Deshalb war das Bürgertum keine einheitliche Klasse und trotzdem bürgerliche Kultur keineswegs klassenneutral."[65]

This is the view taken by the Bielefeld researchers, who regard the differing social groups described above as broadly sharing a set of values orientated towards *Bildung*, productivity and the development of a democratic civil society.[66] They therefore focus on the emergence of the new *Bürgertum*. This set of values functions as a blueprint for society as a whole and, in their view, had an enormous influence on the development of

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[62] It should be noted, however, that the Frankfurt group included a much wider portion of society in their *Bürgertum*, about 15% around 1800, while the Bielefeld group limits this figure to only 2-3%. See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 43.

[63] Ibid., p. 39.

[64] Cf. my discussion of social identity in relation to Clifford Geertz at the end of chapter one.

[65] Jürgen Kocka, "Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit als Probleme der Geschichte vom späten 18. zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert", in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 47.

[66] See *Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel: Innenansichten des 19. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000); and Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*. A foundational text is Jürgen Kocka's essay cited above in note 65.

democracy (such as the reforms driven by the administrative and academic classes in the early nineteenth century, or the humanist reforms of the universities), though the 'class' they are associated with is not understood as completely dominating in Marx's sense. From the Bielefeld perspective, the old urban bourgeoisie represented a conservative position rather than a force for change in the 'bürgerliches Jahrhundert', the nineteenth century. The focus on culture and values in this approach has some similarities with the concept of habitus, described already. Jürgen Kocka sums up this bourgeois culture succinctly:

> Zu ihr gehörten die Hochschätzung von Arbeit und Leistung, von Selbstständigkeit und Bildung, ein bestimmtes Familienideal und ein bestimmtes Modell der Arbeits- und Machtaufteilung zwischen den Geschlechtern, auch bestimmte moralische und ästhetische Grundsätze, Werte und Lebensweisen.[67]

Both groups however shared one conclusion: that the long-held hypothesis of the lack of German civil society and engagement, and the weakness of the German bourgeoisie – the *Sonderweg* thesis[68] – could not be substantiated by empirical evidence. Furthermore, the *Sonderweg* thesis has been criticised for the assumption that, in comparing Germany to other Western countries such as England or America, their development was constructed as the norm while German development was seen as a pathological deviation, instead of viewing it as simply different.[69] One might also add that England's 'normal' development also depended on ethically questionable acts of domination and exploitation. The German bourgeoisie were shown by both research groups to have had a great influence on the urban environment, particularly local politics, to have been active in associations and philanthropic social work, and to have funded and supported culture and political debate. It was therefore both statistically larger and more influential and developed than previously assumed. Manfred Hettling writes in "Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System":

> Die Sozialformation Bürgertum, verstanden als Ensemble von Klassenlagen und bestimmt durch Besitz und Bildung, erwies sich als zahlenmäßig größer und gesellschaftlich erfolgreicher als die alten Sonderwegsdeutungen postuliert hatten.[70]

Hettling observes that some of the most fruitful investigations of the German bourgeoisie in recent years have involved investigations of mentality and its cultural manifestations,

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[67] Jürgen Kocka, "Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im Wandel" in *Bürger, Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit*, p. 6. For a summary of the Bielefeld group's conclusions, see *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums*, ed. by Peter Lundgreen.
[68] For example, Helmuth Plessner, *Gesammelte Schriften IV: Die verspätete Nation*, ed. by Günther Dux and Richard W. Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982 [1959]).
[69] The *Sonderweg* thesis had also been supported by the assertion that the bourgeoisie imitated the aristocracy, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century, but new comparative research has shown that in fact this was not unique to Germany and occurred to a lesser extent than previously believed. See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 176-178.
[70] Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 6.

which has subsequently led to a differentiation of the German bourgeoisie. The questions of what unifies the various different sub-groups or whether the overall category of *Bürgertum* is useful at all therefore remain a central concern.

Hettling's thesis is that the German bourgeoisie were united in their experience of modernity: their collective response to the end of the estate system, the consequent experience of the self as an individual (which involves some distance from one's social role) and the disorientation of the experience of the world without clear guidance from religion; issues already encountered in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. Bürgerlichkeit* was a response to this problem or crisis of the self. As the old social structure collapsed, there were no longer such clear-cut prescriptions for social role, work, habitus and personal identity, and the modern citizen had to decipher for himself how to act within the social context. In short, it was the lack of a common background and tradition while living together in a political community that was originally the most significant shared experience of the modern German bourgeoisie.[71] In my opinion, there are three further related characteristics which can be ascribed to the *Bürgertum*.

I have already shown that the different groups within the German bourgeoisie have in common an active part in particular historical developments (liberalism, democracy, the nation state), and are also defined by education (usually to a relatively advanced level) and the ability to earn a living independently (in my view, *Besitz* or property is too broad – theoretically it could also apply to the aristocracy and to a lesser extent the working class). What I also propose is a definition of the *Bürgertum* as those individuals most integrated into the modern capitalist system, without necessarily being the politically, statistically or economically dominant class. Neither the bureaucratic bourgeoisie nor the academic bourgeoisie necessarily owned any means of production, but their cultural and social capital gave them high levels of access, opportunity and integration. The values of the *Bürgertum* therefore tend to be values which encourage and enable success within such a system, and therefore create a *kind* of hegemonic domination, despite the fact that the bourgeoisie represented only a small percentage of society. This helps explain why the bourgeoisie were so strong in the early medieval towns, the ferment of capitalism. Integration into capitalist structures also depended on an openness to change and a willingness to adapt in the face of the problems outlined above, indeed sometimes to make significant personal sacrifices, indicated by the strong association of the bourgeoisie with liberalism and democracy in the early nineteenth century. The commercial bourgeoisie were often the first to express radically new opinions on laissez-faire economics and

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[71] Manfred Hettling, *Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System*, p. 11.

deregulation in general, which encouraged the development of capitalism. This is also why bourgeois values were understood as applying to everyone initially: anyone who lived their lives on that basis could be successful within the new system. Previously, integration and success had been a matter of chance; now values, education and opinion as well as social networks, and of course still a certain amount of luck, were the factors which enabled a person to become successful.

A second major common characteristic, which I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter, is a unique relation between the public and the private self in the bourgeoisie. The *Bürger* saw himself as an agent of history in a new way, as a part of society, where many wills and actions combined would create change rather than the single will of one ruler.[72] As a public citizen he was in part responsible for his social environment. As an active man of work, his private life became a space of retreat, leisure, culture and the family, in opposition to this new public role or self. Sometimes these different spheres were at odds with each other, for example in the case of art and indeed the theatre, which in fact are very unbourgeois in their 'uselessness'. Throughout the period of bourgeois dominance, bourgeois aesthetics is torn between trying to justify art as useful (the bourgeois tragedy, which will be discussed in the next chapter, realism, cultural tradition) and by defining art's aesthetic quality by its very uselessness (Kant, Romanticism, Modernism). Bourgeois culture, as described by Hettling, can therefore be understood as the articulation of this crisis and an attempt to assign meaning in the manner Clifford Geertz describes (see chapter one). Indeed, one can go even further, as Thomas Nipperdey does, and argue that modern culture itself, as in the conception of 'the arts', is *bürgerlich* per se and that its function is to articulate this search for orientation.[73]

As Habermas shows, the development of the public sphere not only changed the options for political action but also constructed new categories of the public and private. In the feudal system, the lord or ruler was the only 'public' figure, who represented the territory over which he ruled not as a delegate of its citizens but as an embodiment of the sovereign state: "sie repräsentierten ihre Herrschaft, statt für das Volk, 'vor' dem Volk."[74] After the Reformation, the church, the sovereign ruler and the state began a process of polarisation; religion became a private matter and the public budget separated from the ruler's private holdings. The state authority that developed with emergence of absolutism began to be referred to as 'public', as the state began to penetrate more and more spheres

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[72] Norbert Elias explores this development and the change from a "Wir-Gesellschaft" to an "Ich-Gesellschaft" in *Gesellschaft der Individuen*.

[73] See Thomas Nipperdey, "Kommentar: 'Bürgerlich' als Kultur", in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, pp. 143-148; especially p. 147.

[74] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 20.

of life: the administration and the army for example. The 'private' person was excluded from this 'public' life and only officials were considered 'public' representatives. Thus the German word *privat* is only found after the middle of the sixteenth century, meaning not holding public office or official position.[75] Private individuals subsequently began to create their own sphere of representation, a public sphere, perhaps as a result of being excluded from the now more manifest public state apparatus.

The realm of the bourgeois family, the household (Aristotle's *oikos*), also separated into private and public spheres: small rural or village communities in which work and other tasks were shared and primarily located in the same place that people lived, were gradually replaced by the family home as the primary social environment, which was by definition private, separate from the sphere of work and business (although the lines blur in family businesses, perhaps the reason why they were so frequently the subject of nineteenth century literature). Conjugal relations for the purposes of reproduction became transformed into intimate family relations, which also reproduced the culture of the *Bürgertum* (usually largely the responsibility of the woman), and the *paterfamilias'* life becomes separated into work and home life, a structure supported by his wife.

> Als ideelle Gegenwelt einer von Eigennutz und Erfolgsstreben regierten Gesellschaft verhieß sie [the family] Solidarität und emotionale Zuwendung. Die Familie war ein Refugium vor den belastenden Anforderungen der Arbeitswelt, in der das unmündige Individuum zur bürgerlichen Selbstständigkeit erzogen wurde.[76]

A new emphasis was also placed on raising children; better living conditions meant that children were more likely to survive and therefore emotional attachments were worth forming.[77] Furthermore, hard work could be justified with the idea of posterity; handing on cultural and financial capital was an important factor for the next generation's success. The centre of the household ceased to be the hall or large front room where the public and the private mixed,[78] but separated into private family rooms and the more public salon. Norbert Elias also describes the retreat into private space of certain activities (such as

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[75] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 24.

[76] Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2005), p. 3. Schulz emphasises that the family was the smallest possible unit of social organisation, necessary for survival and success at the time. That the family has become the object of criticism in our time is only possible because of the security provided by the welfare state in his view.

[77] Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage, 1962). Cf. Gunilla Budde, *Auf dem Weg ins Bürgerleben: Kindheit und Erziehung in deutschen und englischen Bürgerfamilien 1840-1914* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994).

[78] Cf. Bernd Roeck, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums in der frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 14-22.

sleeping and bathing) due to a rising level of shame and embarrassment, especially related to corporeal activities, in his *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*.[79]

The emergence of the private individual, the bourgeois subject, is thus the corollary to the establishment of bourgeois civil society and the public sphere. This individual now had to come to terms with himself as a private personality and as a public *Staatsbürger*. Forms such as the bourgeois tragedy and the *Bildungsroman* provided a system of ethics and a guiding principle (empathy) with which to handle this problem. As I will show in the following chapter, sensibility and the emotional aspect of early bourgeois theatre are one of its most striking features – a presentation of the private in public, one of the few spaces where these two spheres openly intersected. This form of subjectivity can also be identified in the craze for letter writing in the eighteenth century, which can be seen as bridging the public and private self.[80] Early psychological novels (for example Karl Philipp Moritz' *Anton Reiser*) and novels in the form of letters (*Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* for example) can also be seen in this light. Conversely, the public entered the private sphere not just through newspapers and journals, but also in bourgeois forms of sociability: entertaining guests at home, which was extremely important in the nineteenth century and in many cases mirrored the hierarchy of the social environment.[81] Private social events became increasingly ritualised with strict codes of behaviour, such as table manners, as the nineteenth century progressed.

In many instances however, the public and private spheres appear to be in conflict with each other, which leads me to my third characteristic. The integration described above was the main factor of success, but also led to conformity. A key feature is therefore self-criticism or even self-denial, especially in the academic bourgeoisie (though admittedly my focus is on culture here). As I will show in the next chapter, the bourgeois form of drama, the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, is dominated by the conflict between desire and duty, between private selves wishing to pursue love, wealth, freedom or happiness, and public selves aware that they are members of a family, a class and a society. This internal struggle sometimes leads to outright criticism of bourgeois values, especially in literature, *from the bourgeoisie themselves*: in fact in almost all cases radical criticism of the bourgeoisie comes from its own ranks (arguably even if the working class does criticise them, it is

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[79] Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976). He also links this process with the expansion of the state.
[80] Cf. Tanja Reinlein, *Der Brief als Medium der Empfindsamkeit* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003) and Jürgern Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 66f.
[81] Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 11f. Cf. Dorothea Kühme, *Bürger und Spiel: Gesellschaftsspiele im deutschen Bürgertum zwischen 1750 und 1850* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997).

under the influence of bourgeois discourse, and if the aristocracy criticises them, then with not half as much accuracy and scorn).

The private conflict that appears in the bourgeois tragedy for example is one aspect of a more general trend towards individualism, especially in literature and art. This individualism is both a result of liberalism in the economy and society, and the new freedom it brought with it, and a critical response towards the loss of personal freedom caused by mechanisation and industrialisation (here we see the roots of Romanticism). Thus the *Bürgertum* on the one hand champions its worldview, its freedom to do business and its political autonomy, on the other it is often self-critical of the results of its success. As Arnold Hauser writes:

> Der Individualismus [...] ist einerseits ein Protest der progressiven Klassen gegen den Absolutismus und den staatlichen Interventionismus, andererseits auch ein Protest gegen diesen Protest, das heißt, gegen die Begleiterscheinungen und Folgen der Industriellen Revolution, in der die Emanzipation der Bourgeoisie ihren Abschluß findet.[82]

Often in the same breath though, the bourgeois writer will defend or inadvertently reinforce bourgeois virtues, which are declared as universal, applicable to all and therefore irrefutable and unavoidable. I have already mentioned Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as a prime example of this, and the bourgeois tragedy and Lessing's dramatic theory will illustrate another. Throughout the nineteenth century and beyond however, many other examples can be found; Henrik Ibsen is of course a name which immediately springs to mind when one thinks of criticism of the bourgeoisie.

The Bourgeois Crisis of Modernity

Frustration with political impotence is often cited as the reason for a general critical stance in bourgeois literature and also the eventual turn to extreme forms of nationalism, with disastrous consequences. In my view this is also connected to the self-criticism, or even self-hatred in some cases, which I am describing. The initial hopes of the Enlightenment were quashed by the restoration of the power of the absolutist state. Public reforms and a healthy public sphere in the early nineteenth century led only to the failed revolution of 1848. The foundational aim of the creation of the German nation was achieved in 1871, but it remained a constitutional monarchy, with a constitution in many ways far behind that of 1848 and a Kaiser who held all the real power. When a real republic with full equal rights for all – a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* – was finally formed in Weimar after the First World

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[82] Arnold Hauser, *Eine Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur* (Munich: Beck, 1967), section VI, part 1, p. 575.

War, many of the *Bürgertum* could only greet it with dismay, as it had been driven primarily by the Social Democrat movement and therefore, in their eyes, the uncultivated masses of workers. Furthermore, the ideal of equality for all threatened the exclusive privileges of the *Bürgertum* in practice. The Treaty of Versailles and the financial instability of the 1920s finally turned most of the German bourgeoisie away from any remaining *bürgerliche* ideals and faith in the Weimar Republic, and poured fuel on the smouldering fire of national extremism. The ideal of a bourgeois society mutated into the fantasy of a national *Volk*.

The developments of the late nineteenth century also led the *Bürgertum* to compromise many of their original political ideals. As the cities and the working class grew, many cities and states returned to a three-tiered voting system, defined by tax contributions, placing many of the *Bildungsbürgertum* in the second or even third category. This meant that occasionally the elite of the commercial bourgeoisie had an inordinate amount of political power: in Essen in the late nineteenth century, Alfred Krupp paid a third of the taxes and therefore had the right to choose a third of the city's council.[83] The wealthy elites with access to power began to fiercely defend their own monopoly on local politics just as the *Stadtbürgertum* once had. This split in the *Bürgertum* itself was also mirrored in a split in the liberal political movement, into the National Liberals and the Left Liberals, resulting in a lack of cohesion in both. Furthermore, problems in the rapidly growing cities, for example hygiene, housing and public transport, could often not be solved with liberal politics, and local governments increasingly intervened and controlled different aspects of urban life (although it must be added that many social and cultural initiatives still depended on the civil engagement of local citizens).

Although the founding of the German nation after victory in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 was seen as a great victory for the bourgeois-orientated Liberals, once again many compromises were made and with the national question settled, they lost their central *raison d'être* in the eyes of the public. With the market crash of 1873, the liberal movement's political power was further damaged. For the main area where the Liberals had achieved their goals was in economic deregulation, making them the targets of blame. When the Social Democrats were legally allowed into politics in 1890, the Liberals lost many more local governments to the new political movement, who arguably represented the basic ideals of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* better than they did. Many of the academic bourgeoisie and civil servants went over to the conservatives, as did the *Kleinbürgertum*, who saw themselves as the last remnants of a traditional and 'truly German' society. This

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[83] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 132.

group feared both the working class movement and the wealthy elites of industry, and also began to express anti-Semitic views, associating Jewish bankers and merchants with unbridled capitalism.[84] The success of the catholic centre party and the Social Democrats grew as the electorate swelled in the final years of the nineteenth century, and they could rely on voters who had a much stronger sense of cohesion than the *Bürgertum* now had. The Liberals, and their bourgeois ideals, simply did not adapt to the new challenges that had resulted from the industrialism they had originally promoted. Mass politics was seen as distasteful to them, even party politics to an extent; they clung to the concepts of *Bildung*, which in reality only ever applied to a tiny proportion of society, and independence, even from their own party, which resulted in endemic in-fighting. In short, politically the *Bürgertum* fundamentally failed to integrate into the society that essentially it had had a hand in creating, and failed to adapt its ideals to a 'less educated' wider public. This reflects the inherent antagonism within the bourgeois subject, which in my view was present from the beginning: in the words of Hauser, the protest against the results of their own protest.

The turning away from the democratic principles that were once the ideals of the bourgeoisie towards extreme nationalism was also evident in the conservative cultural criticism or pessimism of the turn of the century and beyond, which can be ascribed to the loss of status of the *Bildungsbürgertum*,[85] but can also be seen in light of both political and subjective impotence caused by the antagonism between idealism and social reality. The academic bourgeoisie often did not earn anything near the same kind of income as the commercial bourgeoisie, and the First World War and economic problems of the Weimar Republic only exacerbated this. Many of the academic and civil service bourgeoisie lost their jobs as a result of economic instability and the reform of the bureaucracy, as well as any savings they may have had due to inflation. Furthermore, the success of the German Empire was largely attributed to the success of industry and technical innovations, in their eyes at the expense of culture.[86] This was expressed in the discourse around the opposition between civilisation and culture already mentioned:

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[84] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 162f.

[85] See ibid., pp. 171-175. Cf. Klaus Tenfelde, "Stadt und Bürgertum im 20. Jahrhundert", in *Wege zur Geschichte des Bürgertums*, ed. by Klaus Tenfelde and Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), pp. 317-353; see pp. 328-331.

[86] Thomas Mann famously complained of a "Prozeß der Entbürgerlichung" in *Bertrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1983 [1918]).

> In der Bewertung von 'Kultur' und 'Zivilisation' äußerte sich durchaus die Geringschätzung basaler bürgerlicher Tugenden der Nützlichkeit und der rationalen Zweckorientierung.[87]

The expansion of education to provide a workforce for the industrial nation was seen as a degradation of the ideal of *Bildung*. Mass education was perceived as merely serving industry, as pandering to students who only cared for their career rather than humanist education as a purpose in itself (the parallels with today's debate about the education system in Germany are striking). At the same time, too much education putatively resulted in becoming a "Fachidiot", who knew nothing about the 'real' world of business. All this created a lack of integration both within the *Bürgertum*, and between it and the rest of society. The emergence of mass culture, for example cinema, jazz and the popularity of sports such as football, provided apparent proof of the disintegration of culture and society, which from the academic bourgeois perspective, could no longer be self-regulated as a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. Arguably this loss of belief in the potential for civil society to function on a mass scale paved the way for a fascist dictatorship.

The scope of this dissertation does not allow me to pursue this complex question adequately.[88] Moreover, the political failures (or successes) and compromises of the *Bürgertum* provide only a partial explanation of cultural practice perhaps up until the early twentieth century. However, the turning away from civil principles towards national extremism demonstrates an inversion of the original movement from a feudal society of estates to a bourgeois society of individuals, towards a form of nation that would essentially obliterate the individual. (Even though, paradoxically, the *Bildungsbürgertum* feared mass culture for precisely the same reason.) It appears that the problem of the individual coping with the dual spheres of private and public, individual and society, here certainly becomes a crisis; indeed it is the crisis of modernity itself. The guiding compass of empathy to be explored in the next chapter no longer appears to function in the reality of mass individualisation.

The period of cultural criticism also spawned numerous reform movements focused on nature and the body (such as the *Wandervögel* and *Freikörperkultur*) in response to what was seen as the increasing soulless materialism of society.[89] As the bourgeois culture of associations had also become more elite the more socially dominant the bourgeoisie became, these reform movements also tried to recuperate a lost form of *Gemeinschaft*, for

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[87] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bügertums*, p. 175. This is also reflected in the writings of Nietzsche, for example, *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift*, ed. by Ottfried Höffe (Berlin: Akademie, 2004).

[88] The complex relationship between the Enlightenment ideals of the *Bürgertum* and fascism is dealt with in a far more detailed manner than I have the space to do here by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, in *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987 [1947]).

[89] See Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, pp. 26-29.

example in artists colonies,[90] who sought a 'higher purpose' in art and viewed life as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. These movements can therefore be seen not only as critical, but as revitalising the traditional bourgeois values of community, autonomy and personal cultivation through culture. The turn of the twentieth century is therefore one of the most significant moments when the bourgeoisie turn their criticism upon themselves and some of their founding principles (or on each other, viewed from the perspective of the different groups within the *Bürgertum*), while at the same time reinforcing or reinventing others.

However, the paradox that is at the root of this is a constituent part of the bourgeois mentality from the beginning. As I will argue in the following chapter, desires are created even as they are criticised and repressed. This is because autonomous and independent thinking, reason and rationality necessarily entail a critical stance, which can just as easily be turned on the self, and is therefore an integral part of bourgeois subjectivity. As Michael Schäfer writes, the system of bourgeois values had always contained opposing principles:

> Bürgerlichkeit konstituierte eher ein Spannungsfeld widerstrebender Normen als einen in sich konsistenten Kanon von Verhaltensanforderungen.[…] Wer in seinem Leben nur eine Seite des Bürgerlichen ausbildete, zog Kritik, Mißbilligung und Spott auf sich.[91]

The criticism that is a central facet of *Bürgerlichkeit* must, however, always be rebalanced to conform to the requirements of society; the desires created must be repressed (or in our time remain mostly dissatisfied). The bohemian is permitted an unbourgeois way of life, as long as he or she conforms to the bourgeois concepts of art and *Bildung*. Indeed, the bohemian artist, the drop-out Wilhelm Meister, or Emilia's putative sexual desire are all as much a part of the "bürgerliche Wertehimmel" as the order of the Biedermeier drawing room.[92] Criticism is welcomed and encouraged, but in the same gesture often reinforces the bourgeois system. It is therefore not just the experience of political powerlessness which is the unifying experience of the bourgeoisie, but a split subjectivity in which criticism is demanded but often impotent.

I will argue that this is still evident in our own time. In my analysis of performances by contemporary directors, directing both canonical and contemporary material, a similar paradoxical, self-critical gesture can be detected: Michael Thalheimer deconstructs his

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[90] For example in Darmstadt. See Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 28.

[91] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 127.

[92] Helmut Kreuzer has also argued that the bohemian was in fact a necessary and integral part of bourgeois culture, and that the relationship between the two is one of interdependence. See Helmut Kreuzer, *Die Boheme: Beiträge zu ihrer Beschreibung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1968). Wolfgang J. Mommsen argues on the other hand that the artistic avantgarde played a part in the deline of the *Bürgertum* in the *Kaiserreich*. See Wolfgang J. Mommsen, *Bürgerliche Kultur und künstlerische Avantgarde: Kultur und Politik im deutschen Kaiserreich 1870-1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1994).

canonical pieces with a modern aesthetic and a minimal version of the text, but paradoxically reinforces the canon at the same time. Thomas Ostermeier is in the curious double-bind of directly addressing issues still present in a milieu his plays are highly critical of, the same milieu which is largely responsible for his ticket sales, but at the same time he adopts a rather conventional 'bourgeois' aesthetic. Finally René Pollesch also deconstructs and reinforces the authority of academic discourse, radically criticises the bourgeois subject and the system of capitalism which produced that subject, while being unable to finally escape that system, the subject or the bourgeois realism he rejects. Although Pollesch seems to be aware of the problem, his only solution seems to be a manic energy and productivity (again a central bourgeois value) in order to somehow stay one step ahead of the game.

Bürgerlichkeit in the Twentieth Century

Before I turn to the relationship of theatre to bourgeois culture, however, the questions of whether and to what extent the German bourgeoisie persists, how its bourgeois values are still relevant and what kind of middle class (if any) exists today, must still be clarified. Many historians would immediately dismiss such questions outright by arguing that any one of the historical developments described above (the end of the influence of political liberalism, the rejection of foundational bourgeois principles from the end of the nineteenth century, the economic insecurity of the Weimar Republic) put an end to the *Bürgertum* or to a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, depending on the approach to *Bürgerlichkeit* taken. Even if none of these developments were the cause, the National Socialist dictatorship and the hardships experienced by all members of society during the War, and after its end, so completely reorganised social structures that arguably every German was in an equally dire situation at 'Stunde Null'.[93]

However, perhaps surprisingly, bourgeois values appeared to undergo something of Renaissance during the post-war period in the new Federal Republic. After the ordeals of the war, there appeared to be a strong desire to return to some kind of 'normality': the family, traditional roles and virtues and 'classical' culture (the theatre of the post-war period for example was marked by a return to bourgeois realism and the classical plays of the German canon). In *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, the

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[93] For this reason, I have made the decision not to discuss the existence or role of the *Bürgertum* in Nazi Germany. Due to the complexity of the situation and the radical transformation of the social parameters, a brief summary can only be grossly inadequate. From a civil society perspective, however, there is no doubt that the Nazis utterly destroyed any autonomous self-government, critical public sphere and social equality that had been established in the Weimar Republic. See Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, pp. 204-218.

conservative historian Friedrich Meinecke suggested founding Goethe societies all over Germany to encourage mental and spiritual regeneration.[94] Furthermore, the structures of the reproduction of social class seem to have survived. With the obvious exception of Jewish academics, many academics and bureaucrats retained their positions (though some denazification was carried out by the allied occupiers, many of the academic bourgeoisie were still re-employed). Many of the vast business empires of the commercial bourgeoisie had also survived, indeed some had proliferated and profited from the industry of war. The three-tiered school system reintroduced in the 1950s also guaranteed that the mechanisms of cultural capital would continue to give children from an academic background an advantage. Though the GDR is once again a situation too complex to discuss in full here, given that destroying class structures was a fundamental aim of the SED, research has shown that some bourgeois social structures did endure there too.[95] Furthermore, the democratic movement that eventually brought down the socialist German state can be examined according to the model of civil society. However, as the political and economic system of the FRG is the one that has ultimately defined today's Germany, I will now focus in brief on developments there.

The defining factor in the development of social structures and the position of the *Bürgertum* in the post-war period was the "Wirtschaftswunder". The economic boom of the 1950s saw a massive contraction of the traditional working class and the agricultural sector, and an equally significant growth in the industrial and service sectors.[96] In the industrial sector, the ratio of salaried employees to workers shrank (1:1.8 in 1965 compared to 1:3.2 in 1950[97]). Josef Mooser has called this the "Entbürgerlichung" of the white-collar worker, the loss in status of low-level, white-collar jobs in general as a new 'Mittelschicht' grew, but it can also be seen as the 'Verbürgerlichung' of industrial workers.[98] GDP doubled from 1950 to 1960, and again between 1960 and the mid-1970s, creating an unprecedented general wealth.[99] Wages and salaries in employment had doubled by the end of the Adenauer era.[100] Educational reforms also provided

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[94] Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe: Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden: Brockhaus, 1947; 3rd edition).

[95] See Thomas Großbölting, *SED-Diktatur und Gesellschaft: Bürgertum, Bürgerlichkeit und Entbürgerlichung in Magdeburg und Halle* (Halle: MDV, 2001); and Günther Wirth, "Zu Potsdam und anderswo: Kontinuitäten des Bildungsbürgertums in der DDR", in *Bürgertum nach 1945*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Bernd Ulrich, pp. 85-110.

[96] Two million agricultural workers left the sector to work in industry in the 1950s. See Axel Schildt, *Die Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis 1989/90* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2007), p. 19.

[97] See ibid., p. 19.

[98] Cf. Josef Mooser, *Arbeiterleben in Deutschland 1900-1970: Klassenlagen, Kultur und Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

[99] Axel Schildt, *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 30.

[100] Ibid., p. 23.

unprecedented access to third level education for those from a working class or *mittelständische* background (employees and small business owners); although percentages were still small.[101] Nonetheless, an education to the standard previously reserved for the *Bürgertum* and consequently social advancement became a tangible possibility. In the social advancement of the *Mittelstand* and the working class, one can also identify correspondence with bourgeois values of hard work, education and career success as defining factors for self-worth: "Armut wurde auch von Arbeitern nicht länger als proletarisches Klassenschicksals wahrgenommen, sondern als persönliches Versagen."[102]

More young people in education or employment and more wealth in general contributed to the rise of a new consumer culture. 'Vollbeschäftigung' (full employment) enabled workers and employees to gain significant ground for workers' rights. Victory in the battle over Saturday and a standard forty-hour week meant more leisure time and a more significant individual private life. After the loss and separation of family members and the dreadful conditions during the war, followed by the accommodation shortage in the post-war years, often forcing people to share cramped space with strangers, this new leisure time was primarily focused on enjoying the comfort of a cosy home with the nuclear family.[103] Many more families could now afford to purchase a lifestyle and level of comfort that the previous generation of employees and workers could never have imagined would be possible so soon: foreign holidays, a family car, electric goods, perhaps even their own home. The question is: does this represent the 'Verbürgerlichung' of the petite bourgeoisie and the working class, the creation of a new broader 'Mittelschicht' (middle class), or the emergence, finally, of the classless civil society that the liberal bourgeoisie had always hoped for?

Axel Schildt states emphatically: "Die soziale Struktur der Bundesrepublik war in den 1960er Jahren kaum mehr durch klassenmäßige Einteilungen in Arbeiterschaft, Mittelstand und Bürgertum zu erfassen."[104] Adenauer's government promised "Wohlstand für alle" and arguably achieved this for the majority. Contemporary sociological attempts to describe the new social complexity such as Karl Martin Bolte's "onion model" and Ralf Dahrendorf's "house model" seemed to concur. Both these models showed a small elite of between 1-2% and an equally small "underclass", between which was a swollen middle

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[101] The number of students in third level education doubled between 1950 and 1960, although those from working class backgrounds (half of all households) who took the *Abitur* rose only marginally, from 3-4% to 6-7% in the same period. See Axel Schildt, *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 28.

[102] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 233.

[103] Axel Schildt, *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 26.

[104] Ibid., p. 31.

class.[105] Through consumerism and wealth, lifestyle became a more important defining factor: Dahrendorf's "falscher Mittelstand" (12%) perceived itself as middle class, although according to his parameters its standard of living located it in the working classes. Dahrendorf concluded from his research that all segments of society seem to orientate themselves towards the class above them.[106] Another well-known concept to describe the status quo was Helmut Schlesky's "nivilierten Mittelstandsgesellschaft".[107] However, even this scientific positing of a relatively classless society can be related to the original bourgeois model of civil society.[108] Furthermore, as Klaus Tenfelde argues, if new forms of self-employment and the new free professions are taken into account (such as consultants, designers or pharmacists) along with the increasingly powerful business managers, then "gäbe es ein Bürgertum, [dann wäre] sein gesellschaftliches Gewicht mittelbar gestärkt worden."[109] These occupational groups certainly exhibit the main bourgeois characteristics: earning a living independently, social or civic influence and status (or even political influence in the case of some top executives) and academic qualification.

What seems certain, however, is that the *Bürgertum* in its nineteenth century social formation, along with its specific lifestyle, did change significantly or even disappear as it lost its privileged and elite status. Arguably the spread of bourgeois values to broader society contributed to this, as it could no longer differentiate itself so strongly as a social group. With the counter-culture movements of the 1960s and 1970s, its cultural domination and what were perceived as its traditional and repressive bourgeois values came directly under attack. In particular, the 1968 student movement criticised consumer capitalism and addressed the previous generation's involvement with Nazism. Moreover, the Frankfurt School's theory of fascism had exposed a potential link between it and the *Bürgertum*. Taboos were broken, new youth cultures established and the "Doppelmoral" of the previous generations rejected.

That the specific culture of the *Bürgertum* in its period of dominance was no longer relevant a century later is not, however, particularly surprising, for culture is a dynamic and not a static phenomenon. Just as the bourgeois of the nineteenth century could no

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[105] See Karl M. Bolte, *Deutsche Gesellschaft im Wandel* (Opladen: Leske, 1966) and *Deutsche Gesellschaft im Wandel II* (Opladen: Leske, 1968); and Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich: Piper, 1966).

[106] See Axel Schildt, *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 32.

[107] Helmut Schelsky, *Wandelungen der deutschen Familie in der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Enke, 1954).

[108] For an examination of liberal political theory in the immediate post-war period, see Josef Mooser, "Liberalismus und Gesellschaft nach 1945: Soziale Marktwirtschaft und Neoliberalismus am Beispiel von Wilhelm Röpke", in *Bürgertum nach 1945*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Bernd Ulrich, pp. 134-613.

[109] Klaus Tenfelde, "Stadt und Bürgertum im 20. Jahrhundert", in *Wege zur Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 324.

longer imagine attending theatre on a market square, so too did the young post-war generation reject sitting in dark and stuffy theatres to watch the plays they were forced to study at school. If viewed from a cultural perspective, it is clear *Bürgerlichkeit* has always been constantly changing and adapting (for example the paradigmatic difference between the Enlightenment and Romanticism), despite failures to politically adapt and integrate into a mass industrialised culture. However, some bourgeois values did persist after the war and have proven to be surprisingly hardy (such as the *Zivilgesellschaft*, really a euphemism for *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, which has experienced a renaissance since the 1990s). Could it be that bourgeois culture finally adapted to mass culture in the twentieth century, both culturally and politically?

It can for example be argued that since the 1960s bourgeois political ideals have in fact experienced their most influential period yet. 1968 can be seen as both a bourgeois (coming mainly from the academic milieu) and a *bürgerliche* (civil) revolution, as the new generation of educated citizens updating the bourgeois values of autonomy, independence and responsibility to the community.[110] Tolerance, self-realisation (in other words, *Bildung*) and the freedom to live as one chose were its strikingly liberal and *bürgerliche* principles (the use of violence as the movement developed was, of course, not). As Michael Schäfer points out, advocating very unbourgeois forms of the family, such as single-parent, 'patchwork' and unmarried families (some might include the *Wohngemeinschaft*), was also a factor enabling the emancipation of a large of number of citizens to live autonomously: women.[111] Schäfer describes this as a period of "bürgerliche Bürgerlichkeitskritik" and compares it to the youth and nature movements of the early twentieth century, which also rebelled against oppressive bourgeois parents and nineteenth century values.[112] It also embodies the bourgeois paradox, for the liberalism it propagated may also be seen to have laid the foundations for neoliberalism and strengthened post-industrial capitalism, inadvertently fortifying the system it sought to destroy.

After the oil crisis of 1973, unemployment and state debt were rising.[113] Though the welfare state had established one bourgeois ideal – basic social equality – it now came under attack from those who argued from another classic bourgeois position, namely that only free-market economics and privatisation could create a truly *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.

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[110] Cf. Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Die 'Revolutionierung des bürgerlichen Subjekts': 1968 als erneute bürgerliche Utopie?", in *Bürgertum nach 1945*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Bernd Ulrich, pp. 374-406.

[111] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 234.

[112] Ibid., p. 228.

[113] Two thirds of society continued to experience increased standards of living, but the gap between them and the poorer third, often dependent on welfare, was widening. See Axel Schildt, *Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 60.

In 1979, Margaret Thatcher's English Conservative party won a landslide victory with a neoliberal economic policy. The following year Ronald Reagan was elected in America. In Germany too, the mood changed as the FDP ended their coalition with the SPD and joined the CDU in coalition in 1982. Helmut Kohl famously called for a change of moral attitude, a "geistig-moralische Wende". To conservatives this meant a return to the traditional values disparaged by the 1968-generation, the 'Sekundärtugenden': industriousness, duty, order, frugality and discipline. To the more liberally inclined, it meant economic policies guided by neoclassical principles.

These voices only became louder after reunification caused anxiety in the West about further economic decline due the absorption of the GDR. Furthermore, with the fall of the Berlin wall, arguably the radical fronts of civil society in both Germanys lost their purpose: the democratic movement in the East ostensibly achieved its aim, while the anti-establishment, left-wing movement of the West was forced to question its ideals.[114] The radical environmental movement also soon entered mainstream politics (the Green party, along with the FDP, is arguably the most traditionally German bourgeois party, representing the academic bourgeoisie). In the 1990s, a more traditional liberal civil society of associations, foundations and civic engagement was once again discussed and pursued, described as *Zivilgesellschaft* and presented as a new concept by many of its proponents:[115] the term is a direct translation of the English 'civil society', rather than the old *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. In this way bourgeois values are once again constructed as neutral and applicable to all, reinvigorating the old fantasy of classless society and allowing liberalism to distance itself from the social elite now associated with the outmoded and 'obsolete' *Bürgerlichkeit* or the *Bürgertum*.[116] Once more, the paradox can be identified that *Bürgerlichkeit* has the potential to both criticise and sustain the capitalist system of which it is an integral part. Furthermore, Schäfer points out that it also seems to be the wealthier and more educated citizens who are the carriers of this *Zivilgesellschaft*, re-linking *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* with the *bürgerliche Mittelschichten* (or perhaps a new *Bürgertum*?) once again.

The 'Neue Bürgerlichkeit' debate in the German *Feuilletons* already mentioned in the introduction demonstrates this recent resurgence of classic bourgeois positions. Here

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[114] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 241.

[115] Paul Nolte, Joachim Fischer and Manfred Hettling can all be counted as those who champion this new *Bürgerlichkeit* in various different ways.

[116] Michael Schäfer, *Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 241. Despite the fact that, as David Harvey argues, neoliberalism has actually increased the gap between rich and poor, and restored the power of economic elites, although it has also radically altered class structure and created new elites, such as CEOs. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, pp. 14-38.

various different factions, including some of those who had been involved in research at Bielefeld and Frankfurt, called for a revitalisation of *Bürgerlichkeit* or identified it as the fundamental structure of our society.[117] It also involved both calls for a return to traditional values (it seems the *Bildungsbürgertum* never tire of demanding a return to tradition) and appeals for the strengthening of *Zivilgesellschaft*.[118] Though as I have already described, this debate is often inclined towards neoliberal and neoconservative positions (civil society can be understood as the 'outsourcing' of welfare from the state to the citizen for example), proponents such as Jürgen Kocka emphasise that *Bürgerlichkeit* and its values of "Selbständigkeit und Verantwortung, Freiheit und Solidarität"[119] offer an alternative to both the failed welfare state and the all-pervasive logic of the market. Furthermore, the unfettered growth of 'consumer culture', aided by the proliferation of media, has led to the reappearance of concerns about the deterioration of *Bildung* in this 'mass culture'. Consequently, certain types of cultural practice, such as theatre and canonical literature, and traditional lifestyles have been embraced again by some as a means to establish distinction over the 'masses', or other cultures in the context of globalisation, such as immigrants or non-European cultures, as Paul Nolte's comments in the introduction demonstrated. For example, the number of private schools is increasing in Germany.

The way in which this 'Neue Bürgerlichkeit' discourse captured the public imagination (either negatively or positively) clearly shows that, even if only in terms of a relationship to its past, *Bürgerlichkeit* is not an irrelevant concept today. In this discourse, along with the counter-culture movements of the 1960s and neoliberalism, it is evident that the political aspect of *Bürgerlichkeit* and some of its key ideals have the capacity to be revitalised, by one or another of the traditional bourgeois groups, in light of their respective political interests. Jürgen Kocka writes:

> Die Bundesrepublik [ist] sukzessive dem Vorbild des Zivilgesellschaft näher gekommen und in diesem Sinn "bürgerlicher" geworden. Das zeigt sich an ihrer politischen, sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Verfassung, an der Dynamik des öffentlichen Raums, am hohen Stellenwert öffentlicher Kritik, an Rechtsgrundsätzen, Gewohnheiten und verbreiteten Werten.[120]

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[117] Cf. *Bürgerlichkeit ohne Bürgertum: in welchem Land leben wir?*, ed. by Heinz Bude, Joachim Fischer and Bernd Kaufmann.

[118] See *Rückkehr der Bürgerlichkeit*, ed. by Alexander Cammann (= *Vorgänge*, 170 (2005), no. 2; journal ed. by Dieter Rulff), which provides a good overview of the debate at the time, especially Alexander Cammann, "Auf der Suche nach dem Bürger: Ein aktueller Literaturbericht", in ibid., pp. 94-104; and Thomas E. Schmidt, "Die 'neue' Bürgerlichkeit": Flucht aus der Politik oder politische Neuorientierung", in *Neue Bürgerlichkeit*, ed. by Thomas Meyer (= *Neue Gesellschaft: Frankfurter Hefte*, 57 (2010), no. 4), pp. 21-23.

[119] Jürgen Kocka, "Bürgerlichkeit: Wovon reden wir eigentlich?", in *Neue Bürgerlichkeit*, pp. 4-8; p. 8.

[120] Ibid., p. 7.

What then remains of the social formation *Bürgertum* today? Klaus Tenfelde explores the various caesuras that have shaken the bourgeois sense of identity in his important essay on the city and the German bourgeoisie in the twentieth century. He argues that, along with a sense of crisis experienced by the bourgeoisie at the turn of the twentieth century and in the Weimar Republic already described, the urbanisation that took place across society fundamentally democratised the exclusivity of the bourgeois urban lifestyle. Furthermore, in the twentieth century modern communications technologies replaced the society and association, the press became a mass medium and even travel was no longer the exclusive habitus of the bourgeoisie: "Die Technik und der damit festverknüpfte Stil der modernen Massenkommunikation haben das Bürgertum als einen Kontext definierbarer Kommunikation entgrenzt."[121] But for Tenfelde, this does not mean the end of *Bürgerlichkeit*, though it is an end to an exclusive lifestyle, rather these developments have led to a "Formwandel und Verallgemeinerung von Bürgertum und Bürgerlichkeit".[122] Writing in 1994, Tenfelde could not have foreseen the vast impact this technology would have and what forms of "Vergesellschaftung" (which Tenfelde emphasises) the internet would make possible; by now it has become clear that the internet both democratises and strengthens niche groups and milieus. Arguably then, in the twentieth century bourgeois ideals and the *Bürgertum* finally integrated themselves into a mass society, with both becoming modified in the process. Rather than asking whether more people became a part of the *Bürgertum* or whether it survived or not, it is perhaps more worthwhile to ask how *bürgerlich* society has become and whether this has resulted in a new form of middle class or a new culture of *Bürgerlichkeit* (remembering that habitus is a dynamic process). Tenfelde also pleads for such an approach to today's society, emphasising that though lifestyle differences have become more complex, specific associative and communal relationships still do form in certain occupational groups.[123]

It could also be argued that the *Bürgertum* is beginning to stabilise once again, or at least was until the financial crisis that began in 2008, the effects of which are perhaps too early to judge. Nonetheless, there have been two generations of relative economic stability in Germany. Those that worked during the 1960s saved hard for the future and their children, and have provided those now in middle-age with substantial inheritances of property, money or both, assuming that this money was not tied up in shares. However, the Germans' typically bourgeois (likely also influenced by the experiences of the Weimar

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[121] Klaus Tenfelde, "Stadt und Bürgertum in 20. Jahrhundert", in *Wege zur Geschichte des Bürgertums*, p. 327.
[122] Ibid., p. 326.
[123] Ibid., pp. 338-340.

Republic) suspicion of debt has left the average German largely unscathed from the financial crisis. Indeed recovery from the crisis was regularly attributed to the "mittelständisches Unternehmen", the small or medium-sized, family-run company, which values tradition, expertise, long-term or even lifelong employees and conservative financial and expansion strategies. Unlike the *Mittelstand* of the nineteenth century however, many of these businesses are now quite large and increasingly active on a global scale. The high number of these kinds of businesses in Germany has been credited with the ensuring the stability of the German economy.[124]

Finally, based on the stipulation that the *Bürgertum* are those who are most integrated into the capitalist system and exhibit value systems which enable success in that system, certainly more of us are *bürgerlich* today than ever before. Today's culture is fundamentally defined by a new relationship between people and commodities. The unbridled development of capitalism across the globe has made consumer culture a norm that even the majority of the academic bourgeoisie rarely fundamentally challenge much anymore, indeed it is now a legitimate area of study. Consumerism has opened up an unprecedented amount of choice in lifestyles and corresponding values, ideals and niche social groups. Michael Wildt describes the *Konsumbürger* as:

> [...] mit allen gleich und doch allein auf sich gestellt, liberté übersetzt sich für ihn
> als Freiheit der Wahl, Universalität bedeutet ihm die unbeschränkte Käuflichkeit
> der Welt.[125]

We spend much of our time focussed on distinction of one kind or another, though these distinctions may be more subtle than before.[126] More than ever before, we are also a society of individuals, so much so that some theorists insist this has superseded class differences.[127] However, though it can be disputed whether the bourgeoisie still exists as a class *per se*, it is clear that Western society is still remarkably *bürgerlich* in cultural terms (though in concrete sociological terms this may not be the case). In my view, the conflict between individualism and mass consumption reflects the same old conflict of the *Bürger* caught between his public and private self, one which can also be compared to the cultural pessimism of the turn of the twentieth century, which was the crisis of bourgeois values of

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[124] "Germany's Mittelstand: Beating China", no author given, in *The Economist*, 30.7.2011. Available online at: http://www.economist.com/node/21524922, accessed on 2.8.2011.

[125] Michael Wildt, "Konsumbürger: das Politische als Optionsfreiheit und Distinktion", in *Bürgertum nach 1945*, ed. by Manfred Hettling and Bernd Ulrich, pp. 255-283.

[126] A perceptive translator or editor gave Bourdieu's *Distinction* the title *Die feinen Unterschiede* for the German edition.

[127] Ulrich Beck, "Jenseits von Klasse und Stand: Soziale Ungleichheiten, gesellschaftliche Individualisierungsprozesse und die Entstehung neuer sozialer Formationen und Identitäten", in *Soziale Ungleichheiten*, ed. by Reinhard Kreckel (= special edition no. 2 (1983) of *Soziale Welt*), pp. 35-74.

individualism when faced with a mass society. However, this relationship has become vastly more complex, considering how much of our subjectivity is now invested in commodities and the public performance of identity.

Referring to Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller's concept of 'interpassivity', Mark Fisher argues that the self-distance, irony and cynicism typical today in fact allow the individual to go on consuming "with impunity", while maintaining a critical stance towards consumer culture and capitalism (and even to 'consume' criticism).[128] As Žižek writes, activity need not always be understood positively and passivity negatively: "people not only act in order to change something, they can also act in order to prevent something from happening, so that nothing will change."[129] This pseudo-activity functions as a diversion tactic and a relief. Capitalism does not require an ideology that advocates it, in fact the criticism that "performs our anti-capitalism for us",[130] strengthens it. Indeed, the very inadequacy of the term 'capitalism' to describe the complexity of the present situation highlights the problem of the impotence inherent to criticism of it.

This double-standard consumption corresponds to the original bourgeois impetus to criticise and yet reinforce bourgeois ideals at the same time, though perhaps the antagonism between idealism and criticism has now been replaced with the *ideal of* criticism. Furthermore, while it was once perhaps apparent to the bourgeoisie that its criticism was being directed towards that which it had had a hand in creating, this is no longer the case. Since the 1960s at least this criticism has been directed at the bourgeoisie *by the educated classes themselves*, resulting in a form of self-denial today. The 'bourgeoisie' therefore functions as an empty category for all that which the educated, relatively wealthy and secure deplore about themselves, but this criticism is itself fundamentally *bürgerlich*. I will explore these questions further when I examine the three contemporary productions which address this complex issue in one way or another; for now I wish to further examine the historical relationship of the *Bürgertum* to theatre: the development of literary 'bourgeois' theatre and the construction of the bourgeois subject in the theatre of the eighteenth century.

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[128] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, p. 12f. Unfortunately, Fisher does not include notes in his text, but I assume he is referring to Robert Pfaller, *Illusionen der Anderen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003) and Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), especially chapter 2, "The Interpassive Subject: Lacan Turns a Prayer Wheel", pp. 22-39.

[129] Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, p. 26. One of Žižek's examples of interpassivity is the canned laughter of sitcoms, doing or performing the laughter or enjoyment for the viewer.

[130] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, p. 12.

Chapter Three

The Emergence of Literary Theatre and the Bourgeois Tragedy

In this chapter I will examine the emergence of the modern institution of theatre in Germany and its relationship to bourgeois culture, as well as its corresponding literary form, the bourgeois tragedy. While modern theatre developed earlier in other parts of Europe, such as France and England, usually as part of the court system, in Germany it developed later, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, in tandem with the emerging bourgeoisie and its political and moral agendas. This bourgeois form of theatre depended firstly on a process of literarisation and a moral justification of literature, and secondly on a mimetic conception of art. The development of a literary market due to printing and increasing literacy, the establishment of fixed theatre buildings and new forms of more naturalistic acting styles also all contributed to this process. The theatre provided the perfect medium for *Vergemeinschaftung*, the transmission of bourgeois values, recreation outside of work and the legitimation of both theatre professionals and literature.[1]

Erika Fischer-Lichte delineates four main different conceptions of art, which in her view have defined how art has been interpreted and produced throughout the ages: the expressive, the cathartic, the rhetoric or aesthetic and the mimetic.[2] Expressive concepts interpret art primarily as an expression the artist's subjectivity, such as in the *Sturm und Drang* movement and the Romantic period, and later in the use of psychoanalytic methods of interpretation in the twentieth century. The individual's unique experience of the world is the subject and meaning of a work. The cathartic model also focuses on subjectivity, but on the subjectivity of the recipient. The relationship between the recipient and the work of art is considered the main factor which constitutes meaning. This can be identified in various theories of theatre throughout the ages, for example those of Aristotle and Lessing, but has also experienced something of a renaissance in recent years in reader-response theory for example, and is evident in theories of the performative, for example in Fischer-Lichte's own work. The aesthetic or rhetorical model views the work of art as an autonomous reality of its own, the meaning of which is created by the internal relations and symbolic systems at operation within the work alone. Kant's conception of aesthetic pleasure, the distanced contemplation of a work of art without emotional affect, is the first major example of this, and later structuralism, New Criticism, or in Germany *immanente*

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[1] Cf. Frank Möller, "Das Theater als Vermittlungsinstanz bürgerlicher Werte", in *Bürgerliche Werte um 1800*, ed. by Hans-Werner Hahn and Dieter Hein, pp. 193-210.

[2] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "The Quest for Meaning", in *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*, trans. by Jo Riley (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), pp. 303-318.

Interpretation, also worked according to this model. The mimetic conception of art, most related to the period of the emergence of bourgeois literary theatre, views art as a representation of objectively existing or knowable reality, though the art work's relation to this reality has been interpreted differently at different times:

> Since in the course of history this concept of art has been related to different definitions of "objective reality", the tasks and functions of art have been described differently in each case: art is supposed to represent, for instance, that which is possible; that which is probable; that which ought to be; that which is typical or characteristic; or that which is empirical.[3]

While Aristotle focused on that which is probable and later the nineteenth century realists were concerned mainly with social reality, the theorists of the eighteenth century believed that art should imitate nature, God's perfect creation. How this should be achieved and to what extent it could or should be improved upon and perfected were the main issues of the debates around mimesis in the period under discussion. With Lessing's emphasis on empathy, the cathartic also begins to play a more significant role once again.

The Literarisation of Theatre

In the eighteenth century, the geographical area of Germany, known then as the Holy Roman Empire, was a territory that was politically and culturally extremely fragmented. No central, modern state which could carry a national culture had yet been established. While in the same period in France a national culture across individual classes had already emerged, in Germany such a project was deliberately undertaken in parallel to the emergence of a nationalist movement. In France this national culture was carried by an elite bourgeoisie around the court, who were integrated into the absolutist state; later in Germany it was the new *Bürgertum* who were the main protagonists in the establishment of a modern German national culture. The efforts to establish the drama as a literary text, and correspondingly the moral and philosophical justification of theatre as a literary theatre, were a significant part of this process.

Before the establishment of literary theatre proper in Germany, theatre or performances were practiced either as part of religious ceremony (elaborations on sermons involving performance, passion plays or Good Friday processions for example) or in public spaces such as markets or inns, where a combination of spectacle, tragedy, vulgar comedy and circus acts was performed by travelling troupes of players.[4] The *Wandertruppen* that

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[3] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "The Quest for Meaning", in *The Show and The Gaze of Theatre*, p. 303.
[4] See *Theater im Kulturwandel des 18. Jahrhunderts: Inszenierung und Wahrnehmung von Körper - Musik - Sprache*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jörg Schönert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1999), especially the introduction, where Fischer-Lichte points out that this other form of theatre was far more prevalent in the

performed this theatre constituted a literary subculture outside of the church, school and university, often made up of out-of-work academics, teachers, lawyers, doctors and poor students – the early *Bürgertum*.[5] New professional positions available to this emerging educated class were still limited and in theatre they found an area of work where their university-gained skills (writing, translation) could perhaps be put to some use. Early literary theatre in Germany on the other hand was usually performed, or rather recited, in schools (often in Jesuit schools[6]) for moral or linguistic instruction. There was also a minor tradition of humanist drama in the protestant schools and the increasing number of universities in the sixteenth century (some credit this as a major influence on the bourgeois tragedy).[7] However, very few people had access to anything written – the literate population of central Europe was still only 15% around 1770[8] – and therefore this was a specialised and peripheral form in the early stages. The process of creating an institutionalised literary theatre involved the suppression of these older forms of public performance and the establishment of clear parameters for theatre as an institution, one which could serve an emerging common national identity. This theatre would be based on the literary text, which provided a reliable, relatively fixed template for a performance, the purpose of which would be the moral education of society. Johann Christoph Gottsched was one of the central figures in this process and I will return to his moral legitimation of the theatre shortly.

In *Das Theater im Literaturstaat*, Ruedi Graf argues that theorists of the theatre in the eighteenth century sought to justify theatre on moral grounds because, in terms of representing the world and providing access to or positing the truth, theatre and literature posed a perceived threat to religious ceremony and liturgical texts. Graf views the moral legitimation of theatre as based on a similar process that first occurred in literature. The 'original text' from a European Christian perspective is the Bible, the only source of the truth. In the time before printing, access to the Bible and other religious texts, or indeed the permission to write, was reserved for a select few, usually in religious orders. The texts of

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eighteenth than has been previously believed. Cf. Hans-Wolf Jäger, "Wanderbühne, Hof- und Nationaltheater", in *Deutsche Literatur IV: Zwischen Absolutismus und Aufklärung*, ed. by Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow (Reineck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980), pp. 261-276; and Rudolf Münz, *Das 'andere' Theater: Studien über eine deutschsprachige teatro dell'arte* (Berlin: Henschel, 1979).

[5] See Sybille Maurer Schmoock, *Deutsches Theater im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1982), pp. 87-102.

[6] See William H. McCabe, *An Introduction to Jesuit Theatre*, ed. by Louis J. Oldani (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1983).

[7] For example plays by Johannes Sturm (1507-1589), rector in Strasbourg, or Sixt Birck (1501-1554), rector in Basel and then Augsburg. See Bernd Roeck, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums in der frühen Neuzeit*, pp. 40-41. Cf. Karl Eibl, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Miß Sara Sampson*, p. 99f. Eibl describes this as a "Bildungstheater" by professors for professors.

[8] See Ruedi Graf, *Das Theater im Literaturstaat* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), p. 2, note 4.

the Bible had, however, always presented the problem that some of them were originally profane (such as the Song of Songs) and were only incorporated into the canon later, and also that they came from a variety of different sources. This led to a strict definition of the religious canon which was also assiduously protected (indeed this is where the concept of canon originally comes from). Graf argues that because not all literary texts could be incorporated into the religious canon, texts outside the canon were seen as a threat to its purity and sanctity, and sometimes condemned as heretic. Rules with which to legitimise these texts, to escape the charge of heresy, were therefore established, thus creating a secular canon: literature.[9] This legitimation was based on a mimetic concept of literature, which did not assert that literature contained immanent truth that might compete with the Bible, but instead conceived of it as a representation of God's perfect creation. Graf identifies this as a reason for the enthusiasm for Aristotle during the Renaissance: his *Poetics* offered a legitimation of literary texts as a representation of the truth not as truth immanent. This was underlined by the insistence that literature was an appropriate medium for moral education.

Graf also proposes that the moral legitimation of literary theatre was motivated by the desire of those involved in early forms of theatre to improve their social status.[10] To say that acting was not considered a respectable profession is something of an understatement: the acting troupes' social standing was so low that they were considered equals of prostitutes and beggars. He describes this desire for social acceptance as a desire for 'distinction' in Pierre Bordieu's sense, but it can also be viewed as the attempt to legitimise theatre as cultural capital worth purveying in the first place.[11] On the one hand therefore, the travelling players wanted to gain respectability and on the other, the new educated class wanted to find, "einen neuen Resonanzraum"[12] for their activities.

This attempt to establish a new legitimate sphere for theatre was part of the larger development of the public sphere, as described by Jürgen Habermas in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.[13] As briefly mentioned in the last chapter, there he argues that one of the most crucial factors in the development of the modern democratic state was literacy.

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[9] Ruedi Graf, *Das Theater im Literaturstaat*, p. 19-22. For example, the Swiss scholar Conrad Gesner felt it necessary to document all known books published in Latin, Greek or Hebrew in his *Bibliotheca universalis* begun in 1545, because he viewed the multitude of available information as a dangerous chaos.

[10] Ibid., p. 12. Cf. Sybille Maurer Schmoock, *Deutsches Theater im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp. 102-117, which describes the social status of actors.

[11] The contradiction between the desire to appeal to polite society and to entertain the lower classes is evident in the few extant plays' mixing of tragic and vulgar forms, argues Graf. See ibid., p. 14.

[12] Ibid. Cf. Rainer Ruppert, *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen: Funktionen des Theaters im 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Edition Sigma, 1995). Ruppert describes the moral legitimation of theatre as a "medienstrategisches Legitimationsargument", which justifies the 'lower' or more entertaining aspects of eighteenth century theatre. See ibid. pp. 47-56; especially p. 55f.

[13] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*.

Thanks to new manufacturing techniques, a better transport system and an expanding education system, which produced an educated reading public to consume literature,[14] there was a huge increase in the amount of journals, periodicals and books produced and read.[15] In the sphere of the written text along with other social spaces, such as the coffee house or the gentleman's club, public opinion could be shared, criticised, spread and exchanged on a much larger scale than ever before, though, of course, many social groups were still excluded from this new public sphere.

The emerging *Bürgertum* thus gradually appropriated the political power of representation (previously reserved for the aristocracy and the monarchy) and created new cultural spheres of representation, including the stage, just as they had asserted the right to representation in non-religious texts. Moreover, theatre and literature began to disseminate a moral and sometimes political discourse, which contributed to the constitution of the public sphere and the creation of associative and communal relationships between individuals with shared interests (*Vergesellschaftung* and *Vergemeinschaftung*). This new public sphere also partly gave rise to the professions of the critic, the academic, the writer and the editor. Because literary texts had previously had very few conventions and codes for their use, such as those associated with the religious canon, legitimation and regulation was required for their function (moral discourse) and interpretation (the moral and aesthetic code).[16] The literary drama was also opposed to the heterogeneous performances of the earlier forms of theatre, which changed from performance to performance, or may not even have been based on a text at all. In theory, a single text for a performance could provide a stable and clear moral message (the same one each time it is performed), which could always be interpreted the same way and came from one reliable source. The literarisation of the drama is thus part of a larger tendency towards the establishment of literature as the legitimate public domain of the educated classes.

The question of the morality of literature and the theatre was rooted in a justification of the mimetic concept of art, the definition of which occupied many commentators in Europe, especially in France, in the early modern period. How exactly this mimesis should be achieved, whether the playwright should alter events to make them more comprehensible to the audience, how faithfully Aristotle's unities should be followed and whether morality could be sacrificed to aesthetic concerns or vice versa were central

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[14] Germany had a much higher concentration of universities than elsewhere in Europe: thirty-six in the seventeenth century.

[15] Cf. David Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780-1918*, p. 96.

[16] Ruedi Graf, *Das Theater im Literaturstaat*, p. 18

questions of the debate from the seventeenth century onwards.[17] Although the neoclassical interpretation of Aristotle usually advocated strict adherence to unities and the restriction of tragedy to the deeds of politically or historically important figures, Corneille, for example, made an important contribution to the development of a proto-bourgeois theatre in his insistence that men more equal to the members of the audience would serve as better exemplary moral figures, as the empathy experienced by the audience would encourage them to avoid similar behaviour: pity leads to fear of a similar fate.[18]

This debate about the mimetic concept of the theatre reached Germany a little later, in the early eighteenth century, when German critics began to formulate their own theories of the theatre and the drama, in an attempt to establish a German tradition that could rival the French. On the one hand, there was the neoclassical inheritance, which focused on a strict interpretation of the Aristotelian unities and on the other, there was a growing argument that, if the theatre had a moral purpose, based on the concepts of empathy and catharsis, this moral purpose could be better served by characters more equal to the members of the audience. The first tendency is exemplified by the theories of Johann Christoph Gottsched, the second by those of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and the emergence of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*.

Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), who was professor of poetry at Leipzig University, sought a complete reform of the theatre in Germany based on the French model and the cultivation of a new theatre audience with the appropriate aesthetic taste. This involved the complete suppression of the theatre of the travelling players, such as the *Hauptaktionen* and *Staatsaktionen*. With the help of Friederike Caroline Neuber, Gottsched also led a campaign to banish the figure of *Hanswurst* and his vulgar licentiousness from the stage during the 1730s.[19] He argued that without such figures, theatre was in fact the perfect medium to convey morality to an immoral society and to spread the values of the Enlightenment. Though these views may appear rather conservative to us today, one must bear in mind that Gottsched is writing not long after the very first university lecture in the German language was held, by Christian Thomasius in 1687,[20] and that therefore his contribution to the establishment of a German-language drama in his many treatises

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[17] For example, the controversy around Corneille's *Le Cid* in 1637. See Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre: A Historical and Critical study from the Greeks to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 95-97. Cf. Armand Gasté, *La querelle du Cid* (Paris: 1898; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1970).

[18] "Pity for a misfortune into which we see men like ourselves fall leads us to fear a similar misfortune for ourselves. This fear leads us to a desire to avoid it, and this desire leads us to purge, moderate, rectify, and even eradicate in ourselves the passion which, in our eyes, plunged the persons we pitied into misfortune." Corneille, cited in Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre*, p. 102.

[19] See Andreas Kotte, *Theaterwissenschaft*, p. 289f. *Hanswurst* was a comic figure related to the *Arlecchino* from the Italian *Commedia dell'arte*.

[20] See Karl Eibl, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Miß Sara Sampson*, p. 101.

(despite following the fashion of French Classicism rather than truly innovating) is not to be underestimated. Karl Eibl emphasises that though Gottsched's francophilia can be explained by numerous factors, such as the expansion of French culture under Louis XIV, the rationalist search for precedence, rules and models, or even Gottsched's own lack of imagination, it was above all caused by "die in ihm inkarnierte Hilfslosigkeit eines Standes, der, zu wirtschaftlicher Bedeutung gelangt, nun nach Möglichkeiten auch geistiger Produktivität suchte."[21]

As mentioned, the theatre was frequently attacked by theologians. It was viewed as a form of lying, in its imitation of reality, and as a sinful activity because it encouraged sensual pleasure.[22] In 1729, Gottsched held a speech in defence of theatre, particularly emphasising how theatre could exist in harmony with Christianity and could in fact be helpful in conveying Christian morals. Entitled "Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen", in reference to Plato and Rousseau, it entails a reinterpretation of the *Poetics* to support this view. Gottsched defines tragedy as a representation of the important actions of significant people, which being exemplary, functions like fable:

> Die Tragödie ist [...] ein Bild der Unglücksfälle, die den Großen dieser Welt begegnen und von ihnen entweder heldenmütig und standhaft ertragen oder großmütig überwunden werden. Sie ist eine Schule der Geduld und Weisheit, eine Vorbereitung zu Trübsalen [...] Sie lehret und warnet in fremden Exempeln; sie erbauet, indem sie vergnüget, und schicket ihre Zuschauer allezeit klüger, vorsichtiger und standhafter nach Hause.[23]

Furthermore, Gottsched makes a direct comparison between the drama and the sermon arguing that the preacher resorts to similar tactics and spectacle as the dramatist when trying to edify his audience with Christian morals: "Denn auch selbst die Predigten würden nicht erbaulich sein, wenn man nicht augenscheinliche Wirkungen derselben bei allen Zuhörern fördern wollte."[24] Here Gottsched combines the mimetic concept of art with the cathartic, and effectively describes the performative capabilities of theatre.[25]

In terms of mimesis, Gottsched goes even further than some of his French counterparts (such as Voltaire or Diderot for example) in demanding a total equivalence to nature in poetry, a mimesis which however must always be defined by the moral lesson to

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[21] Karl Eibl, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Miß Sara Sampson*, p. 103.

[22] A well-known example is the Puritans' banning of theatre altogether in England between 1648 and 1660.

[23] Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen," in, *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. by Horst Steinmetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972), pp. 5-11; p. 5.

[24] J. C. Gottsched, "Die Schauspiele und besonders die Tragödien sind aus einer wohlbestellten Republik nicht zu verbannen," in *Schriften zur Literatur*, p. 9.

[25] Cf. my discussion of catharsis and the performative in chapter one.

be taught. In *Versuch einer critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen* (1730),[26] he lays out his principles in a set of rigid rules for the creation of a German dramatic tradition. He is uncompromising with regard to the unities of time and place, with the ultimate aim of stage time and real time being identical, but encompassing a maximum of eight to ten hours during the day (in order for the characters to sleep!). The actors should also play only one role at a time, for the audience will not believe that one actor can 'be' numerous characters. The world of fantasy and the 'magical' ability on the traditional medieval folk stage to cross great distances in one step, to alter the logical progress of time or to metamorphose repeatedly are all banished from Gottsched's stage.

Another major concern of Gottsched's was the behaviour of the audience. In order to reduce distractions to a minimum and enable the audience to fully concentrate on the illusion presented to them, both the audience and the actors should remain fixed in one place. An audience at the time was a rowdy bunch, taking a much more active role in the performative 'feedback loop' than the average audience today – talking loudly, moving about, eating, drinking and making their approval or disapproval clearly heard:

> Zumindest bis zum Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts ist entsprechend davon auszugehen, dass die Mehrzahl der Zuschauer Theater als eine Art Treffpunkt betrachtete, als einen Ort der Kurzweil und der Zerstreuung, an dem die Aufführung immerhin ein mögliches Gesprächsthema für die Unterhaltung abgeben konnte, kurz: als einen geselligen Ort, nicht aber als eine Sittenschule oder eine moralische Anstalt.[27]

The theatre reformers of Gottsched's time were therefore equally concerned with the disciplining of the audience as that of the playwrights, which Georg-Michael Schulz goes as far as to call "der Krieg gegen das Publikum".[28] The bourgeois theatre which developed in the second half of the eighteenth century had as its ideal precisely that "Sittenschule", one of the spheres in which the social body was disciplined and educated.[29] The "Ort der Zerstreuung" was redefined as an ordered space, with a representative, unified and primarily bourgeois public – the presence of *Theaterpolizei* was not unusual in the early years of bourgeois German theatre.[30] The efforts to establish the literary drama with a clear moral message as the basis for theatre was therefore also mirrored in the division of those

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[26] J. C. Gottsched, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. by Hans-Gert Roloff , vol. VI: *Versuch einer critschen Dichtkunst*, ed. by Joachim Birke and Brigitte Birke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973).

[27] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater im Kulturwandel des 18. Jahrhunderts*, introduction, p. 17.

[28] Georg-Michael Schulz, "Der Krieg gegen das Publikum", in *Theater im Kulturwandel des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jörg Schönert, pp. 483-502.

[29] Cf. Hilde Haider-Pregler, *Des sittlichen Bürgers Abendschule: Bildungsanspruch und Bildungsauftrag des Berufstheaters im 18. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Jugend und Volk, 1980); and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1997).

[30] For example, fearing trouble at his performance of Zacharias Werner's *Martin Luther; oder die Weihe der Kraft* at the Prussian Royal National Theatre in 1806, August Wilhelm Iffland requested twenty officers to be present, double the normal number of theatre police. See Andreas Kotte, *Theaterwissenschaft*, pp. 98-101.

present at the performance into two unified groups: performers and audience. Erika Fischer-Lichte also points out that the audiences' tendency not to observe the stage quietly and obediently was a reflection of the average theatre evening's programme in the early eighteenth century.[31] This might contain several disconnected pieces, short comedies or burlesques and musical interludes, with numerous breaks and disruptions. The unity of place and time in the dramatic text advocated by Gottsched is therefore also a pragmatic concern regarding the actual performance conditions in order to better serve the morally didactic purpose of the theatre, creating the disciplined quiet of the classroom in the auditorium

Despite his pedantically moral view of the theatre, Gottsched would even allow vice to go unpunished if it offended an absolutely accurate portrayal of nature. However in his view, if mimesis is correctly achieved, the result will always be moral, because nature is inherently perfect, the embodiment of the laws of reason. Although the impact of Gottsched and his followers' reforms were hugely significant in terms of establishing the literary drama as the basis for theatre and the establishment of a clear boundary between the audience and the actors, the age of neoclassical theatre did not last long. As the age of the *Bürgertum* dawned, neoclassical drama about distant or historical kings and princes would no longer prove as attractive to the modern individual as the opportunity to construct their own identities on the stage in a distinctly bourgeois theatre.

Creating the Illusion: Theatre Spaces and Acting

Another aspect of the establishment of bourgeois literary theatre was the construction and use of purpose-built or at least permanent buildings as theatres. At the time of the theatre reforms, Germany did not have a national or central court theatre and very few fixed theatre buildings. Although some courts supported the performance of opera, the general public and the emerging middle classes were generally denied access. From the early eighteenth century onwards court theatres began to open their doors to wealthier citizens, such as members of the administration or the local *Stadtbürgertum*. However in general, theatre took place in whichever public spaces the *Wandertruppen* could convince the local authorities to let them use: in *Ballhallen*, large halls used for playing an antiquated form of tennis; in public squares and markets, where large crowds were guaranteed; in taverns or their courtyards; and in rooms and cellars in town halls. In her history of German eighteenth century theatre, Sybille Maurer-Schmoock points out that in each new space the

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[31] *Theater im Kulturwandel des 18. Jahrhunderts*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Jörg Schönert, p. 15. Cf. Sybille Maurer-Schmoock, *Deutsches Theater im 18. Jahrhundert*, especially the sections "Publikum" and "Repertoire", pp. 118-135.

actors had to adapt their rehearsed movements, entrances and exits anew.[32] No two performances were therefore alike and the faithful presentation of a written drama would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, as it was necessary to adapt it to a radically different space each time.[33] The establishment of literary drama and its faithful interpretation therefore required fixed spaces in which to perform. Later dramatists such as Schiller and Goethe would be engaged by specific theatres and could write dramas with particular spaces in mind.

At first theatre performances began to migrate indoors, into closed private spaces: "Turnier, Tanz und Theater ziehen sich von den öffentlichen Plätzen in die Anlagen des Parks zurück, von den Straßen in die Säle des Schlosses."[34] Then later, towards the end of the eighteenth century, companies of players began to acquire more permanent structures and the first attempts to establish national and state theatres took place. The *Prinzipal* Franziskus Schuch managed to gain citizenship of Breslau (Wroclaw) in 1754 and after purchasing some land, built a theatre which was active between 1755 and 1764. Konrad Ackermann built his first theatre in Königsberg, but after it was occupied by the Russians moved to Hamburg, where he built a theatre at the *Gänsemarkt* in 1765, previously the site of an opera, after obtaining citizenship of the city-state. This allowed him to own property and run a business, at the time a still relatively rare privilege.[35] The establishment of permanent theatres thus also depended on the new laws and rights for the residents of the growing cities and towns: the *Stadtbürgertum*. Most of these theatres were run as private theatres and depended on the *Prinzipal* acquiring the status of a *Bürger* in order to be allowed to run the theatre as a business. This points to the gradual change in social status of the theatre-makers. Johann Friedrich von Löwen, for example, was only capable of setting up the Hamburg National Theatre enterprise because of Ackermann's citizenship, and with a consortium of twelve other *Bürger*. Soon more theatres followed all over Germany: two in Berlin (1765), in Leipzig (1766), in Frankfurt (1769) and finally in Mannheim (1776), where the old hospital was converted into the theatre where Schiller was later to work, the Mannheim National Theatre (which, though planned as a national theatre, effectively functioned as a court theatre). The architecture of the theatres reflected

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[32] Sybille Maurer-Schmoock, *Deutsches Theater im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp. 4-5.

[33] Admittedly, this 'problem' has never been completely eradicated. Actors and directors have always had to adapt to the available space and still must do so, though this is often seen as part of the artistic process today. However, the establishment of permanent theatres created the conventional form of the proscenium arch theatre, enabling a more standardised bourgeois form.

[34] Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, p. 22.

[35] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas I: Von der Antike bis zur Deutschen Klassik* (Tübingen: Francke, 1999), p. 290.

the new class divisions, with boxes for the nobility and the *Parterre* reserved for the *Bürgertum*.

A second significant change was to the stage itself, the scenery and wings.[36] The stage of the *Wandertruppen* was divided in two by a curtain, similar to the English stage, with its main and apron stage. In this way the location of the play could be extended or changed, or two locations could be shown at once. When moving scenery and wing technology were adopted from the Italian perspective stage, the focus moved to the design of a single three-dimensional space – the stage became a picture or an image; a closed, unified world. The wings were arranged to the side in perspective, while the backdrop usually depicted a scene. The actors could also use the wings for exits and entrances and to hide props. This cemented the divide between audience and actors, effectively creating the 'fourth wall'. It also created a divide between the backstage, the hidden world that enables the performance, and the stage as a fictional space, uninterrupted by the means with which it is created. The words *Schaubühne* and *Guckkastenbühne* reflect the construction of the space as a framed image. By the end of the eighteenth century, this space was often used to represent one room (with windows and specific doors), which then became the norm in nineteenth century realism and naturalism. The fixed space of the stage reinforced the distinction between the representation and the represented, between the framed illusion onstage and backstage reality. It also represents a closed, bourgeois public sphere in which the private is displayed publicly, especially with the advent of the domestic drama.

The changes in the technical conditions of production also coincide with the development of a more realistic and natural acting style, developed and taught in Germany primarily by Conrad Ekhof in his acting school founded in 1753 in Schwerin, but in which Denis Diderot and Lessing also had a hand. In Baroque theatre, physical acting tended to consist of the highly formalised demonstration of emotions, but this gradually shifted to a focus on effecting emotions in the audience, through the mimesis of natural behaviour, in the theatre of Lessing's time.[37] This was to be achieved through a repertoire of natural-seeming, emotional gestures, but how these gestures were to be executed, whether they should be improved or altered, and how much they should affect the actor himself, was much debated. The younger Riccoboni, Antonio Francesco, for example, placed central emphasis on a controlled but accurate mimesis in *L'art du théâtre* (1750).[38] The actor

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[36] See Sybille Maurer-Schmoock, "Dekoration und Bühnenbild", in *Deutsches Theater im 18. Jahrhundert*, pp. 32-51.

[37] See ibid., "Schauspielkunst", pp. 149-202. Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Die Schaubühne als eine zivilisatorische Anstalt betrachtet", in *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation* (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), pp. 25-42.

[38] Françoise Riccoboni, *L'art du théâtre* (Paris: 1750; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1971).

should observe natural reactions and imitate them accurately; actually feeling the emotions would cause the actor to lose control and he or she would therefore no longer be able to act successfully. *L'art du théâtre* was translated by Lessing in 1750 and published as "Die Schauspielkunst" in *Beyträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters*.[39] Denis Diderot developed this idea more fully in the famous *Paradoxe sur le comédien* of 1773 (though this was not published until 1830).[40]

Diderot's paradox concerns the fact that, while the ideal was to appear 'natural', and the signs and gestures employed for this should be taken from the natural emotional behaviour of real people, it also involved a disciplining of the actor's body, making it a kind of text upon which these natural signs should be inscribed. In reference to Norbert Elias, Erika Fischer-Lichte describes this as part of the general process of civilising the body in society:

> Um diese Wirkung ausüben zu können, muß der Schauspieler seinen Körper also in ein natürliches Zeichen der Seele umformen. Damit hört dieser jedoch auf, sinnliche Natur zu sein bzw. als sinnliche Natur wahrgenommen zu werden. Der Körper wird vielmehr als Kultur von Natur aus präsentiert – er wird als ein von der Natur hergestellter Zusammenhang von Zeichen, als ein 'Text' in der 'natürlichen Sprache der Seele' ausgegeben. Während der Zuschauer diesen Text entziffert, wird er im Idealfall den Körper des Schauspielers gar nicht mehr als sinnliche Natur wahrnehmen, sondern als einen Zusammenhang von Zeichen, welche die einzige Funktion haben, auf Empfindungen der dramatischen Person zu verweisen.[41]

The actor's body – characterised later by Hegel as the instrument of the poet – becomes the carrier of the dramatic text, his or her individual self subordinated to the moral sense of the literary drama for the enjoyment, enlightenment and critical engagement of the audience. The body becomes a representational tool, rather than a body present in its unadulterated corporeality. The private self, as an individual personality with emotions and a phenomenological body, though it appears in public on the stage, is therefore also sacrificed for the sake of the bourgeois public space of the theatre. Fischer-Lichte views the construction of the body as a sign of an early experiment in the constitution of the

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[39] See *Texte zur Theorie des Theaters* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000; new edition), ed. by Christopher Balme and Klaus Lazarowicz, pp. 144-149.

[40] Denis Diderot, *Paradoxe sur le comédien*, ed. by Marc Blanquet (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1958 [1830]). Cf. Andreas Kotte, *Theaterwissenschaft*, pp. 169-171.

[41] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation*, p. 33. Cf. Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, which examines the history of the 'civilising' of the body in general, and the emergence of shame and embarrassment in relation to the body, as a new regulation of the emotions; and Rainer Ruppert, *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, pp. 112-125. Ruppert argues that theatre serves as a corporeal and emotional space to compensate for the disciplining of emotions and the body in everyday life. This will be discussed further below.

bourgeois subject, through education in the proper use of their bodies and language in public, that is, 'civilised' behaviour:

> Auf diesem Wege wird gezeigt, dass die Arbeit am 'Zeichen-Körper' der Schauspieler ein Probedurchlauf für die 'höhere' Bildungsarbeit am zukünftigen bürgerlichen Menschen war, der sich durch 'anständige' Sprach- und Körperverwendung inszenieren können musste, da er in der Öffentlichkeit wahrgenommen wurde.[42]

After the establishment of the nation state, this is a sacrifice the private individual could also be asked to make for the sake of his country. The private individual, in the sense of an individual citizen or *Staatsbürger*, is constituted as such within and for the sake of the social and political community. Paradoxically though, the moral sense he or she was representing often concerned the altered private domestic realm, which was the subject of the new drama, and in this sense also constitutes the private. The private therefore also functions as a category of the public.

Theatre in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction

Along with the philosophical and moral foundation of the reforms for theatre, another major, if not *the* fundamental factor in the literarisation of drama was a change in its materiality.[43] Printing, as Habermas argues, completely changed social relations by enabling the production of newspapers and journals, creating a new public sphere which would later form the basis for democracy. It also completely changed the way plays could be produced and used. Just as borders were created around theatrical space as it moved from temporary structures in open public squares and halls, the theatrical performance could now also be constrained and fixed permanently as a literary artefact (although initially due to lack of copyright, texts were still usually copied and altered). The play became an object and not just an event. The ramifications of this include the possibility of the study, reading and criticism of plays exclusive of the performance. The artwork could now come to the recipient; the audience no longer had to travel to a performance (or happen upon it at the market).[44] The theatre enters the domestic realm via the literary text and reading privately reflects the drama's new concern with the private. This also coincides with the decline of reading aloud, which was a standard practice up until the

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[42] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Theater im Kulturwandel des 18. Jahrhunderts*, introduction, p. 18.

[43] Cf. Frank Möller "Das Theater als Vermittlungsinstanz bürgerlicher Werte", in *Bürgerliche Werte um 1800*, pp. 198-201. Andreas Kotte provides statistics regarding the number of published dramas in this period, in *Theaterwissenschaft*, p. 103.

[44] Cf. Walter Benjamin, "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit (zweite Fassung)", in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), vol. I, part 2, pp. 471-508; especially pp. 475-478.

eighteenth century (especially since many people could not read).[45] Reading aloud was now considered to prevent the rational understanding of a text, therefore only texts which did not necessarily need to be rationally understood could be read aloud, such as poetry and in particular the drama, but even these were eventually read silently. The reading aloud of texts is thus partly relocated to the stage, the refuge of the physical experience of text, which is at the same time subordinated to the new literary theatre.

In *Theatre of the Book*, Julie Stone Peters also argues that the emergence of literary theatre was dependent on printing, but not just because it allowed dramas to be printed. It also enabled the dissemination of theoretical texts on Greek theatre, translations of plays, treatises on aesthetics, images of theatrical spaces, as well as new plays.[46] Furthermore, in the period of the emergence of bourgeois literary theatre in Germany, certain theoretical norms can be identified that were only made possible by the advent of the printed play text. For example, the concept of fidelity to a dramatic work was only possible if there was a printed text available. Only if the audience (or critic) has previous knowledge of a drama, can it judge the performance on the basis of these preconceptions. This also applies to the evaluation of acting: the actor was now expected to remember his ot her lines and a printed play text enabled others to judge how well he or she had done this. This increased the technical requirements of actors. No longer expected to simply improvise, actors were given more programmatic training in order to behave naturally and appear to imitate reality (without a text). This in turn engendered more serious discussions of the art. The printed text of course also made possible the position of author.[47] The text became an artefact which the writer could own, laying claim to his (more rarely her) authorship, rather than merely being another in a long line of version writers or editors, paving the way for a Romantic and expressive conception of art.[48] A printed text was also a valuable commodity simply in terms of cost and access, and so the literary text became valorised over improvisations, which could be performed by anyone possessing a body. Later, in the nineteenth century, a representative library became an important aspect of the performance of bourgeois identity in the home.

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[45] See Erich Schön, *Der Verlust der Sinnlichkeit oder die Verwandlung des Lesers* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987).

[46] Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480-1880: Print, Text and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 97.

[47] Cf. ibid., section 4, "The Commerce of Letters", pp. 203-256.

[48] Cf. Rainer Ruppert, "'Der Grund, warum das Theater da ist, ist das Gedicht': Der Ursprung des Literaturtheaters in der Kunstperiode", in *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, pp. 171-226, which examines the shift to an aesthetic concept of literature and theatre (the autonomy of art) in Weimar Classicism and early Romanticism.

The development of the public sphere embodied in printed texts, including the drama, was a significant factor first in the development of the *Bürgertum*, and later the development of the nation state and a sense of national identity. In his book on nations and nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson also argues that printing was of central importance for the development of nationalism. He argues that the book was the first mass-produced commodity and views newspapers as a form of the book or 'one-day bestsellers'. Newspapers created a mass ceremony of ritual consumption and imagination (Hegel observed that they replaced morning prayers, Anderson notes). This ritual was performed silently and in private, but in the awareness that this private consumption was reproduced perhaps many thousands of times by others within the reading community on a regular basis: "What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned?"[49] This ritual was also replicated in the reading of literature and literary journals, and this imagined community also becomes physically manifest in the space of the theatre. Print culture not only linked the heterogeneous communities of the fractured German territories across space and time, it also encouraged the standardisation of written language, strengthening the imagined community of readers and a common sense of identity. The nation, like the theatre, provided "a new way a new way of linking power, fraternity and time meaningfully together."[50] It was therefore a vehicle for communal relationships based on a sense of togetherness, as well as associative ones, defined by rational interests.[51]

Anderson's study of nation however constantly emphasises the hybridity that lies beneath European national identities, which were only constituted as a common and lasting identity through cultural practices and, I would argue, a performative use of language. In a process analogous to the speech act, print culture contributed to the constitution of national, and indeed, the bourgeois sense of identity. If language is performative, then printed texts – including the drama – are an extension of this, a complex collection of speech acts in material form, which delineates aspects of the social consensus described by Austin as the prerequisite for speech acts to function. They therefore function as a kind of fixed reference point in the constitution of mass identities. This opens up the potential for reading the drama, even in its bourgeois form, as a performative text *par excellence*.[52] However, like speech acts, its effect always also depends on the historical and social

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[49] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 35.
[50] Ibid., p. 36.
[51] See chapter one of this dissertation.
[52] Cf. Irmgard Maassen, "Text und/als/in der Performanz in der frühen Neuzeit: Thesen und Überlegungen", in *Theorien des Performativen*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte and Christoph Wulf (= *Paragrana*, 10 (2001), no. 1), pp. 285-302.

context in which it is received. In this sense, although the drama is fixed on one level, it can also be reinterpreted in new ways at different points in history, revealing a nexus between past constructions of national, class, or individual identities and our own present senses of ourselves. This is an aspect which is clearly evident in the work of Michael Thalheimer, whose contemporary productions of canonical plays confront us precisely with this intersection.[53]

Not only can the German bourgeoisie be viewed as the central players in this process of the construction of a national identity, but as a social group the bourgeoisie itself is an imagined community, comprising members of a *bürgerliche Kultur*, who did not always share a common fixed identity, as shown in the previous chapter. Despite sharing the characteristics of education and earning a living independently, or integration into the capitalist system, the main way in which they were linked was through value systems manifested and created through these cultural practices and language:

> Here was a class [the bourgeoisie] which, figuratively speaking, came into being as a class only in so many replications. The factory-owner in Lille was connected to a factory-owner in Lyon only by reverberation. They had no necessary reason to know of one another's existence; they did not typically marry each other's daughters or inherit each other's property. But they did come to visualise in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language. For an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable. Thus in world historical terms, bourgeoisies were the first classes to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis.[54]

Like national identities, which Anderson shows are basically all 'Creole' beneath a constructed, shared and imagined veneer, class identities too are binding ideas which mask hybridity beneath. No language or ethnicity, let alone nation, can justifiably claim a 'pure' identity, for it is merely by the waves of time that hybridity gets smoothed over, appearing then as solid, eternal or unified, or claimed as such.

National Theatre

The establishment of the bourgeois theatre and the early development of a national sense of identity came together in the concept of a national theatre in the second half of the eighteenth century. The reforms Gottsched and others had brought about were initially successful, but ultimately did not last beyond his own time. One reason this can be attributed to is the wholesale takeover of the French poetic form, the Alexandrine, which sounded repetitive and artificial in German. Lessing summed up Gottsched's contribution succinctly and stingingly in the seventeenth of the *Briefe, die neuste Literatur betreffend*,

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[53] See chapter four of this dissertation.
[54] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 77.

when he writes that Gottsched wanted less to improve the German theatre, than to create his own, by adopting the French model entirely, never once stopping to think whether "dieses französierende Theater der deutschen Denkungsart angemessen sei, oder nicht".[55] Lessing argues that the German way of thinking is closer to the English than the French, perhaps because the English theatre was primarily a middle class theatre by that time and the bourgeoisie had more power there. In contrast, the French theatre Gottsched used as a model was largely written for the pleasure of the aristocracy. He concludes "daß wir in unsern Trauerspielen mehr sehen und denken wollen, als uns das furchtsame französiche Trauerspiel zu sehen und zu denken gibt; daß das Große, das Schreckliche, das Melancholische, besser auf uns wirkt als das Artige, das Zärtliche, das Verliebte."[56]

While for Gottsched there was still very little issue with taking over the French model, the national question loomed larger for Lessing. What kind of drama might be unique to Germany and suit the unique German character or 'way of thinking' would soon be addressed in the newly established but short-lived German National Theatre in Hamburg, where Lessing also pursued these questions in the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*.[57] Unlike other European national theatres founded either by stable autocratic governments (for example the *Comédie Française* in Paris and the *Burgtheater* in Vienna), or as part of nationalist movements attempting to define themselves against a history of foreign rule (for example the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen or the Abbey in Dublin), the attempted establishment of a German national theatre was conceived primarily as a citizens' theatre,[58] and explicitly associated with the *Bürgertum*.

Johann Elias Schlegel had spent time at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in the 1740s and, inspired by that theatre's nationalist agenda (it had been operated by the municipality since 1750 and had a significant repertoire of domestic Danish drama by Ludvig Holberg[59]), encouraged Germany to follow suit in his 1747 dramaturgical text, "Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters".[60] The Hamburg National Theatre was founded in 1767 by Johann Friedrich Löwen, funded by a consortium of local wealthy

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[55] G. E. Lessing, *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, no. 17 (16 February 1759), in *Werke*, ed. by Karl Eibl et al (Munich: Hanser, 1973), vol. v: *Literaturkritik, Poetik und Philologie*, ed. by Jörg Schönert, pp. 70-73; p. 71.

[56] G. E. Lessing, *Briefe, die neueste Literatur betreffend*, no. 17 (16 February 1759), in *Werke v: Literaturkritik, Poetik und Philologie*, p. 71.

[57] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995).

[58] See S. E. Wilmer, "The Development of National Theatres in Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, ed. by S. E. Wilmer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 9-20; p. 9. Cf. Roland Krebs, *L'idee de "théâtre national" dans l'Allemagne des Lumiéres: théorie et realisations* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1985) and *Das Ende des Stegreifspiels: die Geburt des Nationaltheaters*, ed. by Roger Bauer and Jürgen Wertheimer (Munich: Fink, 1983).

[59] See S. E. Wilmer, *National Theatres in a Changing Europe*, p. 10.

[60] J. E. Schlegel, "Gedanken zur Aufnahme des dänischen Theaters", appendix to *Canut: ein Trauerspiel*, ed. by Horst Steinmetz (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1967), pp. 75-111.

citizens (from the *Bürgertum*), and managed by Löwen.[61] Ackermann also stayed on and the acting ensemble included Conrad Eckhof. The stated aim of the theatre, read by Madame Löwen in the prologue on the opening night of the theatre, was to create rational, bourgeois citizens and:

> Durch süße Herzensangst, und angenehmes Graun
> Die Boßheit bändigen und an den Seelen baun;
> Wohltätig für den Staat, den Wütenden, den Wilden
> Zum Menschen, Bürger, Freund und Patrioten bilden.[62]

The repertoire included a comparatively large number of German plays (Christian Felix Weiße, Johann Christian Brandes, J. F. Löwen and of course Lessing – the most successful production was *Minna von Barnhelm*) but not exclusively so. It also included French playwrights: Diderot of course, but also Voltaire, Moliere, Marivaux, and Beaumarchais' *drame bourgeois* (the new genre) *Eugenie* as well as the new middle class plays from England by George Lillo and Edward Moore.[63]

Lessing was appointed dramaturge of the theatre and as part of this new role, he wrote a continuous critical response to the productions in the theatre, the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, advocating not only a national theatre, but one which would also serve to propagate bourgeois values, especially that of empathy. However, audience attendance did not reflect these lofty ideals. It seems that they were simply not ready to give up the more entertaining forms of popular theatre, such as ballet and pantomime, and replace it with more intellectually demanding German drama. With audience numbers dwindling, Löwen was forced to make serious concessions in the programming and incorporate additional entertainment pieces, but this also served to alienate those who had attended the theatre for its original aims. The financial backers became nervous, and when the theatre was attacked publicly by the prominent Hamburg pastor, J. Melchior Goeze, it became impossible for Löwen to convince them of the viability of the project.[64] For although most of the backers wished to see the ideal of a national theatre realised, they also wished to see profit on its books. The project failed, and at the end his *Dramaturgie*, Lessing places the blame firmly on the audience, on the lack of a coherent group or national identity:

> Wenn das Publikum fragt: was ist denn nun geschehen? und mit einem höhnischen
> Nichts sich selbst antwortet: so frage ich wiederum: und was hat denn das

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[61] Löwen had deposed Ackermann by publicly criticising him and insisting that as a non-actor (Ackermann was a *Prinzipal* – both the lead actor and the manager), he was better placed to manage the theatre as a business. See Michael J. Sosulski, *Theatre and Nation in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), p. 17.

[62] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 6th piece, p. 40.

[63] The plays produced are listed in the appendix of ibid., pp. 627-630.

[64] See Michael J. Sosulski, *Theatre and Nation in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, p. 19.

Publikum getan, damit etwas geschehen könnte? Auch nichts; ja noch etwas Schlimmers, als nichts. Nicht genug, dass es das Werk nicht allein nicht befördert: es hat ihm nicht einmal seinen natürlichen Lauf gelassen. – Über den gutherzigen Einfall, den Deutschen ein Nationaltheater zu verschaffen, da wir noch keine Nation sind! Ich rede nicht von der politischen Verfassung, *sondern bloß von dem sittlichen Charakter*. Fast sollte man sagen, dieser sei: keinen eigenen haben zu wollen. Wir sind noch immer die geschworenen Nachahmer alles Ausländischen…[my emphasis][65]

Although the project of the national theatre did ultimately have significant effects on the future development of a bourgeois theatre and national culture in Germany, by helping to encourage the establishment of a German repertoire, Lessing's complaint shows that despite this, the German nation remained fractured and outward-looking, and the general bourgeois public not yet sufficiently 'educated' to appreciate the work. This moment reveals the fragility of what would later disappear beneath layers of more extreme nationalism: a disparate, heterogeneous '*Volk*' still in the process of attempts to imagine a unity. It is important, however, to note that Lessing emphasises the lack of a "sittlichen Charakter" as the reason for the project's failure, and not the lack of national, political unity. This shows that the politically frustrated *Bürgertum* tended to channel its energy into its ethical character and the cultural sphere, where its ideals were at least tolerated by the increasingly authoritarian 'Enlightened' absolutist state. The emotional display of empathy both on and off stage was one of the ways in which the *Bürgertum* could appear victorious against aristocratic and absolutist values, and thus formed what could be called an 'ethical community' which replaced the absent nation. The theatre was defined as a "moralische Anstalt", most famously by Schiller,[66] and the alleged moral superiority of the *Bürgertum* was an indirect claim to political power. The dramatic vehicle for this morality was the new genre of drama most explicitly associated with the *Bürgertum*: the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*.

The Bourgeois Tragedy

It may seem obvious at first to interpret the emergence of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* at the same time as the *Bürgertum* itself as an expression of political class interests, the manifestation of emerging class consciousness. But, as we have seen, the changes that took place across society during the emergence of the *Bürgertum* (national, administrative, legal, moral, religious) were so complex that it is more pertinent to view the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* as enacting a shift in the entire mode of cultural and specifically theatrical

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[65] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), p. 509.

[66] Friedrich Schiller, "Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken? (Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet)", in *Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe*, ed. by Julius Petersen et al (Weimar: Böhlau, 1943–), vol. xx: *Philophische Schriften: Teil 1*, ed. by Benno von Wiese (1962), pp. 87-100.

representation, the perception of and actual function of the institution of theatre, as well as the subject matter to be performed therein.

The canon of *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* or bourgeois tragedy is a problematic one. The plays generally considered by major studies represent merely a handful of those that carry the subtitle *bürgerliches Trauerspiel*, the majority of which were written by playwrights who are less well known.[67] Most of those plays considered historically paradigmatic do not carry this subtitle.[68] In German, these consist of only about four or five canonical dramas, which however do not always demonstrate the characteristics one might expect of this genre. Even viewing these plays as classical tragedy is problematic. In fact, they partly have their roots in the French *comédie larmoyante*, the sentimental or moving comedy, which is evident in Lessing's 'serious' comedy, *Minna von Barnhelm*. Karl S. Guthke has argued that we cannot understand the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* until we also examine the hundreds of minor and marginal plays that locate themselves within this genre.[69] Though I may agree with this, my purpose is not necessarily to understand the genre in its entirety, but rather to investigate it as a paradigmatic instance of bourgeois self-performance (*Selbstinszenierung*), which is equally evident in the small number of plays that ultimately survived in the German canon and were successful in theatrical repertoires as it is in the content of the plays.

In the early twentieth century, the development of the *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* tended to be viewed from a socio-literary perspective as evidence of class conflict and the coming to class consciousness of the bourgeoisie. In his book on the theory of the German bourgeois tragedy, Peter Szondi quotes Georg Lukács:

> Das bürgerliche Drama ist das erste, welches aus bewußtem Klassengegensatz erwachsen ist; das erste, dessen Ziel es war, der Gefühls- und Denkweise einer um Freiheit und Macht kämpfenden Klasse, ihrer Beziehung zu den andern Klassen, Ausdruck zu geben.[70]

Szondi also refers to Arnold Hauser's interpretation that the middle class drama's "Geburt aus dem bürgerlichen Klassenbewußtsein war seine ganze Geschichte beschlossen".[71] But

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[67] For example Breithaupt, Dusch, Lieberkühn, Pfeffel, Pfeil, Trautzschen and Ziegler. See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973), p. 21; and Karl S. Guthke, *Das deutsche bürgerliche Trauerspiel* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1972), pp. 55-56.

[68] For example George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (although the French translator of *The London Merchant* appended the subtitle *drame bourgeois*), Diderot's *drames bourgeois*, Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* and Lenz's *Der Hofmeister, oder Vorteile der Privaterziehung*. See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 20.

[69] See Karl S. Guthke, *Das deutsche bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, pp. 1-2.

[70] Georg Lukács, "Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas", cited in Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 17.

[71] Arnold Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, section VI, part 3: "Die Enstehung des bürgerlichen Dramas", pp. 599-616; p. 599.

Szondi disagrees with Lukács and Hauser. The bourgeois tragedy is, like the *Bürgertum*, not a homogeneous form, which always explicitly represents figures from the *Bürgertum* in direct social conflict with members of the old aristocratic classes. Szondi argues that the bourgeois tragedy initially developed for aesthetic reasons as the next logical step of a theory of tragedy (based on Aristotle) concerned with the play's effectiveness, as well as for sociological ones. However, it is also the "bürgerliche Wertehimmel", bourgeois ethics or value systems, which mark these dramas as belonging to the genre of the bourgeois tragedy, and Szondi emphasises the concept of *Empfindsamkeit* or sensibility in the development of the German bourgeois tragedy.[72] While the plays generally are not directly politically confrontational, many of the emotional, ethical and moral aspects can be viewed as a channelling of political energy into the cultural sphere, where it was tolerated, and an implicit claim to the moral and therefore political superiority of the *Bürgertum*. The emotional and moral thus becomes the battleground of the political. Furthermore, they also demonstrate a shift in the very possibilities and the function of representation in relation to the public and the private.

Many of the *bürgerliche Trauerspiele* also include characters from both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, though not always represented in direct political conflict in the *bürgerliche Trauerspiele*.[73] There is even an obscure bourgeois tragedy about Louis XVI by Ernst Karl Ludwig Ysenburg von Buri, *Ludwig Capet, oder Der Königsmord: Ein bürgerliches Trauerspiel in vier Aufzügen* (1793). Many of the aristocratic characters, such as Lessing's Sir William Sampson or the Prince at the end of *Emilia Galotti*, are in fact depicted as capable of bourgeois emotion, values and morality. That even a member of the nobility can embody bourgeois ethics shows how universal bourgeois ethics were considered to be. The aristocracy is thus 'colonised' from below with the bourgeois worldview.[74]

What is true of the plays themselves, which do not explicitly depict class conflict, is also the case with the theory of the bourgeois tragedy. Szondi argues that these theories also rarely discuss class conflict or political intentions explicitly, but tend to legitimise and advocate the new form on aesthetic or poetic grounds, which must however be viewed as implicitly political. Szondi's first example is George Lillo's *The London Merchant* from 1731, generally considered the first extant bourgeois tragedy in Western Europe. This play was performed frequently in Germany in the latter half of the eighteenth century (in the

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[72] Cf. Lothar Pikulik, *'Bürgerliches Trauerspiel' und Empfindsamkeit* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1966), who argues that the bourgeois tragedy is entirely defined by *Empfindsamkeit* rather than class interests.

[73] Szondi points out that Lillo's *The London Merchant*, Lessing's *Miß Sara Sampson*, and Diderot's *Le fils naturel* and *Le pere de famille*, all contain central characters or protagonists from the aristocracy.

[74] Cf. Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1999), pp. 137-139.

Hamburg National Theatre for example), and so is considered an important influence on the development of the German bourgeois tragedy.

In his dedication of 1731 to Sir John Eyles,[75] Lillo justifies his new drama on poetic foundations, which are by implication political. It is not that the middle class have a right to tragedy but that tragedy has a right to the middle class. If the main purpose of tragedy is to have an effect (based on Aristotelian poetics of tragedy), namely pity and fear followed by catharsis, and if this catharsis or its effects are deemed as having positive results in society, then it follows that tragedy should aim to affect the greatest number of people. The greatness of the tragedy is assessed on the basis of its *usefulness* to society, which is in itself a bourgeois perspective. Lillo writes:

> If tragic poetry be, as Mr. Dryden has somewhere said, the most excellent and the most *useful* kind of writing, the more extensively *useful* the moral of any tragedy is, the more excellent that piece must be of its kind [my emphasis].[76]

This emphasis on usefulness demonstrates an important change in both the interpretation of Aristotelian poetics[77] and the perception of the function of drama and theatre: in the emerging capitalist, industrial society, everyone and everything must have its place and purpose. Art must serve society and play its part in the march of progress. That purpose is firstly cathartic: tragedy is "the exciting of the passions in order to the correcting [sic] such of them as are criminal" and the more citizens whose passions can be "corrected" through their excitement of their passions, the greater the tragedy, "the instrument of good to many".[78] The terrible fate of individuals is enacted in order for it to be prevented in reality: that is the cathartic function according to Lillo and his successors. However, the theatre also functions as an intermediate (public) space between society and the individual, a place to critically examine the relation between the public and the private, which I will discuss further below. Lillo continues:

> If princes, etc., were alone liable to misfortunes arising from vice or weakness in themselves or others, there would be good reason for confining the characters in tragedy to those of superior rank; but, since the contrary is evident, nothing can be more reasonable than to proportion the remedy to the disease.[79]

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[75] Who was one of the many middle class parvenus to the nobility in England – his father, Sir Francis Eyles, having been made a baronet by George I.

[76] George Lillo, dedication to Sir John Eyles, *The London Merchant* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 3

[77] See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 25f. The reference is to Dryden's introduction to his own translation of Juvenal's satires. Szondi argues that Lillo has changed the meaning of Dryden's reference to Aristotle, which in fact concerned the perfection of the drama if the unities are adhered to, and does not mention its usefulness to society.

[78] George Lillo, dedication to Sir John Eyles, *The London Merchant*, p. 3

[79] Ibid., p. 3.

Once again this may be read in light of Austin's social consensus required for the success of a speech act. When successful, the speech act can directly affect the world (the audience), transforming them. Catharsis can thus be understood as a form of (emotional) transformation (see my discussion of catharsis in chapter one).

Lillo conflates the effect of the tragedy with an empathy based on the equivalence of social status, but justifies this on poetic grounds: "Seine Argumente geben sich vielmehr als poetologische."[80] Ultimately though, the poetic is inseparable from the political and the social, and the discourse on the *Ständeklausel* is the point where these three intersect. The estate or class clause prescribed that tragedy should depict the aristocracy or great kings and comedy the lower classes. The *Ständeklausel* is not, however, as the neoclassicist poetics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggested, explicitly defined in the *Poetics*. Szondi argues that the neoclassical interpretation is based on a section of the second chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which the social status of the characters is *not* being discussed, but rather how they are depicted (realistically, exaggeratedly, as caricature). Here is the relevant passage from the *Poetics*:

> Since mimetic artists represent people in action, and the latter should be either elevated or base (for characters almost always align with just these types, as it is through vice and virtue that the characters of all men vary), they can represent people better than our normal level, worse than it or much the same. As too with painters: Polygnotus depicted superior people, Pauson inferior, and Dionysus those like ourselves [...] This very distinction separates tragedy from comedy: the latter tends to represent people inferior, the former superior.[81]

Aristotle is ostensibly referring to moral character not social status, which in any case was not as relevant in Greek theatre, since it was a communal ritual for all citizens of society, a society in which the lines between citizen and non-citizen were very clearly drawn. Szondi insists that the reference to the painters implies that Aristotle is talking about aesthetic effect, not content, which seems likely, since in the following passage Aristotle talks about the difference of effect in music for example. As is so often the case with the *Poetics*, the *Ständeklausel* is in fact a specific interpretation of Aristotle in a particular historical context, based on rather ambiguous text.

Szondi also argues that the shift from classical poetics to the poetics of the Renaissance, the Baroque and neoclassicism, is one from a descriptive, historic poetics focused on effects (Aristotle, a cathartic model) to an abstract, normative one (for example

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[80] See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert,* p. 31.
[81] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995; 2nd edition), p. 33f. Cf. book v, pp. 45-47.

Gottsched, a mimetic model).[82] In the early Enlightenment, these normative rules needed to be articulated on a foundation of reason, rather than merely the authority of forbears. According to this reason, by showing the terrible fates of kings a greater lesson for all can be conveyed, one that "teacheth the uncertainty of this world and upon how weake foundations guilden roofes are builded".[83] The general population was thus to learn to face the uncertainty (and the violence) of the late medieval world with stoicism (and religious morality). This is especially evident in Gottsched:

> Der Poet will also durch die Fabeln Wahrheiten lehren, und die Zuschauer, durch den Anblick solcher schweren Fälle der Großen dieser Welt, zu ihren eigenen Trübsalen vorbereiten.[84]

This lesson is conveyed by the demonstration of misguided actions to inspire fear, but with the bourgeois tragedy, the focus shifts to one more focused on the cathartic effect through empathy.

In his survey of the German bourgeois tragedy, Christian Rochow identifies that tragedy as it was defined by Gottsched was fundamentally incompatible with Enlightenment principles. The new bourgeois citizen no longer wanted to be subject to the whims of despotic rulers over which he had no control, but to influence the world himself through democratic politics. The chaotic, violent and unpredictable medieval world was to be conquered and controlled by reason, politics and science – why then should tragedy depict an inherently good hero meeting a terrible end at the hands of fate?

> Warum sollte man sich auf Trübsale vorbereiten, wenn sich doch die Welt – die beste aller möglichen Welten – durch Aufklärung so verbessern ließe, dass die Unglücksfälle von denen die Tragödie handelt, vermeidbar wären? Wenn doch die Lehre, die der Held erteilt, gerade darin besteht, dass der Zuschauer dessen Fehler vermeide?[85]

Szondi also underlines that in *The London Merchant* the protagonist is not depicted as merely trapped in the clutches of fate, but *responsible* for his own actions. The individual's effect on the world is emphasised rather than its effect on him. The often criticised excessive fifth act of Lillo's play may also be explained in these terms: George Barnwell does not meet a quick and gruesome end, but must *mentally* and perhaps spiritually face the consequences of his actions in jail. Lillo gives him ample time to ponder his crimes and

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[82] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 41.

[83] Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetry*, which Szondi cites as an early example of this, in ibid., p. 44.

[84] Gottsched, *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst*, in *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. VI, part 2, p. 312. It should be noted that Gottsched makes this statement in the context of his analysis of Greek tragedy. It corresponds to his overall theory of tragedy however: cf. chapter 4 of ibid., "Von den dreyen Gattungen der poetischen Nachahmung, und insonderheit von der Fabel", in *Ausgewählte Werke*, vol. VI, part 1, pp. 195-223.

[85] Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, p. 51.

their spiritual consequences in jail.[86] The effect on the audience in turn is not to harden themselves to the events that fate may throw at them, but to make a conscious individual decision to *act* differently ("prevent our guilt, or by reflection cure", Lillo writes in the prologue). Rochow also points out that the endings of bourgeois tragedies are often awkward: this is because the playwrights had to deconstruct the tragic ending, which from an Enlightenment perspective is the unlikely one; or give it a solid reasonable foundation based on believable characters,[87] making psychological realism more important.

Another neoclassicist prescription for tragedy was that it should depict historical events. This is based on Aristotle's rule that tragedy must be believable and probable, and that history, having happened, is definitively likely and therefore is the most apt material for tragedy, yet not the only material possible. The Renaissance interpreted this far more strictly: tragedy should deal with historical events and comedy with the profane. Moreover, up until perhaps the French Revolution, the average citizen was not considered to be a significant protagonist in history. With the advent of democracy, the idea was propagated that every individual had the potential to influence history, to be a major player on the world's stage – and the theatre's. The bourgeois tragedy reflects this: "Gezeigt wird nicht die Beschaffenheit der Welt, sondern die Lebensführung eines Einzelnen."[88]

The private could be, in fact *should* be political. The private effect on the world is also fundamentally *not* portrayed as personal desire or passionate whim but rather the result of the good bourgeois citizen acting on the basis of universal, 'natural' reason. An example of this is Thorrowgood's story at the opening of *The London Merchant*. The bank of Genoa had agreed to lend the king of Spain money in order to fund a possible invasion of England. Elizabeth sends her secretary of state, Walsingham, who manages to avert the crisis employing only financial weapons:

> TRUEMAN   'Tis done. The state and bank of Genoa, having maturely weighed and rightly judged of their *true interest*, prefer the friendship of the merchants of London to that of a monarch who proudly styles himself King of both Indies [my emphasis].[89]

Loyalty or political sympathies here mean far less than their "true interest": financial interests. These interests are impersonal, dispassionate and rational ("weighed maturely and rightly judged"). The laws of the market are far more reasonable than "former princes

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[86] William H. McBurney argues that Lillo uses the fifth act to "demonstrate not only the punishment of sin but also the possibility of redemption through divine grace." See William H. McBurney, introduction to George Lillo, *The London Merchant* by William H. McBurney, p. xxiii. This also links *The London Merchant* with the English morality play.

[87] See Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, p. 28

[88] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 47.

[89] George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, I.1, p. 11.

who made the danger of foreign enemies a pretense [sic] to oppress their subjects by taxes great and grievous to be borne," saving England a great deal of "blood and treasure".[90] This is one reason why it was also conceivable for dramatists to create characters from the nobility who also display the ability to use reason over despotic whims (for example in *Miß Sara Sampson*).

The *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* then does not simply rewrite the *Ständeklausel*, replacing kings with merchants, but fundamentally alters the sphere of representation, making the private sphere and bourgeois morals the theme of the public sphere of the theatre.[91] The stage is no longer merely a representation of the "Beschaffenheit der Welt" but a sphere of the active engagement of the private citizen with the world (whether this be a member of the aristocracy or a merchant), both in terms of the content of the play and its performative effects on the audience. The effect of the tragedy in its performance contributes to society, the greater good, and therefore tragedy itself becomes an historical agent.

Emotional Performances

The praise of the merchant class, capable of saving England from foreign despots through their cunning trade tactics, and their status as members of the new middle class, were apparently not the main aspects audiences responded to when *The London Merchant* was first performed in Germany, as Erika Fischer-Lichte notes.[92] It was first performed in April 1754 by the Heinrich Gottfried Koch company in Leipzig, followed by a performance by Johann Friedrich Schönemann's company in Schwerin, after which it made its way into the repertoires of acting societies and other companies. It was also one of the most heavily featured of the few English dramas played at the Hamburg National Theatre, along with Edward Moore's *The Gamester*.

The main aspect audiences seem to have responded to was Barnwell's murder of his own uncle, which for Fischer-Lichte points to the new importance of the family in the bourgeois tragedy and for the bourgeois audience. The texts recounting its reception, which she quotes, also underline an aspect that Szondi emphasises as being of central importance to the bourgeois tragedy, that of sensibility or *Empfindsamkeit*. The actor Johann Friedrich Müller describes his reaction to seeing a performance by the Ackermann troupe in Magdeburg in 1755 as follows:

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[90] George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, I.1 p. 12. Spoken by Trueman in response to Thorrowgood's story.
[91] Cf. Rainer Ruppert, "Der Reiz der theatralen Öffentlichkeit: Kulturelle Bewältigung der sozialen Modernisierungsprozesse", in *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, pp. 101-133.
[92] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas I*, p. 263.

> Ich sah diese Vorstellung, und wurde am Ende des dritten Aufzuges, wo der verlarvte Barnwell den Dolch zieht, seinen bethenden Vetter zu ermorden, so hingerissen, daß ich laut aufschrie: 'Halt er ein! es ist ja sein Onkel!' […] Männer von Gefühl und Würde, tiefgerührte Damen, die mich umgaben, lobten meine Aufmerksamkeit, meine so innige Theilnahme, und suchten mich, da ich Thränen vergoß, liebreich zu trösten.[93]

This statement is from an actor, who more than any other member of the audience, should be aware of the illusionistic nature of what he is witnessing. In his novel *Das Leben des Soufleurs Leopold Böttinger*, August Wilhelm Iffland also writes of his character's reaction to a performance of Lillo's play. He too is deeply moved by the murder of the uncle, who reminds him of his own father. He describes how he loses control of his senses, flees the theatre in tears and once home, flings himself on the bed, crying out for his father. So much for the austere, emotionless *Bürger*! Another example is the audience's reaction to Schiller's *Die Räuber* in the Mannheim National Theatre in 1782. It is possible however, that these emotional scenes were heightened by the fact that Schiller's play was one of the first significant plays to be published for reading *before* a major performance (it was published a year before). The audience may therefore have been whipped into a frenzy by scandalous rumours they had heard before attending the show, arriving *prepared* to be shocked. Emotional reactions were therefore a common and accepted response in the theatre towards the end of the eighteenth century. If Gottsched prescribed a neo-stoicist hardening of oneself to the vicissitudes of the world, the new domestic tragedy made the theatre a decisively emotional public space. This can also be seen in relation to a number of other contemporary irrational phenomena such as alchemy, Freemasons lodges (of which Lessing was a member) and Pietism. As daily life became more and more rationalised, irrationalism, ritual and emotional display resurface in other social, cultural and religious practices.

In another essay on the subject,[94] Fischer-Lichte explores the subject in more detail. While it is clear that the theatre of the latter half of the eighteenth century sought to have an emotional effect, she pursues the question of how and why this was to be achieved. This aspect was rarely explicitly discussed by the theorists at the time, but her reading of Lessing, Diderot and others shows that beneath their rational analysis of which gestures had an emotional effect, lies a rather irrational conception of *how* the actor's gestures

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[93] This and the following source are cited in Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas I*, p. 263-264. Cf. note 94 below; and Rainer Ruppert, *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, pp. 118-125, where he describes the expressive behaviour of audiences in the late eighteenth century. Karl Philipp Moritz' novel *Anton Reiser* also contains a description of an emotional encounter with a production of *Emilia Galotti* by Ackermann's company. See ibid., p. 81f.

[94] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Der Körper als Zeichen und als Erfahrung: Über die Wirkung von Theateraufführungen", in *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation*, pp. 67-80. She cites numerous examples of emotional audience reactions on pp. 67-68.

affect members of the audience. This rests on a conception of the body as "instabil und durchlässig"[95] (she compares the theatrical discourse to medical discourse on contagion[96]). The emotional effect was conceived as a form of feedback loop within the actor: his physical gestures would engender the emotion within him and in turn reinforce the external expression of the gestures. A similar process occurred between the actor and audience: the audience sees the gestures and is 'infected' with the emotion, essentially feeling 'for' the actor. Effectively, however, the emotional effect was explained as a kind of magical process. This she compares to the transformative or even magical power of the "Blick" seen in religious movements in the sixteenth century, in which simply regarding the host enabled the observer to have a spiritual experience.[97] The remains of the "magische Bewusstsein", which was banished from early folk forms, can thus be identified in the aesthetic illusion based on the emotional connection of the audience to the actor.

This is not to say that audiences were necessarily unemotional before the bourgeois period, but they were affected in subtly different ways. Medieval religious plays, being closer to ritual, aimed at promoting a spiritual and communal reaction, an intense, more transcendental awe, comparable to the reaction that may have been induced by Gothic cathedral architecture. Court theatre too, with its ostentatious and artificial operas, was aimed at impressing the audience with the spectacle rather than engendering private emotions. An audience at a medieval performance of a travelling troupe, for example at a market, were likely to have been less emotionally focused on the performance and the effects on them therefore less intense, given that the stage was outdoors and embedded in its colourful and noisy surroundings – the players had to compete with other sights and sounds. The *Guckkastenbühne* focused the audience on one single space of representation and sought to eliminate as many distractions as possible, apart from the emotional responses of others. As the example above shows, the 'illusion' was so powerful that even an actor could become emotionally involved enough to feel compelled to intervene. It is highly unlikely that Müller or any audience really believed that this illusion was 'real', but ultimately that is irrelevant. The emotional reactions of the audience can be viewed rather as a complementary performance to that taking place on the stage – both actors and audience enact the new bourgeois subject and his private repertoire of emotions. It is a public performance and a demonstration of the private.

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[95] Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Der Körper als Zeichen und als Erfahrung", in *Theater im Prozess der Zivilisation*, p. 78.
[96] See ibid., p. 75f.
[97] Ibid., p. 76f. Cf. Rainer Ruppert, *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, p. 125, where he emphasises that theatre in the eighteenth century is not a new medium. It should be therefore be viewed as a transitional form, importing irrational, emotional and corporeal practices from feudal culture into its modified bourgeois form.

The new emphasis on the emotional is also evident in the reinterpretation of Aristotle's catharsis through *eléos* (pity, compassion) and *phóbos* (fear, terror), particularly by Lessing. A poetics focused on the *phóbos* aspect of catharsis, such as that of Gottsched, aimed to frighten the audience into moral behaviour primarily through demonstration, but this did not sit well with an audience that considered itself a group of autonomous subjects, and valued each individual's capacity for rational thinking. Lessing therefore interprets Aristotles' *phóbos* as the means to pity in the process of catharsis, thus subordinating it, in the seventy-fifth piece of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*.[98] Gottsched also placed central importance on the fable – the content of the message to be learned.[99] Lessing follows in the footsteps of Lillo when he assesses tragedy not so much on the basis of its content but on the basis of its effect, but there is a subtle difference: "Er [Lessing] schreibt nicht, wie der Mensch handeln soll, sondern wie er handeln muß, soll der Zuschauer Tränen des Mitleids weinen können."[100] As he writes in 1756 in the *Vorrede zur Übersetzung von Thomsons Trauerspiel*:

> Bei einer einzigen Vorstellung des erstern [*The London Merchant*] sind auch von den Unempfindlichsten mehr Thränen vergossen worden, als bei allen möglichen Vorstellungen des andern [*Sterbender Cato*] auch von den Empfindlichsten nicht können vergossen werden. Und nur diese Thränen des Mitleids und der sich fühlenden Menschlichkeit sind die Absicht des Trauerspiels, oder es kann gar keine haben.[101]

Although Lillo emphasised the effect of tragedy, he did so on the basis of the social equality of audience and characters (though explained in poetic arguments). Nowhere however, does Lessing discuss *Mitleid* and the bourgeois tragedy in direct connection with the rise of the *Bürgertum*,[102] but rather constructs his theory of tragedy on the basis of a general "sich fühlenden Menschlichkeit". The values embodied in the bourgeois tragedy are construed as universal, ideal values that apply to everyone, even kings and princes, though in reality the *Bürgertum* was more reluctant to apply them to social groups perceived as being below them. In the fourteenth piece of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Lessing writes that even if the hero of a tragedy should be a person belonging to the aristocracy, then our sympathy should be with them as a "Mensch", not as a political

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[98] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, pp. 383-387.

[99] Rochow argues however, that Gottsched's emphasis of the fable actually paved the way for bourgeois tragedy, because it legitimised the invention of plots. A believable, invented fable with a good moral was better than an unbelievable historic plot. His emphasis on believable characters is the second aspect that Rochow argues created the foundation for a realistic bourgeois theatre. See Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, pp. 24-26.

[100] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 164.

[101] G. E. Lessing, *Des Herrn Jakob Thompson sämtliche Trauerspiele: Vorrede*, in *Werke*, ed. by Karl Eibl et al (Munich: Hanser 1973), vol iv: *Dramturgische Schriften*, ed. Karl Eibl, pp. 142-147; p.144.

[102] See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 153.

figure, because "unsere Sympathie erfordert einen einzeln Gegenstand, und ein Staat ist ein viel zu abstrakter Begriff für unsere Empfindungen".[103] Bourgeois culture shifted the balance of communal identity to individual identity,[104] and a new 'we-identity' was embodied by the state.[105] However, as Lessing says, the 'state' is a rather abstract concept, which the individual identity may have difficulty identifying with, especially in the early stage of state-building. The experience of *Mitleid* in the theatre can therefore be viewed as a form of compensation for the loss of the traditional forms of communal relationships. At the same time it is also the attempt to build the new communal identity of the state on a foundation of bourgeois ethics.

However, if the emotional reaction of the audience is the main aim of tragedy, then its moral foundation at first appears to fall by the wayside.[106] In his exchange of letters with Friedrich Nicolai and Moses Mendelssohn in 1756 on this subject, Lessing justifies the moral purpose of tragedy by shifting the emphasis slightly, from stimulating passions to the means by which this is achieved: compassion or empathy. *Mitleid* itself becomes the main moral purpose of tragedy rather than a means to an end:[107]

> Wenn es also wahr ist, daß die ganze Kunst des tragischen Dichters auf die sichere Erregung und Dauer des einzigen Mitleidens geht, so sage ich nunmehr, die Bestimmung der Tragödie ist diese: sie soll *unsre Fähigkeit, Mitleid zu fühlen*, erweitern. Sie soll uns nicht blos lehren, gegen diesen oder jenen Unglücklichen Mitleid zu fühlen, sondern sie soll uns so weit fühlbar machen, daß uns der Unglückliche zu allen Zeiten, und unter allen Gestalten, rühren und für sich einnehmen muß. [...] *Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch*, zu allen gesellschaftlichen Tugenden, zu allen Arten der Großmuth der aufgelegteste. Wer uns also mitleidig macht, macht uns besser und tugendhafter, und das Trauerspiel, das jenes thut, thut auch dieses, oder – es thut jenes, um dieses thun zu können [Lessing's emphasis].[108]

It is our private emotions, our capacity to be moved, that make us *menschlich* according to Lessing; these are universal, natural and irrefutable. The bourgeois subject is constructed as feeling, empathetic to his fellow man, capable of understanding his suffering, his needs; and therefore also capable of choosing what is best for everyone – to represent all citizens as a politician, or to choose for all through exercising one's vote. Empathy was understood as the basic requirement for all moral action. In this sense, according to Lessing's theory of *Mitleid*, the *Bürgertum* encompasses everyone. This is also a reason why the *Bürgertum*

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[103] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, p. 77.

[104] See Norbert Elias, *Gesellschaft der Individuen*, pp. 262-265.

[105] See ibid., pp. 274-281.

[106] Cf. Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, p. 55 f.

[107] Ibid., p. 157.

[108] G. E. Lessing, *Briefwechsel über das Trauerspiel* (letter to Nicolai dated November, 1756), in *Werke* VI, p. 163. Cf. Hans-Jürgen Schings, *Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch: Poetik des Mitleids von Lessing bis Büchner* (Munich: Beck, 1980).

directed much of their political energy into the cultural sphere. The particular ideals associated with the eighteenth century *Bürgertum* show that they were not class conscious in the strict sense, but rather they saw themselves as the embodiment of the dawning of a new age, the values of which would eventually win the hearts and minds of all levels of society. In one of the most famous texts on this subject, originally a speech entitled "Was kann eine gut stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken?", later published in 1784 as *Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet*, Friedrich Schiller writes:

> Und dann endlich – welch ein Triumph für dich, Natur – so oft zu Boden getretene, so oft wieder auferstehende Natur – wenn Menschen aus allen Kreisen und Zonen und Ständen, abgeworfen jede Fessel der Künstelei und der Mode, herausgerissen aus jedem Drange des Schicksals, durch *eine* allwebende Sympathie verbrüdert, in *ein* Geschlecht wieder aufgelößt, ihrer Selbst und die Welt vergessen, und ihrem himmlischen Ursprung sich nähern. Jeder Einzelne genießt die Entzückungen aller, die verstärkt und verschönert aus hundert Augen auf ihn zurück fallen, und seine Brust giebt jetzt nur *einer* Empfindung Raum – es ist diese: ein *Mensch* zu seyn [Schiller's emphasis].[109]

Schiller celebrates the unity out of the many, he emphasises one empathy, one brotherhood, one humanity, transcending individual desires.

The shift to empathy and the emotional sphere of human life is evinced by the focus on family relationships in many of the *bürgerlichen Trauerspiele*, particularly those between fathers and children, especially daughters. This also demonstrates that despite noble ideals, this 'one humanity' was still a patriarchal one.[110] This is of course an important aspect of Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*, which I will discuss in chapter four. For now I wish to examine the relation of the private sphere to Max Weber's theory protestant ethics, which Szondi also suggests is related to the bourgeoisie taking refuge in the private sphere of emotions. The retreat to the inner world and domestic realm is both a reaction to political powerlessness and to "die Ohnmacht der Triebe".[111]

The Protestant Ethic and the Theatre of *Empfindsamkeit*

One of Max Weber's most important contributions to sociology was to extend Marx's analysis of capitalism to the cultural sphere. Weber felt that Marx oversimplified the system by basing his analysis too narrowly on material circumstances and therefore failing to take into account how values and ideas must also change to support the emergence of new social systems. Nonetheless Weber continually stresses the interrelatedness of

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[109] Friedrich Schiller, "Was kann eine gute stehende Schaubühne eigentlich wirken? (Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet)", in *Werke*, vol. xx: *Philophische Schriften: Teil 1*, p. 100.

[110] See Gail K. Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise: Family and Gender Politics in German Bourgeois Tragedy 1750-1850* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996).

[111] Peter Szondi, *Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels*, p. 147.

economic factors and ideas. Status and value systems, culture and religion all have an important role to play as part of the overall system of social and economic relations.

Weber examines what he considers to be the shift from traditional to rational social action taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as Western industrial capitalism became the dominant system (Weber differentiates between many different types of capitalism, including Eastern and pre-modern forms). He does not attempt an overall theory of capitalism, but focuses on the specific forms in Western Europe and America which have defined modern society, in particular those which developed in largely protestant areas (New England, England, Northern Continental Europe) and therefore are particularly relevant to the *Bürgertum* in Germany. He identified that there was a striking disproportion of Protestants in the typical bourgeois professions in the nineteenth century. For Weber this is because particular strains of Protestantism broke the hold of tradition and paved the way for new ways of thinking, but are not the sole causes of capitalism as such. For my purposes here, the relevant aspects of protestant asceticism are the relocation of religious calling to the private realm, making it a matter of individual responsibility and the suppression of the corporeal and sensual pleasures in the now, in favour of work for work's sake, in the context of a systematic life of obedience and the ethical doctrine of saving (delaying pleasure) rather than spending, resulting in the accumulation of capital.

Weber argues that some characteristics of the 'capitalist spirit' can be traced back to the religious reform movements of the sixteenth century, particularly Calvinist theology. His derives his concept of the 'capitalist spirit' from Benjamin Franklin's *Necessary Hints to Those That Would be Rich* (1736) and *Advice to a Young Tradesman* (1748), which he quotes at length, beginning with the famous "time is money" passage. Franklin advises to pay debts on time, as punctuality and honesty will ensure good creditworthiness, because, he cautions the reader, credit is also money.[112] (The threat of debt and bankruptcy is a theme which recurs throughout bourgeois literature.) These virtues of character along with diligence and hard work are not merely inherently positive traits (though they are always conceived as universal), but are also directly related to profit and the accumulation of capital: "The sound of your hammer at five in the morning, or eight at night, heard by a creditor, makes him easy six months longer."[113] According to Weber, Franklin's main message is that increase in capital is a noble end in itself. These are not just rules for

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[112] See Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, ed. by Dirk Kaisler (Munich: Beck, 2004), pp. 75-76. References are to this edition unless otherwise stated. The original Franklin text is reprinted in the Routledge edition of the English translation, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. by Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 14-16.

[113] Bejamin Franklin cited in ibid. (Routledge edition), p. 15.

conducting business successfully but represent set of values, an ethic. Indeed, Franklin claimed that it was God who had revealed to him the usefulness of virtue. Weber argues elsewhere that the privileged in all societies attempt to legitimise their good fortune (or wealth) by convincing themselves that they deserve it.[114] This is linked to the portrayal of the bourgeois as a moral being by nature in bourgeois tragedy and its theory.

Weber emphasises that this pursuit of the accumulation of capital is not the same thing as greed (*aura sacra fames*, or the hunger for gold), which he asserts has always existed in almost every society, along with merchants and trading. However, it is the attitude to work which has changed since the development of industrial capitalism. He illustrates this change from a traditional attitude to labour to a rationalistic one with the example of a labourer working for piecemeal rates.[115] In early capitalism, landowners tried to make their workers more productive by offering more money per field ploughed, but the strategy backfired. The labourer simply earned what he was accustomed to and then took the rest of the day off. What needed to change in order to establish a system of production which created surplus was the labourer's attitude to this work, whereby the day's labour is an unquestionable task in itself and duty towards work is internalised:

> Wie bei einem Maximum von Bequemlichkeit und einem Minimum von Leistung dennoch der gewohnte Lohn zu gewinnen sei, sich loslöst und die Arbeit so betreibt, als ob sie absoluter Selbstzweck – 'Beruf ' – wäre. Eine solche Gesinnung ist aber nichts Naturgegebenes. Sie kann auch weder durch hohe noch durch niedere Löhne unmittelbar hevorgebracht werden, sondern nur das Produkt eines lang andauernden Erziehungsprozesses sein.[116]

Work and profit thus become ends in themselves, to be pursued rationally and systematically. Correspondingly, the capitalist who is successful in the long term also does not display overt greed:

> Er scheut die Ostentation und den unnötigen Aufwand ebenso wie den bewussten Genuß seiner Macht und die ihm eher unbequeme Entgegennahme von äußeren Zeichen der gesellschaftlichen Achtung, dir er genießt. Seine Lebensführung trägt [...] einen gewissen asketischen Zug an sich [...][117]

This is related directly to "streng bürgerlichen Anschauungen und 'Grundsätzen'".[118] For Weber, this combination of constant devotion to work and asceticism inherent to the

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[114] See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie*, ed. by Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980 [1921]; 5th edition), part 2, chapter 5 "Religionssoziologie", p. 299.
[115] Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, pp. 82-83.
[116] Ibid., p. 84. Marx differs on this point quite strongly, in that he sees the wage and factory system as the reason surplus-value could be generated through the worker's use-value (i.e. being forced to produce more goods in the same amount of time for the same wage).
[117] Ibid., p. 91.
[118] Ibid., p. 90.

concept of *Beruf* – its non-eudemonistic motivation – reveals an irrationalism at its core. Why does a man live for his business and not vice versa? He argues that the rational justification for work and the accumulation of capital becomes an internalised logic, based on irrational spiritual principles.

Weber traces this asceticism associated with *Beruf* back to Calvinist and Puritan asceticism, or "innerweltliche Askese".[119] *Beruf* also means calling, as in a religious calling, and is thus related to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. According to this, God has chosen the elect and the individual can do nothing to change this. Human beings cannot know or understand God's true will, as it emanates from a transcendental, omniscient being. The individual is therefore spiritually completely alone in the world, on his solitary path to salvation or damnation. This isolation also meant a certain distrust of brotherly love – individualism is valorised over the communal. All the isolated individual can do is look for signs of his or her salvation and devote him or herself to a dutiful life of toil. The Puritans also banished all 'magic', ornamentation and ritual from their religious practice, because worldly riches or actions could not have any effect on the predestination of the elect:

> Verbunden mit der schroffen Lehre von der unbedingten Gottferne und Wertlosigkeit alles rein Kreatürlichen enthält diese innere Isolierung des Menschen einerseits den Grund für die absolute negative Stellung des Puritanismus zu allen sinnlich-*gefühls*mäßigen Elementen in der Kultur und subjektiven Religiösität – weil sie für das Heil unnütz und Förderer sentimentaler Illusionen und des kreaturvergötternden Aberglaubens sind – und damit zur grundsätzlichen Abwendung von aller Sinnenkultur überhaupt.[120]

The repugnance towards the aristocratic life of sloth and pleasure is related to this, for sloth is construed as the worst sin, worse even than greed. Instead the virtues of thrift, sobriety and hard work are emphasised – virtues which all aid the pursuit of wealth. Calvinism demanded a systematic and rational life of obedience.

Calvinist and Puritan ethics also frowned upon waste of any kind, particularly wasteful spending on luxuries (as was the tendency of the aristocracy). With the 'disenchantment' of religion, donating to the Church became less necessary, as it no longer needed to fund expensive icons, elaborate ornamental Churches and so forth. As begging was also considered sloth, giving alms was also looked down upon. The rationally, morally acceptable thing to do with surplus earnings gleaned from hard work was to invest it or

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[119] Weber stresses that the religious reformers were not actually concerned with changing ethical attitudes but merely with the salvation of the soul. The resulting change in values was a side-effect, sometimes in opposition to their actual intentions.

[120] Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, p. 146.

save it, leading to the generation of capital.[121] The protestant ethic is thus based on the suppression of drives (desire) to consume what one has now and instead save for the future, the denial of pleasure in this world in the hope of salvation in the next – or at least a university education for one's offspring and a successful business to inherit.[122]

This disenchantment of the world not only involved the banishment of all things ritualistic and magical but also sensual: "Mit voller Gewalt wendet sich die Askese, wie wir sahen, vor allem gegen eins: das *unbefangene Genießen* des Daseins und dessen, was es an Freuden zu bieten hat [Weber's emphasis]."[123] As shown, a similar process can be identified in the establishment of a bourgeois theatre of illusion. Firstly, like the religious practice of some Protestants, its ritualistic element subsides, its magical and irrational transformation of a shack in a market square to the castles of great kings and princes. The illusion must no longer be accidental and miraculous, but must be pursued rationally and must be accepted as rationally believable by the audience. Above all it must no longer be spontaneous, but also rationally planned, embodied by the now common printed text, and finally, it must have a purpose. Like Franklin's useful values, revealed to him by God, it too must demonstrate virtues which can ultimately be translated into capital (even if that is primarily cultural and social). In these ways, the theatre may be seen to conform to the protestant ethic in the spirit of capitalism.

However, in other respects, the theatre fulfils some of the functions now eliminated from other social spheres. Though the Puritan ethic distrusted and discouraged the emotional, other groups such as the Pietists were extremely emotional, occasionally hysterical.[124] As discussed above, audiences at performances of the new bourgeois drama seemed to be intensely emotionally affected and the plays also had emotional relations as their subject matter. Emotions may have been banished from practical public life – from the office, the church, the market – but they retreated to the family, to the theatre and to the representation of the family in the theatre. Furthermore, while the communal was distrusted by the sternly individualistic Puritan, the theatre represented an alternative communal sphere (though the focus of the representation was now on the individual), which was defined as a brotherhood of man.

Peter Szondi also emphasises (in reference to Habermas) that the emergence of the bourgeois tragedy entailed a redefinition of the public and the private, expressed by

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[121] Weber does not however take account of how active the German bourgeoisie were in civil society.

[122] Weber notes that hard-working businessmen often justify living for work for the benefit of their offspring. See *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, p. 91.

[123] Ibid., p. 190.

[124] Cf. Ulrike Gleixner, *Pietismus und Bürgertum: Eine historische Anthropologie der Frömmigkeit: Württemberg 17.-19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005).

Empfindsamkeit. The early bourgeois tragedy, especially the English form, focuses on the suppression of emotional drives similar to Weber's protestant ethic. He argues that *The London Merchant* for example explicitly criticises time-wasting and valorises order and organisation in business and life.[125] At the beginning of act three, Thorrowgood exalts the merchant's profession not just as means for generating profit, but as a rule book for a rationally-led life, which

> [...] is founded in reason and the nature of all things, how it has promoted humanity as it has opened and yet keeps up an intercourse between nations far remote from one another in situation, customs and religion; promoting arts, I ndustry, peace, and plenty; by mutual benefits diffusing mutual love from pole to pole.[126]

Furthermore, according to Szondi, the tragic conflict is no longer between two individuals embodying principles, nor between two classes, but is internalised by the characters and takes place between the suppression of desires and the urge to fulfil them.[127] George Barnwell does not lose against the figures of power or to the competition; he loses to his own desires.[128] Emilia too must be sacrificed for the sake of victory over the Prince's (and perhaps her own) desires in *Emilia Galotti*. In his comparison of Lillo's two female figures, Millwood and Maria, Szondi emphasises that Millwood's greed and dishonesty represents the traditionalism of a pre-Puritan ethic (and also aristocratic vices). On the other hand, Maria's melancholy represents the duty to the ethic so valorised by Trueman and Thorrowgood. Her speech in III.2, as Szondi points out, demonstrates this migration of the tragic conflict inwards in the bourgeois tragedy – the internal conflict of the new bourgeois subject between desire and duty:

> The martyr cheaply purchases his heaven. Small are his sufferings, great is his reward. Not so the wretch who combats love with duty when the mind, weakened and dissolved by the soft passion, feeble and hopeless, opposes its own desires.[129]

Szondi concludes that this struggle with the new social contract within the bourgeois family – the suppression of one's own desires for the benefit of the family's social security – exemplifies the emerging style of *Empfindsamkeit*:

> Empfindsamkeit ist der Ausdruck der Tabuierung [sic] jedes Konflikts zwischen den Angehörigen einer Familie. Dem Konflikt wird abgeschworen, da man von der

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[125] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 69.

[126] George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, III.1, p. 40.

[127] See Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 71. Though he emphasises that the French version by Mercier, which Bassewitz' translation was based on, significantly reduces this ascetic Puritan ideology.

[128] Ibid., p. 73.

[129] George Lillo, *The London Merchant*, III.2, p. 41.

> Güte des Anderen überzeugt ist. Die Absage an den Konflikt bedeutet aber nur
> dessen Hereinnahme ins Innere des Subjekts [...] Die Folge ist Leiden,
> Melancholie. Beides, Grund wie Folge des Verzichts auf Austragung des Konflikts,
> führt zu jener Wirklichkeit, welche den empfindsamen Stil kennzeichnet. Man
> weint Tränen der Rührung (wie gut, wie zärtlich ist doch der Andere) und man
> weint Tränen des Leides (wie schlecht geht es doch einem – wegen der Güte des
> Anderen). Empfindsamkeit ist der Tränenvorhang der bürgerlichen Familie, den die
> Vertreter des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 19. Jahrhundert – Hebbel, Ibsen,
> Strindberg – in Stücke reißen werden, um dahinter Lebenslügen aufzuzeigen.[130]

I have already identified this "Tränenvorhang" in the theatre during the performances of
early middle class dramas, and in chapter five, I will return to Ibsen, who sought to tear it
apart.

A comparison can also be made with Luise and Lady Milford in Schiller's *Kabale
und Liebe*,[131] although by that stage both charaters have internalised these ethics, both
respond to the battle between duty and desire differently. Lady Milford dreams of true love
with Ferdinand, rather than her 'useful' relationship to prince. Admittedly this can be
viewed as the aristocracy's 'luxury' to harbour such fantasies, however, as Luise displays a
similar capacity for love, it seems more likely that this is another example of the bourgeois
world view (or here a dilemma) colonising the aristocracy. Like the Prince in *Emilia
Galotti* arguably does, she succumbs to authentic bourgeois emotions. Furthermore, Lady
Milford's total identification with the aristocracy is problematic: she is an orphan whose
father was executed in the religious disputes of England (significantly, her father was
executed by Mary Queen of Scots, placing him on the protestant side). Perhaps more
importantly, she is English (and this is repeatedly emphasised), the country which so often
was held up as exemplary by the German *Bürgertum*. When Lady Milford hears that
Ferdinand is in love with Luise, she acts rationally and empathetically. Luise on the other
hand gives in to her desires; she succumbs to the melancholy caused by her love for
Ferdinand. However, Luise's powerlessness is not only against her own emotions, but the
law of the father: the despotic President, her own father's *spießige* bourgeois values, and
finally Ferdinand's jealousy and violent revenge. Luise thus can be seen to represent the
political powerlessness of the bourgeois and their frustration with being unable to follow
their (political) desires.

Finally, while the suppression of desire is particular to the protestant ethic which
dominated the *Bürgertum*, it should be emphasised that desire in the form of love is a
major theme of German bourgeois tragedy. In fact almost all the major plays, in particular
Emilia Galotti and *Kabale und Liebe*, deal with the issue of the relatively new ideal of a

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[130] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 90.
[131] Friedrich Schiller, *Kabale und Liebe* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).

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'love marriage'. As the family and the law took over from the church in regulating this social contract, it became less a:

> Kaufvertrag zwischen zwei Sippen, nur die Übergabe der Frau an den Mann als eine 'Rechtssache' –, sondern die Eheschließung wurde nunmehr ein Rechtsvertrag zwischen zwei Individuen.[132]

The negotiation of how this contract between autonomous individuals (and their possible desire for each other) is to be reconciled with a duty towards one's family and system of morals is the central subject of the above mentioned plays. A production of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* in 2009, directed by Falk Richter at the Schaubühne in Berlin, emphasised the sexual energy of this play: the actor playing Ferdinand, Stefan Stern, physically ripped up the stage, driven wild by desire. Though this desire is eventually overcome by the law of the father, still it is desire that dominates the stage. The corporeal reality of the body, including sexual desire, may be taboo, but the negotiation between good-willing fathers and daughters wishing to be dutiful takes some degree of subjective choice into account – indeed implies it is there at all, since there is negotiation and conflict. Subjective choice must be related to desire, in some cases sexual and irrational, otherwise it would simply be a matter of marrying the most reasonable partner at hand.

There is therefore a paradox in the relation between desire and duty, which becomes clearer when the focus is widened to encompass performance and not only dramaturgical and literary theory. While interiorisation – the constitution of the inner-world – is characteristic of bourgeois drama in this period, this inner world only becomes apparent in its expression on the public stage (the 'natural' language of the soul), in its exteriorisation. This paradox is evident in the theories of acting discussed above (the actor's body appears as sign or text to be deciphered by the audience, but the real presence of the body remains). If for Habermas the public sphere is the intermediate space between the state and the market, the theatre seems to be a unique kind of public space, the intermediate space between the public and the private: for here the private is publicly displayed and at the same time performatively constituted. While those desires so repugnant to protestant asceticism may have been represented as something to be repressed on the stage, still *they are represented*, in fact constituted to a certain extent.[133]

There are thus two levels at work here: one is the internalising of the conflict within the individual in the dramaturgical context, replacing the explicit struggle between figures

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[132] Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, *Die deutsche Familie: Versuch einer Sozialgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996 [1974]), p. 99. Cf. Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 5f.

[133] Cf. Rainer Ruppert, "Labor der Seele und der Emotionen: Die Diskursivierung der bürgerlichen Innenwelt", in *Labor der Seele und der Emotionen*, pp. 57-100.

representing different forces of power in pre-bourgeois drama. The other is the theatre itself as an intermediate space between the private and the public, the individual and his ideological environment. The internalisation of discourses of power through value systems is performed on the stage and contributes to the constitution of the bourgeois subject (for example Luise). But if theatre functions as a unique public space, an intermediate one, where many of these realities intersect, and if power works in more complex ways, as Foucault has shown throughout his work, then it seems that that which is being suppressed in society is also being demonstrated and acted out on the stage, even as it is shown to be something which one should suppress.[134] Though Maria, Emilia and Luise and are shown to suppress these desires in different ways (and this is legitimised as the correct moral behaviour), paradoxically for the first time, these personal desires appear as an issue that individuals must contend with and are given a space within the sphere of the theatre. The act of suppressing desires, but also the experience of having them thus becomes a theme for reflection on the bourgeois stage. It is this aspect of desire, which becomes the dominant theme in Thalheimer's interpretation of *Emilia Galotti*, to which I will now turn.

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[134] Cf. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *The Will to Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990; repr. 1998), in which Foucault argues that modern sexuality was partly constituted by the incessant discussion as to why and how it should be repressed, as well as the pathologisation of deviatory sexual behaviour.

Chapter Four

Performing the Canon: Michael Thalheimer's *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust*

In the preceding three chapters I have examined two major aesthetic currents in German theatre: a performative or postdramatic aesthetic since roughly the 1960s and a representational or realistic aesthetic formed primarily in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The latter is associated with the emergence of middle class theatre and was conventionally considered the aesthetic corresponding to classical literary drama of the 'tradition' or the canon. As the traditional bourgeois aesthetic began to be questioned, experimented with or abolished altogether in the twentieth century, so too did the idea lose currency that theatre functions primarily as a vehicle for exposing the public to an established and fixed literary canon, not least because literary critics also now radically question the very notion of a traditional canon.

However, as Lehmann insists in *Postdramatisches Theater*, this new aesthetic does not simply appear and replace a previous one, but must partly co-exist with it, and always remains in a certain relation with it. Furthermore, the broad historical opposition between a bourgeois representational and an anti-representational aesthetic since the 1960s already discussed may not always apply precisely when individual productions are examined more closely. Fundamentally, many regular theatre-goers still expect to see certain canonical plays performed, and every *Intendant* must carefully weigh up how many new and experimental pieces he or she can include in the artistic programme, in balance with traditional repertoire pieces that will guarantee a certain level of attendance simply because members of the public know the play already. However, Germany also has had a strong tradition of experimentation with classical drama since the second half of the twentieth century, which means that these plays are certainly not always staged in a representational or dramatic aesthetic, despite originating from the period in which these forms dominated. In what way then do these two aesthetic currents collide and confront each other, or even blend, in contemporary practice? What happens when a director *uses* the audience's prior knowledge of a canonical drama precisely to do something new with it? I will explore these questions in this chapter as part of an analysis of work directed by Michael Thalheimer at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin in recent years. These are productions of perhaps the two most significant 'canonical' dramas for the German public, which are also important in the context of the history of the *Bürgertum*: Lessing's *Emilia Galotti* and Goethe's *Faust*.

There are two main issues here requiring careful differentiation. The first is whether the content of the drama corresponds to a particular social group identity or bourgeois culture. The second is how the aesthetic production of these plays affects the reception of them by particular social groups. It seems however, that in some of the debate and analysis of 'postdramatic' theatre, these two aspects are sometimes confused: a rejection of a bourgeois aesthetic implies a rejection of outdated bourgeois ideology. This has also occurred in the debate around the revision of the canon in the 1990s. While I do not wish to suggest that the canon is ideologically neutral, canonical literature from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century has often been too readily interpreted as the expression of a consistent ideological position associated with the *Bürgertum*.[1] The situation is invariably far more complex than that. As I have argued in chapter two, the *Bürgertum* was a very heterogeneous social formation that can only really be linked through recourse to the concept of 'bourgeois culture', which necessarily entails a criticism of itself. Further, it seems that those works which do survive in the canon or sustain cultural attention, tend to be precisely those which are ambiguous, complex and can be reinterpreted differently at different times. Ricarda Schmidt writes in her introduction to *Literarische Wertung und Kanonbildung*:

> Eine Kritik am Kanon, die literarische Werke allzu eng mit politischen Positionen und bestimmten sozialen Gruppen assoziiert, tendiert dazu, die Komplexität literarischer Werke zu reduzieren. Eine solche Reduktion manifestiert sich besonders mit Bezug auf den deutschen Kanon des 19. Jahrhunderts, etwa in der Annahme, daß er von der herrschenden Klasse konstituiert wurde, um zur Herausbildung einer deutschen nationalen Identität beizutragen, die andere ethnische Zugehörigkeiten verunglimpft und den Weg für Irrationalismus und rassistisch inspirierten Imperialismus gebahnt habe, wie er im Nationalsozialismus kulminierte.[2]

While there may be a link between irrationalism, or certainly the crisis of the German bourgeoisie experienced around the turn of the twentieth century and the eventual rise of fascism in Germany, it is nonetheless reductionist to view the nineteenth century literary canon solely from the perspective of that development, or as the product of the 'ruling class'. The critical tendency mentioned above and already outlined is evident indeed in the most canonical of German bourgeois dramas, which is the second main issue I will explore in this chapter.

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[1] For example, Georg Lukács, *Schriften zur Literatursoziologie* (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1961). Cf. Arnold Hauser, *Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur*, section VI, part 3: "Die Enstehung des bürgerlichen Dramas", pp. 599-616.

[2] Ricarda Schmidt, "Der literarische Kanon: Ein Organ des Willens zur Macht oder des Gewinns an Kompetenzen," in *Literarische Wertung und Kanonbildung*, ed. by Nicholas Saul and Ricarda Schmidt (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 9-22; p. 11.

Emilia Galotti: A Political Play?

Emilia Galotti can be considered one of the paradigmatic *bürgerliche Trauerspiele*. Along with Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, it is usually the main text on university courses in this subject and is often taught on German school syllabuses, and is one of the standard works of German tragedy, indeed of all German literature. It is also the oldest German drama still performed today. In literary terms, the play is also historically significant because it breaks with French neoclassical rules and with Gottsched's poetics, ushering in the age of the psychologically realistic theatre of *Bürgertum*. The conventional interpretation is that Lessing pits the morals of the *Bürgertum*, represented by the Galotti family, against the despotism of the aristocracy, represented by the Prince's desire to possess Emilia. When the Prince, through a series of violent acts and coincidences, manages to secure Emilia and her family in his palace, her virtue is threatened and ultimately she convinces her father to kill her, rather than let her fall prey to the Prince's lust. Thus, according to the standard interpretation, bourgeois morals triumph over aristocratic power and pleasure-seeking through her self-sacrifice.[3] The struggle thus takes place in the sphere of values and ideals. One of the reasons why Michael Thalheimer's production was perceived as so radical[4] is that he largely dispenses with any historical or political context. But is this really an 'unfaithful' interpretation of this classic bourgeois tragedy?

As I have already discussed in the last chapter, the category of *bürgerliches Trauerspiel* is an oddly limited one, despite its wide use. Not only does it refer to a very limited number of plays, but most of those plays are not as overtly political as some might expect from the adjective "bürgerlich". As I have shown, they are characterised by a focus on the private emotions of the individual and the internal conflict between desire and duty. *Emilia Galotti* is a case in point. However, unlike Lessing's earlier play *Miß Sara Sampson*, the subtitle "bürgerliches Trauerspiel" is absent from the title page: for Lessing *Emilia Galotti* was simply "ein Trauerspiel". Indeed, Christian Rochow writes that Lessing's tragedies have always been something of an anomaly for literary theorists in terms of genre.[5] In his study of Lessing's tragedies, Gisbert Ter-Nedden has argued that Lessing's dramaturgy should be viewed as a critical confrontation with the genre norms of

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[3] For example the Marxist interpretation: Paul Rilla, *Lessing und sein Zeitalter* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1968; 2nd edition); and Jochen Schulte-Sasse, *Literarische Struktur und historisch-sozialer Kontext: Zum Beispiel Emilia Galotti* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1975). Schulte-Sasse takes this interpretation as his basis, but argues that Lessing shows the bourgeois aim of changing society through morals to be illusionary. Though the Prince shows feeling towards Emilia, ultimately he remains a despot. Cf. Monika Fick, *Lessing-Handbuch: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), pp. 317-323.

[4] I will discuss some press reaction to the production later in this chapter.

[5] Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, p. 11.

his time.[6] *Emilia Galotti* therefore does not, as one might assume, present overt bourgeois political interests, rather it presents a set of ideals and values conceived as universal. By presenting these value as universal (legitimised by Enlightenment philosophy), charges of direct opposition to the social order and censorship could be avoided. This is the tendency of reform rather than revolution outlined in chapter two. At the same time, it is the *Bürgertum* that is shown to be the carriers of these values, implying its moral superiority over the aristocracy and indeed other excluded social groups, and thus making an indirect claim to power. One of these values is critical engagement, which Lessing applies both to the form, as Ter-Nedden argues, and to *Bürgerlichkeit* itself.

Though it is not initially clear from the play whether Odoardo Galotti, Emilia's father, is a member of the *Bürgertum* or the nobility, Lessing provides many hints regarding the Galottis' social position. His seemingly professional familiarity with the Prince, Marinelli and Appiani could suggest a lower ranking member of the aristocracy, but it is most likely that Galotti is representative of the many *Bürger* recruited for the administration of the Enlightened absolutist state in the eighteenth century. In I.4, the Prince explicitly states that Odoardo Galotti is not his friend and calls him "bieder und gut", which clearly associates him with the *Bürgertum*:

> DER PRINZ   Auch kenn ich ihren Vater. Er ist mein Freund nicht. Er war es, der sich meinen Ansprüchen auf Sabionetta am meisten widersetzte. – Ein alter Degen, stolz und rauh, sonst bieder und gut![7]

Historically, Sabionetta was a town which was the centre of a dispute between two different lineages of the Gonzaga family.[8] Did Odoardo Galotti prevent the Prince from claiming Sabionetta in a professional legal capacity, as a lawyer for example, one of the new bourgeois professions? Also, the location of the Galotti family home in the town, the typical bourgeois environment, also underlines their status. Finally, in I.6, when Marinelli informs the Prince of Appiani's wedding, he clearly states that he is marrying a girl below his station, without wealth (inheritance) and status (title): "Ein Mädchen ohne Vermögen und ohne Rang hat ihn in die Schlinge zu ziehen gewusst."[9]

Despite the fact that it is clear Odoardo Galotti is a member of the *Bürgertum*, Lessing does not labour the point, nor does Odoardo explicitly express solidarity with a

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[6] Gisbert Ter-Nedden, *Lessings Trauerspiele: Der Ursprung des modernen Dramas aus dem Geist der Kritik* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986).

[7] G. E. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1966), I.4, p. 7.

[8] Sabbioneta (the correct spelling) was a Northern Italian Renaissance town, connected to the Gonzaga family, related to the Gonzagas of Guastalla (the Prince here), who therefore had a lineage claim there. This legal quarrel over rights continued over many years. See Gesa Dane, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: G.E. Lessing Emilia Galotti* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2002), notes on the text, p. 9, note 9,35.

[9] G. E. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, I.6, p. 12.

class.[10] The staging history also indicates that the play could not have been perceived as a direct criticism of the aristocracy in political terms. First performed on the 13th of March, 1772 in Braunschweig on the occasion of the Herzogin von Braunschweig's birthday, the Herzog Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand obviously had no qualms about including Lessing's play in an official court celebration.[11] Again this is because the social or political criticism in Lessing's tragedy is manifested in values and ideals rather than political action. It may have been tolerated by the Herzog in the spirit of reform or 'enlightened absolutism', or as a concession to maintain his own authority. Though bourgeois idealism is contradicted by the political reality of the end of the eighteenth century, Lessing's play is a clear attempt to establish bourgeois culture as the norm and to create political and social change through values and moral improvement.

The concept of mixed characters was also central to Lessing's dramaturgical approach. In the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Lessing discusses this on numerous occasions with reference to Aristotle.[12] He criticises and rejects the one-dimensional, neoclassical ideal hero of state and martyr dramas, defined largely by his or less usually her social or political position. According to Aristotle, mixed characters are necessary to engender the affects of pity and fear, which is the purpose of tragedy. As well as pity and fear, Lessing also advocated the necessity of mixed characters based on the same argument he used for mixing the genres comedy and tragedy. This argument is that drama should imitate nature's vast complexity as a model of that complexity, rather than reduce that complexity to one extreme or another. Life is always both comic and tragic. By the same logic, Lessing argued that no character is simply evil by nature, and that no person intends to be evil for evil's sake:

> Der Dichter muß nie so unphilosophisch denken, daß er annimmt, ein Mensch könne das Böse, um des Bösen wegen, wollen, er könne nach lasterhaften Grundsätzen handeln, das Lasterhafte derselben erkennen und doch gegen sich und andere damit prahlen. Ein solcher Mensch ist ein Unding.[13]

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[10] Gisbert Ter-Nedden emphasises that almost none of the 'bourgeois' writers of the eighteenth century (Lessing, Schiller, Lenz, Jean Paul, Karl Philipp Moritz) profess solidarity with a "Kollektivsubjekt Bürgertum", and that instead their social identity was derived from their function as writers. The new social structure based on individualism and function (and therefore "soziale Ortlosigkeit") is however definitively *bürgerlich*. See Ter-Nedden, *Lessings Trauerspiele*, p. 5; and chapter two of this dissertation.

[11] The Italian setting of course helped in this regard. See the *Theaterzettel* (playbill) for the Braunschweig premiere, reprinted in Gesa Dane, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: G. E. Lessing Emilia Galotti*, p. 75. Although the play was rejected in other places, for example in Gotha. Cf. Christian Rochow, *Das bürgerliche Trauerspiel*, p. 121.

[12] See G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, pieces 46/47; 82/83; 86-89 and 92-94. Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. by Stephen Halliwell, chapter 13, pp. 69-73.

[13] G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, piece 2, p. 22.

This also points to an understanding of humanity as inherently always potentially good, a goodness which is only corrupted by (social) circumstance. In the 46th and 47th pieces of the *Dramaturgie*, Lessing criticises Voltaire's *Merope* and argues that a character should reflect both poles of pity and fear in order to inspire both in the audience.[14] Merope should be both "Mensch und Mutter"[15], writes Lessing. She should not be completely consumed by murderous rage as in Voltaire's version, but human as well, as Lessing surmises would have been the case in Euripides'. The rage will then be perceived all the stronger in contrast to the otherwise morally good nature. Pity and fear – and fundamentally identification – can only be engendered if the characters are made of the same stuff as the audience and, Lessing argues, that stuff is fundamentally complex. Lessing is therefore the first German playwright to create complex psychological characters, enabling identification from the audience (one reason why his work is still acceptable to an audience today). The mixed character is also another way to describe the internal conflict experienced by the bourgeois subject, in Lessing's example between Merope's personal emotions and her social role as mother. I have shown how this operated within the characters Maria in *The London Merchant* and Luise in *Kabale und Liebe* and the same also applies to Emilia.

Lessing therefore does not paint a simple black and white picture of two classes pitted against each other in *Emilia Galotti*. This is underlined by the inclusion of characters from several different ranks of the aristocracy and the minor characters include a painter, servants and criminals. Appiani is a *Graf*, a fairly neutral title, similar to a count or an earl, which in Germany covered various sub-ranks (*Landgraf* or *Reichsgraf* for example). Hettore Gonzaga is the Prince of Guastalla, in the sense of the ruling sovereign of a region rather than heir to the throne of an entire country.[16] Marinelli is a *Marchese,* a *Markgraf* in German, no doubt a deliberate choice on Lessing's part. This rank of the nobility was usually responsible for a *Grenzmark*, the borderlands at the edge of the empire, and was responsible for defending the realm from invasions. A *Markgraf* therefore often had quite significant power, considering his importance for the stability of the territory.

This is particularly interesting in light of Marinelli's relationship with the Prince, which is the one which receives the most exposition in the play and in fact represents the

[14] In piece 73, Lessing also criticises Christian Felix Weiße's *Richard III* for its one-dimensionally evil hero. See Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, p. 375-379.

[15] Ibid., piece 47, p. 243. Merope believes her son is her son's murderer and almost takes revenge with an axe. The original Greek tragedy *Cresphontes* by Euripides is lost but described by Hyginus in the *Fabulae*.

[16] Guastalla most likely refers to the Italian province of Emilia, today part of the region Emilia-Romagna. Emilia's name is therefore probably not a coincidence. The Prince wants to expand his power over both women and territory. See Gesa Dane, *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: G. E. Lessing Emilia Galotti*, p. 5.

most complex power struggle. It is Marinelli who conceives of the plan to stage a robbery which results in the death of Appiani, in a sense defending the Prince's power with violence. He also has great influence over the Prince, who is often unsure of how to act on his desire for Emilia. Marinelli encourages him to do so and to enforce his will. In the first scene, the Prince admits to Marinelli that he is unable to think for himself, so clouded is his mind by his desire for Emilia:

> DER PRINZ   Und auf was? - Liebster, bester Marinelli, denken Sie für mich.
> Was würden Sie tun, wenn Sie an meiner Stelle wären?
> MARINELLI   Vor allen Dingen eine Kleinigkeit als eine Kleinigkeit ansehen -
> und mir sagen, daß ich nicht vergebens sein wolle, was ich bin - Herr![17]

This subjunctive statement reveals the truth about who is "Herr" of the action: Marinelli. Though the Prince tops the hierarchy in terms of political power, he is unable to rationalise his actions, driven as he is by lust and desire. Marinelli on the other hand represents this power in rationalised form. He remains emotionally uninvolved throughout and is thus capable of ordering the violence to be committed by others or allowing the situation to develop in which the ultimate tragedy, Emilia's death, can take place. He is nevertheless merely a function in a command chain, acting not on his own desires or conscience, but on the whims of those in power, merely to defend that power. In the end neither the Prince nor Marinelli feel the need to take responsibility for the results of their actions because the violence has been delegated so many times, it appears to be an accident of chance or fate.[18] The Prince desires but does not act, delegating the violence away from himself; Marinelli acts on the basis of the Prince's desire, but can absolve himself of guilt as he has only acted on the Prince's orders, not on his own emotional motivation. Each can blame the fate that apparently causes the tragedy.

This lack of emotion in Marinelli is depicted in a negative light by Lessing as pure rationalism (Marinelli seems to have an explanation and a plan for every situation), highlighting the moral superiority of *Empfindsamkeit*. He is also shown as unfeeling and unscrupulous, characteristics associated with the aristocracy by the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the pure emotion of the Prince is also portrayed critically, blinded as he is by his passions. Moreover, the rationalisation of power is, according to Max Weber, one of the central characteristics of industrial or capitalist society, and can therefore also be

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[17] G. E. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, i.6, p. 15.
[18] Cf. Manfred Durzak, "Das Gesellschaftsbild in Lessings Emilia Galotti", in *Lessing Yearbook*, 1 (1969), pp. 60-87, which follows a similar line of argument. The characters reduce each other to 'things', almost like commodities, using each other as tools for their own ends.

viewed in light of bourgeois culture.[19] Despite the fact that the end of feudalism promised more active political participation for all citizens, absolutism involved the expansion of state power, followed by the rationalisation of power in capitalism, which can also result in a failure to see one's part in the whole, and in a selfish protectionism which overrides concern for the greater good. This view can also be applied to the rationalised morality that causes Odoardo to kill his own daughter. Odoardo feels compelled to commit this crime, for the bourgeois moral system says it must be so, failing to recognise he is an agent of this morality.[20] Lessing appears to be therefore both advocating the classic bourgeois virtues (duty, chastity), but at the same time criticises their misuse, or rather criticises a lack of critical engagement with any system of morals. He depicts the antagonism that is at the heart of the bourgeois subject: duty to others and the obligation to think and act independently as an individual.

Lessing's play is therefore not a one-dimensional example of bourgeois ideology. Despite that fact that it does include historical aristocratic lineages, it is rather a complex analysis of power through a variety of ranks. Also, at the risk of stating the obvious, Lessing's play is a tragedy, not a comedy. Odoardo's murder of Emilia cannot be simply interpreted as a triumph. Even if the values of honour and chastity 'win' in the end, values which can in fact equally be associated with courtly culture, this is at the tragic cost of terrible violence.[21] As Ter-Nedden writes, both the Prince and Odoardo cannot be viewed as heroes in the classical sense, for the tragedy is a result of their lack of self-awareness and self-control:

> Nur weil beide in derselben Weise ihrer selbst nicht mächtig sind, kann es zur Katastrophe kommen, und nicht deshalb, weil hier machtlose Tugend und tugendlose Macht miteinander in Kampfe lagern.[22]

Nevertheless, the tragic ending can also be interpreted as an expression of the *Bürgertum's* sense of powerlessness, manifested in the ideal of self-sacrifice,[23] a powerful weapon with which to defeat the seemingly undefeatable. In a letter to Nicolai from 29 November 1756, Lessing discusses the different ways empathy is felt illustrated by the example of a

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[19] Adorno and Horkheimer identify Enlightenment rationalism with the cruelty of de Sade, who was, however, an aristocrat. Cf. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*.

[20] Cf. Simonetta Sanna, *Lessings Emilia Galotti: Die Figuren des Dramas im Spannungsfeld von Moral und Politik* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1988). Sanna also views the bourgeois systems of morals as restricting action with any real impact. For her, Orsina is the only character who acts politically, by demanding a reprisal.

[21] Emilia's self-sacrifice and her father's sacrifice could also be seen in light of Weber's asceticism – there is nothing more unworldly than giving up this world.

[22] Gisbert Ter-Nedden, *Lessings Trauerspiele*, p. 165.

[23] Cf. Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 160f.

beggar.[24] He concludes that though we may feel some sympathy for a beggar due to his material poverty, we feel the most sympathy if we know that beggar has made some self-sacrifice – in Lessing's example a beggar who has given up his position in the local administration because he felt his honesty was compromised. Emilia gives up her life and Odoardo his daughter for similar ideals. This current in German bourgeois thinking culminates only two years later in Lenz's protagonist in *Der Hofmeister*, who castrates himself rather than vent his aggression on the socio-political powers that have created his predicament. Szondi notes that Lessing does not pursue the question of whether we would still sympathise with the beggar if he expressed frustration with his powerlessness by murdering the superior who had placed him in that position, for Szondi a sign of a culture "dessen Bürger lieber den Revolutionär als den Diktator umbringen."[25]

The question remains however whether Lessing is advocating such a bourgeois ideal of self-sacrifice or not. From one perspective, Lessing anticipates German Idealism, in that the victory is moral and ethical rather than political; through the experience of empathy with Emilia and her father caused by their sacrifice for morally superior reasons, the audience establishes an 'ethical community' which compensates for its lack of political power and unity (see chapters two and three).

> Diese Möglichkeit antizipiert den Deutschen Idealismus, der es mit der Revolution gehalten und die Mittel an die Hand gegeben hat, die Macht der Verhältnisse, statt sie im Weinen zu akzeptieren, in der Idee zu negieren und so ihre Abschaffung zu antizipieren.[26]

It can also be viewed as the retreat to the inner-world of private emotions, of desire and duty, rather than directly confronting the social and political situation.

> Solange das Bürgertum gegen den Absolutismus nicht aufbegehrt und seinen Machtanspruch anmeldet, lebt es seine Empfindungen, beweint es im Theater ohmächtig die eigene Misere, die ihm [...] ebenso von Menschen bereitet wird wie den Helden der attischen Tragödie vom Schicksal. Der Bürger findet sich mit seiner Ohnmacht im Absolutismus ab, indem er sich in eine Privatheit zurückzieht, auf welche die gesellschaftlichen und politischen Verhältnisse keine Macht auszuüben scheinen.[27]

Szondi argues that while the English bourgeois tragedy focuses on the emotional conflict and the suppression of desires (because the English middle class had already attained a

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[24] Cited in ibid., pp. 160-161.

[25] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 164. Cf. Gert Mattenklott, "Drama: Gottsched bis Lessing", in *Deutsche Literatur IV: Zwischen Absolutismus und Aufklärung*, ed. by Ralph-Rainer Wuthenow (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980). Mattenklott argues that the bourgeois aggression towards absolutism is manifested in mere ideals rather than the "sinnliche Welt", and so "schlägt selbstzerstörerisch nach innen", ibid., p. 295.

[26] Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhundert*, p. 165.

[27] Ibid., p. 167.

greater degree of political power), in Germany this is coupled with the political suppression and the feeling of powerlessness experienced by the *Bürgertum* at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Szondi, this ended as soon as the *Bürgertum* began to fight for political power (evident in the *Sturm und Drang* focus on actual social conditions). On the other hand, it can be argued that victory is achieved through values rather than violence. The Prince is eventually converted to empathy and morality in the fifth act, showing concern for Emilia's future and treating Odoardo with kindness.[28] This is contrasted with his wilful despotism in the opening scene. The political implication is that a ruler who embraced bourgeois values would change the way he rules, exemplifying the bourgeois attempt at reform from above.

Dramaturgically, however, the tragedy of *Emilia Galotti* is the result of bourgeois characters believing in the inevitability of fate and not recognising that as autonomous citizens, they have the power to change their world. It is Claudia Galotti who in fact seems to be the voice of this new autonomy and liberalism, criticising Odoardo for being too strict. Bourgeois duty thus does not prevail unchallenged. Moreover, the failure of the characters to take responsibility for violence and to recognise their agency can also be interpreted as critical of aspects of bourgeois or capitalist society. It is ultimately individual desire which is the foundation of the drama's conflict, but Lessing explores this as a central problem of the bourgeois subject, rather than merely advocating its constant suppression; for although Emilia's father judges her harshly, Lessing does not. Lessing is therefore critical of both the old and the new social order. Seen from this perspective, Thalheimer's interpretation is not as bold a move as at first it may seem. Perhaps it is not his (misperceived) irreverence towards the content of the play and its text that is radical and shocking to some, but instead the abstract aesthetic formalism applied to such a canonical piece of bourgeois literature.

Thalheimer: "Die Banane ohne Schale"

Michael Thalheimer is often described as a reductionist and a minimalist. Dirk Pilz calls him "der formstrenge Stilist und mutige Minimalist, jener Verknappungskünstler, der die vornehmlich klassischen Vorlagen auf ihren Glutkern abmagert."[29] His productions of the classics do not aim at historical accuracy and are usually mercilessly cut, often to the

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[28] See G. E. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, v.1 and v.5. Cf. Bengt Algot Sørensen, *Herrschaft und Zärtlichkeit: Der Patriarchalismus und das Drama im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 1984). Sørensen examines whether the Prince can be seen as 'menschlich' or not, arguing that the combination of *Menschlichkeit* and absolute power leads to the tragedy, and thus is a critcism of Enlightened absolutism.

[29] Dirk Pilz, "Gestus und Gefühl. Michael Thalheimer: Über die Entwicklung einer maßgeblichen Bühnenästhetik", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9.2.2008, p. 36.

length of a standard commercial film or less, with no intermission.[30] The minor characters, the more detailed intrigues of the plot and the subplots are also usually dispensed with. Thalheimer peels away the specific complexities of the narrative in order to reveal or focus on its core element: the tragic conflict. This often seems to be concerned with themes of unconsummated desire and the failure of human beings to understand each other and themselves:

> Stets behandelte Thalheimer den Text wie der Chirurg einen Patienten. Mit scharfen Schnitten legte er den zentralen Konfliktherd frei und erstellte beinahe allen Figuren eine gnadenlose Diagnose: Die Sehnsucht nach liebender Begegnung zerschellt am unweigerlichen Scheitern der Liebe selbst.[31]

The sets are usually starkly bare and simple, with neutral colours and almost no props. The costumes are modern and stylish but also historically neutral. The acting is restricted to minimal movement and a few, sometimes exaggerated gestures. The actors rarely look each other in the eye, almost always delivering dialogue frontally or to a vague point somewhere on the stage. They almost never touch each other, and when they do, such as when Faust and Gretchen kiss in *Faust I*, it can be grotesquely intense. There is no intimacy here, no *Innigkeit*. John von Düffel, a dramaturge at the Deutsches Theater who has worked with Thalheimer many times, describes the style that has become synonymous with his name:

> Sein Ruf als Reduktionist nicht nur von Stücken, sondern auch von schauspielerischen Vorgängen hat ihm sogar einen Eintrag im Brockhaus beschert. Es gibt unter Theaterleuten mittlerweile auch das geflügelte Wort, dass auf der Probe "gethalheimert" wird. Damit ist die immer weiter getriebene, radikale Reduktion eines Textes gemeint und eine Spielweise, die sich mit minimalen Gesten und Zeichen, auf das Wesentliche konzentriert. Thalheimer drückt das mit seinen eigenen Worten gerne so aus: "Ich will die Banane ohne Schale." [32]

The piece that established this aesthetic formula, and Thalheimer as one of the most famous directors in Germany, was Franz Molnar's *Liliom* which premiered at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg in December 2000. Almost every article on Thalheimer makes reference to the scandal that accompanied it. In the middle of the performance, the then

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[30] This seems to be a general trend. Both Thomas Ostermeier's and René Pollesch's productions are also usually between one and two hours, with no intermission.

[31] Dirk Pilz, "Gestus und Gefühl", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9.2.2008, p. 36.

[32] John von Düffel, "Michael Thalheimer: Das Bauchsystem". John von Düffel gave this talk on Thalheimer's directing style at the conference "Chaos und Konzept" at the University of Hildesheim in 2009. The text is on the Deutsche Theater website: http://www.deutschestheater.de/ueber_uns/theorie (accessed on 3.1.2011).

mayor of Hamburg, Klaus von Dohnanyi, stood up and shouted into the auditorium: "Das ist doch ein anständiges Stück, das muss man doch nicht so spielen!"[33]

His production of *Emilia Galotti*, perhaps even more of an "anständiges Stück", was also performed in his trademark reductionist style. It premiered at the opening season of the new artistic directorship of Bernd Wilms, who aimed to revitalise the Deutsche Theater's reputation as the theatre of the classics in Berlin, but with a decidedly contemporary flavour, and thus was representative of a sea change in the theatre's artistic direction. Lessing's original play was cut heavily and reduced from approximately one hundred and seventy minutes to only seventy-five. This famous 'minimalism' creates an urgent sense of inevitability, which I will argue is also intensified by the audience's prior knowledge of the tragedy. Despite the sense of urgency, there is also a strict formal structure to the performance, a sense of rhythm (Thalheimer is also a drummer).[34] The performance has a momentum that does not seem reducible to a series of events caused by the characters' psychology, but rather gives the impression of an inevitable process, which the characters must complete. They seem trapped in a movement towards their tragic fate, which none of them can recognise as the result of their own actions. One line recurs throughout the play: "Was soll ich denn tun?"

Music by Bert Wrede also plays an extremely important role in this production of *Emilia Galotti*. The simple, pizzicato crotchet chords in a traditional waltz rhythm, combined with a rhapsodical violin solo in B minor, are repeated over and over and form a kind of punctuation to the action. Reminiscent of folk music, the solo violin sounds almost like a lonely human voice. Important pieces of action are performed only physically against the music with no dialogue, such as Emilia's encounter with the Prince at the beginning.[35] Wrede's music is variation of a piece called "Yumeji's Theme" by Shigeru Umebayashi, from the soundtrack of Wong Kar-Wai's *In the Mood for Love*. The sense of tragic longing evoked by the music was also the theme of Kar-Wai's film[36] and its tense but poetic mood can be identified as a significant influence on the depiction of desire unfulfilled in Thalheimer's *Emilia*.[37]

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[33] This theatre legend has been recounted many times by journalists and other writers, but it can also be found in Dirk Pilz's article cited above.

[34] Erika Fischer-Lichte discusses rhythm and Robert Wilson's time brackets as structuring elements of performance in *Ästhetik des Performativen*, pp. 227-243.

[35] In his 2003 production of Checkhov's *Drei Schwestern* also at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, the entire last act was performed mute.

[36] In which two married but lonely neighbours in repressive 1960s Hong Kong meet through daily chance encounters, but never allow their relationship to develop as they would desire.

[37] Cf. Rüdiger Schaper, "Sturm und Zwang", in *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29.9.2001, p. 25.

The set by Olaf Altmann is a long hall, almost a wide corridor.[38] The wooden panels on either side reach high up into the rigging of the theatre and far back into the stage. These panels are actually doors but are used rarely, and only by the Prince, Marinelli and Odoardo (with the exception of the ending, see below).[39] They have no handles and can only be opened from offstage, like concealed doorways leading to secret chambers. As it is unclear which door leads where in the rest of the castle, they lend something of a labyrinthine quality to the set, despite its simplicity. A slight angling of the walls of the corridor exaggerates the distance to the dark opening at the back, where Emilia, played by Regine Zimmermann, appears in the opening scene. She pauses in the doorway as two small flames light up on the ground on either side of her, and as she walks slowly towards the audience through the darkness, the flames run along behind her, like the fuses of cartoon dynamite. When she reaches the front, the 'dynamite' explodes behind her and she is showered with pyrotechnical silver rain. Like the accompanying music, this image of Emilia – alone, calm, beautiful – burns itself into the audience's mind. She is the object of desire, the spark that lights the fuse. The silver rain, like electrical sparks, is an image for the energy of sexual desire which runs like an undercurrent throughout the production, energy that draws the characters to each other but which cannot be released, a desire that cannot be consummated.

In Lessing's original, Emilia's encounter with the Prince in church is only described by Emilia to her mother in II.6, while here it is shown in another mute image. As Emilia turns to exit, the Prince enters and as they approach each other, they seem to be drawn together as if by magnetic force. The Prince lifts his hand to Emilia's face and though he does not touch her, regards his hand as though it had some residue of Emilia. Emilia remains almost unmoved, neither timid nor eager, but looks the Prince straight in the eye. Without any other action or dialogue, the tragedy is set in motion. Emilia exits and the Prince's face turns from astonishment to excitement, from joy to confusion, all the time staring obsessively at his hand.[40] He rips open his shirt, clutches at his heart with the hand that almost touched Emilia. He slaps himself, as if to wake himself from this spell of desire. His emotions seem to be primarily a physical phenomenon, not something experienced inwardly and then expressed outwardly; they seem to manifest immediately in the physical body.

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[38] Many reviews referred to it as a *Laufsteg*, a fashion show runway.

[39] Odoardo is played by Peter Pagel, the Prince by Sven Lehmann and Marinelli by Ingo Hülsmann.

[40] I suspect this one gesture – the Prince wiping his hand across Emilia's face as if to capture her image – is the reduction of the original scene with the two paintings, I.5 of Lessing's original. In both cases the Prince seems to fall in love with an image, not a person.

The next character to enter is Orsina, who in Lessing's version does not make an appearance until much later on. Nina Hoss plays Orsina to inspire sympathy rather than censure, as a woman whose suffering has turned her cold rather than as a vain courtesan. She carries a letter, which she drops at the Prince's feet before slowly exiting. The Prince crumples the letter and leaves it in the floor. In it, Orsina has requested to meet the Prince at his summer palace, Dosalo. Though he never replies, when she hears that he has travelled there, she assumes it is to meet her and follows. At the palace, when the Prince refuses to see her, she deduces the Prince's (and Marinelli's) plot, which she then reveals to Odoardo. The letter remains on stage throughout the action. It represents the force of chance that is the main constituent of the tragedy, but also courtly intrigue, which is opposed to bourgeois values and the function of the letter in bourgeois culture as an expression of *Empfindsamkeit* and authentic emotion. The only other prop, the gun which Orsina subsequently gives to Odoardo, represents the power of human agency. It may be chance that the Prince travels to the same place Orsina has requested to meet, but is it chance that she happens to have brought a gun?

These two props also reveal something about process of signification in Thalheimer's work. The reader will recall that Erika Fischer-Lichte proposes that in performative aesthetics, the emphasis is on the sign's 'signness', the experience of its materiality. The use of only two key objects in an otherwise empty stage and the letter's insistent presence throughout most of the play certainly call attention to this: they appear highlighted as objects. On the other hand, they do have significance within the dramaturgical context, which must be apprehended intellectually. Moreover, they are *so* significant – they are the fulcrum of the plot so to speak – so pregnant with meaning, that the normal relationship between signifier and signified seems almost on the verge of collapse. Thalheimer thus somehow operates between the traditionally representational and the performative, in a manner that could perhaps be compared to Modernist painting.[41] It seems as if the whole action is concentrated in just these two elements. They are thus not theatrical signs in a conventional representational sense, but become symbols in Walter Benjamin's sense.[42]

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[41] Cf. Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect", in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (California, University of California Press, 1989), pp. 141-148; p. 148: "The disintegration of the sign – which seems indeed to be modernity's grand affair – is of course present in the realistic enterprise, but in a somewhat regressive manner, since it occurs in the name of referential plenitude, whereas the goal today is to empty the sign and infinitely to postpone its object so as to challenge, in a radical fashion, the age-old aesthetic of 'representation'."

[42] See Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972 [1928]), p. 182f.

Once Orsina exits, Emilia returns. She seems confident and poised, while the Prince is still distracted, breathing heavily, sweating. They stand together shoulder to shoulder and stare into the audience. There is a movement from both Emilia and the Prince, which could suggest a movement towards a kiss, but Emilia immediately turns and exits. The Prince beseeches the empty space she has left, in an inaudible whisper. Only now (seven minutes in) does he utter the first line: "Ich habe zu früh Tag gemacht, der Morgen war so schön", repeating it three times.[43] From this very first utterance, the Prince blames his encounter with Emilia on fate; had the weather not been so pleasant, he tells himself, he may never have met her. The deletion of Lessing's first scene by Thalheimer, in which the prince responds to a "Bittschrift" from an Emilia Bruneschi, the function of which is to highlight the Prince's callousness and despotism, also considerably depoliticises the play.[44]

Seven minutes may seem like a short time, but is significant enough in a production of a little over an hour. Thalheimer's work often contains long sequences with only physical action, and lengthy silences or pauses. *Liliom* opened with the actor Peter Kurth playing Liliom standing on stage and over the course of five minutes slowly beginning to flap and wave his arms around. Thalheimer's production of *Faust I* also begins this way, with Ingo Hülsmann as Faust staring almost accusingly at the audience before he launches into the famous opening monologue. Dirk Pilz argues that the silences in Thalheimer's work present a counterpoint to our society which is marked by incessant activity and blind optimism.[45] In terms of performativity, they can also be viewed as moments in which the audience is made aware of the aesthetic experience beyond representation, the experience of the experience so to speak. These pauses and silences also create an intense sense of expectation and tension in the audience. But just when the tension begins to feel uncomfortable, Thalheimer's actors explode with speech.

The actors' speech slices through this tension like a knife, venting the energy that seems to have been bubbling beneath the surface in this first sequence. The dialogue is extremely fast and yet over-articulated; the actors treat language as though it were an actual substance, a foreign body placed in their mouths by someone else (which it has), rather than a force which comes from within. Even a well-educated German native-speaker might have trouble following exactly what the actors are saying and in this sense the direction assumes a prior knowledge of the text, or is confident that the narrative will be conveyed primarily by the action and images on the stage. In this first pseudo-expositional

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[43] Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent references are to the version of *Emilia Galotti* kindly provided to me by the dramaturgy department of the Deutsches Theater, giving the act, scene and page number. Here I.1, p. 2.

[44] Cf. G. E. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, I.1, p. 3f.

[45] Dirk Pilz, "Gestus und Gefühl", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9.2.2008, p. 36.

scene with speech that follows the Prince's opening lines, between the Prince and Marinelli, the dialogue is precisely timed and rhythmical, like a game of ping-pong with words.[46] There are few natural pauses between lines, instead the actors pause at odd points within lines, or for an unnaturally long time between lines. These pauses' function seem to be to let the audience absorb the information or as formal demarcations of the tragedy advancing one step closer. For example, after Marinelli announces that Appiani is marrying Emilia ("Es ist eine gewisse Emilia Galotti."), Emilia re-enters and there are another few minutes of action without dialogue, before the Prince takes up the dialogue with Marinelli again (during which she makes a gesture as if to ask the Prince to follow her as she exits, implying her complicity). After her exit, requiring absolutely no prompting or interrogation from Marinelli, the Prince immediately confesses his love, which is comically unnatural:

> DER PRINZ *(der gegen ihn wieder aufspringt)* Nun ja, ich liebe sie; ich bete sie an. Mögt ihr es doch wissen! Mögt ihr es doch längst gewußt haben.[47]

Marinelli does in fact give the impression throughout this scene that he has known this all already: he shows no surprise when the Prince confesses and his plan seems ready-prepared. This underlines the impression that he is the mastermind of the intrigue. There is another ironic, long pause after the Prince agrees to let Marinelli do anything it takes:

> MARINELLI Erst heute - soll es geschehen. Und nur geschehenen Dingen ist nicht zu raten. Wollen Sie mir freie Hand lassen, Prinz? Wollen Sie alles genehmigen, was ich tue?
> DER PRINZ Alles, Marinelli, alles, was diesen Streich abwenden kann.
> MARINELLI So lassen Sie uns keine Zeit verlieren. [Pause][48]

This particular pause is followed by the Prince's agreement, "Gut!" which is another recurring marker of the tragedy's progression. Every "Gut!" is a point at which an alternative decision could have been made and an alternative path taken. In most of these pauses the music also comes up again, and the pizzicato of the violins counts each step towards Emilia's murder like a ticking clock.

These unnatural pauses in the dialogue and the manner in which it is delivered also give the impression that the characters never actually understand each other. They seem to be merely reciting at each other, going through the motions of communication. There is no

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[46] This ping-pong effect is also reminiscent of the *commedia dell'arte* style of acting, delivered frontally to the audience with head turns marking beats, and also of Robert Wilson's 'clacks', which mark the movement in his pieces.

[47] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, 1.1, p. 3.

[48] Ibid., 1.1, p. 2.

sense of the character pausing to think first in order to respond. The actors seem instead to be getting through some urgent, inevitable process, as though someone is forcing them to read through Lessing as fast as humanly possible without faltering. The technical difficulty of delivering these lines in this manner also reminds us of the actors' presence and the artifice of stage language, or even the artifice of all language. Language appears rather as a physical act or substance, rather than an interface between an inner and outer sphere, between the mind and the body; in fact it seems to collapse this dichotomy. Moreover, in II.2 of Thalheimer's production, Claudia Galotti encourages her daughter not to be concerned about what the Prince has whispered in her ear at church. The language of chivalry and courtly romance is quixotic and unreliable, she warns, and ultimately means nothing:

> CLAUDIA   Der Prinz ist galant. Du bist die unbedeutende Sprache der
> Galanterie zu wenig gewohnt. Eine Höflichkeit wird in ihr zur Empfindung, eine
> Schmeichelei zur Beteurung, ein Einfall zum Wunsche, ein Wunsch zum Vorsatze.
> Nichts klingt in dieser Sprache wie alles, und alles ist in ihr so viel als nichts.[49]

Does Thalheimer mistrust Lessing's language as Claudia mistrusts the language of courtly romance? Lessing's language is not the everyday language of the actors or the audience, but Thalheimer seems to encourage the actors to feel and relish its strangeness, as illustrated by the first scene between Marinelli and Appiani. The formality with which the two treat each other in Lessing's lengthier scene seems artificial and stylised; Thalheimer retains this comic strangeness. The formal language and unnatural speech patterns are fundamentally not expressive. The dialogue does not convey the inner essence or psychology of the characters and therefore resists traditional identification. The actors are primarily physical beings consumed with desire and unwilling agents of the action, rather than illusions of real psychologies.

The physical acting style also reinforces this. The action remains strictly choreographed and composed throughout the production. The influence of physical theatre or dance is clearly evident.[50] The actors do not appear natural and relaxed, but stiff, almost like automata or puppets. When they reach their position on the stage, they usually remain

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[49] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, II.2, p. 8. In Lessing's original, this is also a criticism of the falseness and superficiality of the aristocracy as opposed to bourgeois emotional authenticity.

[50] Some reviewers were highly critical of this. Hans-Jörg von Jena, the reviewer from neo-conservative journal *Junge Freiheit* was appalled at how Thalheimer apparently denied the actors Lessing's language and replaced it with physical theatre: "Bewegungstheater tritt weitgehend an die Stelle des Lessingschen Textes. Damit desavouiert die Aufführung sich selbst." He also vastly misperceives the amount of editing Thalheimer had done to the text he did use: "Lessings geformte Sprache scheint dem Regisseur geradezu peinlich, deshalb kommen seine Laufsteg-Marionetten weitgehend ohne sie aus." In fact, all of the remaining text is Lessing's original language (see my comparison of Thalheimer's and Lessing's text below). See Hans-Jörg von Jena, "Nicht gleich losmäkeln", in *Junge Freiheit*, 41 (2001), p. 12

there, keeping their arms pinned to their sides. They do not demonstrate the inner world of their characters through naturalistic psychological body language (the 'natural language of the soul' described in chapter three), but employ a minimal series of sometimes extreme physical gestures, such as the repeated shirt-ripping of the Prince and Appiani, or the Prince's knocking on his chest. Any elements of psychological realism that remain are abstracted and intensified, to the point of the grotesque. The only gestures of physical contact between them are the occasional poke in the stomach, an inclination of the head, or perhaps most memorably, Orsina's symbolic defeat of Marinelli (to be discussed below).

Mitleid as Lessing conceived it is clearly not the aim of Thalheimer's theatre. Dirk Pilz argues for an aesthetic effect that can also be described as performative: a shift of focus from the characters onto the audience member's own subjectivity:

> Ihr Tun und Lassen blieb damit dezidiert unerklärt – und steigerte den Deutungsdruck auf Seiten des Publikums. Auch so sind wir Menschen? Thalheimer war es um den ungeschönten Blick auf uns Zeitgenossen in einer Zeit zu schaffen, die mit dem Neoliberalismus auch die gänzlich befriedete, nämlich einzig konsumgesteuerte Seele propagierte.[51]

Though the audience may not empathise in Lessing's sense, it may nonetheless see itself mirrored onstage. Thalheimer's figures are steered solely by desire, just as today we are largely steered by desire, either in the form of consumerism or hedonism, or a desire to fulfil our individual selves. As Pilz suggests this may cause the audience to ask themselves if they too behave in such a manner. The audience may thus relate to the figures in an abstract manner (but this is still not empathy in the strict sense), controlled as they are by a desire that seems to come from elsewhere rather than within.[52] They appear to have no inner world, just as the bourgeois subject has defined itself as an empty vessel constructed by exterior forces. Society today seems concerned only with producing more wealth (which was an aim of the bourgeoisie) and perhaps this has created nostalgia for a time when there was a system of ethics as a guide for dealing with desires (for example in the *Neue Bürgerlichkeit* debate), as opposed to postmodern relativism and subjectivism. These 'desire automatons' are a vivid image of the bourgeois subject today, going through the motions of communication (and criticism), but unable to escape the inevitable (the society of its own making).

Despite this lack of psychological identification, Thalheimer's work is characterised by an emotional intensity that might not be expected from his minimalist

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[51] Dirk Pilz, "Gestus und Gefühl", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 9.2.2008, p. 36.
[52] This calls to mind Deleuze and Guattari's "desiring-machines". See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Continuum, 2004 [1984]), pp. 1-57.

approach, although it is certainly not emotionally moving in the sense of a bourgeois theatre of *Empfindsamkeit*. The cool formalism of the stage is intermittently interrupted by intense displays of emotion. In some instances the emotional reaction or display is repeated and intensified until it almost becomes meaningless, once again collapsing the dichotomy of signification. For example, when Appiani rejects Marinelli's order to run an errand for the Prince (which would have delayed the wedding), he repeats again and again: "Mann hat das gut getan, das hat gut getan [...]",[53] while ripping at his shirt, punching the air and flinging his arms around in general triumph. This is in fact the only instance of *quasi* rebellion against the Prince. Not only is Appiani's triumph almost farcical in its exaggeration, the audience knows it is no real victory (again this depends on a prior knowledge of the play).

One of the most intensely emotional scenes in the production is between Orsina and Marinelli in act four. Although the Prince has not read or replied to her letter (which is still onstage), Orsina arrives at Dosalo, assuming the Prince had travelled there to meet her as she had suggested. She enters the empty stage carrying a pistol, which she first presses to her temple as she stares out into the auditorium – but courage fails her and she drops the pistol on the floor beside the letter. Marinelli must now persuade her to leave as she is a liability to the plan. Again this scene is tragicomic: Marinelli precedes each answer with an over-exaggerated "Hmmm". He is obviously playing the fool, going through the formalities with Orsina, though we must assume she already knows she is no longer in the Prince's favour, given that she has just held the pistol to her head. Despite this fact, she questions Marinelli desperately in an attempt to piece together the puzzle, though as she says, "was liegt daran, ob Sie mir es voraussagen oder nicht? Ich werd es ja wohl sehen."[54] Finally Marinelli picks up the crumpled letter and delivers the final blow, "Erhalten aber nicht gelesen".[55]

Though her eyes brim with tears, she unflinchingly stares directly at the audience. Perhaps precisely because there is no sobbing or shaking, this scene of weeping becomes all the more intense, focusing the audience's attention completely on the physical act of crying. There is also a dislocation between her physical expression of emotion and what she is saying, such as when she makes the sound of laughter after her rejection:

> ORSINA   Wie kann ein Mann ein Ding lieben, das, ihm zum Trotze, auch denken will? Lachen soll es, nichts als lachen, um immerdar den gestrengen Herrn

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[53] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, I. 5, p. 14.
[54] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, IV.2, p. 25.
[55] Ibid., IV.2, p. 25.

der Schöpfung bei guter Laune zu erhalten. Ha, ha, ha…. - Nun, worüber lach ich denn gleich, Marinelli? - Ach, jawohl! Über den Zufall! Ha, ha, ha![56]

Orsina's laugh is utterly empty: it is a forced, inhuman sound, a reflex that sounds more like a hiccough. Her only revenge on Marinelli can be to 'infect' him with her utter emptiness, to show him the chasm between feelings and actions. She advances towards him, knocks violently on his chest with her hand, as if to confirm that it contains no heart. She then wipes a tear from her cheek, this physical evidence of her 'Menschlichkeit', her suffering as a woman, and places it on his face. Marinelli is horrified and close to tears himself.

Without the Prince's cold rejection of Orsina, he might have retained the audience's sympathy. In her suffering and in her uncovering of the plot, Orsina represents a figure of revelation. Moreover, she also denies that everything can be blamed on fate:

> ORSINA   Ein Zufall wär' es, daß der Prinz nicht daran gedacht, mich hier zu sprechen, und mich doch hier sprechen muß? Ein Zufall? - Glauben Sie mir, Marinelli: Das Wort Zufall ist Gotteslästerung. Nichts unter der Sonne ist Zufall - am wenigsten das, wovon die Absicht so klar in die Augen leuchtet.[57]

Finally the Prince musters the courage to appear and reject her in person, in the same artificial language of formality, but testifying to his own feeling of helplessness:

> DER PRINZ   Madame, wie sehr bedaure ich, daß ich mir die Ehre Ihres Besuchs für heute so wenig zunutze machen kann! Ich bin beschäftiget. Ich bin nicht allein. Ein andermal, ein andermal, ein andermal. – Bitte gehen Sie, gehen Sie! – Was soll ich denn tun?[58]

When Marinelli then tells her about the 'accident' and Emilia's presence in the castle, Orsina deduces the truth. The Prince is a murderer, insists Orsina. But, she says, she would kiss "den Teufel, der ihn dazu verleitet hat":[59] she kisses Marinelli violently for almost a full minute. Marinelli reacts in the same way the Prince did after seeing Emilia for the first time. Given a taste of passion, his eyes bulging, he falls to the ground. He tries to touch her and kiss her again, but Orsina stands motionless and taps her chest again: there is nothing there. Feeling and passion are easily expressed physically – in tears or a kiss – but just as easily faked. The inner and outer levels of emotion can often be in contradiction.

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[56] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, IV.2, p. 26. It should be re-emphasised that these words are Lessing's and have not been altered by Thalheimer. Lessing can thus hardly be accused of misogyny, which is sometimes deduced from the murder of Emilia: cf. Gail K. Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise*, pp. 1-23. Rather, he presents a complex portrayal of two women suffering through desire in different ways and displays an awareness of the injustice of the patriarchy of bourgeois culture.

[57] Deutsches Theater, *Emilia Galotti*, IV.2, p. 26. In the context of the original, Orsina is referring to courtly intrigue and its superficiality. This is thus a political commentary on Lessing's part.

[58] Ibid., IV.2, p. 26f.

[59] Ibid., IV.2, p. 28.

Moreover, as Thalheimer seems to suggest throughout the production, the superficial expression of emotion may not even mask some inner authenticity. The illusion of feeling, its physical manifestation, is all there is, for authentic or not, this is what effects events.[60]

When Odoardo arrives to find his daughter, Orsina is left alone with him by Marinelli (in a state of confusion after the kiss). She reveals the truth to him and seals the fate of her rival by giving him the gun, in the hope that Odoardo will take revenge and kill the Prince. The final scene of *Emilia Galotti* is the climax of the urgent inevitability that has dominated throughout. The last act has been heavily edited: Odoardo's deliberation over his choice of action in various monologues as well as dialogue with Marinelli, the Prince and Emilia herself, in Lessing's act five, are all cut. All that remain are ten lines of dialogue between Emilia and Odoardo.[61] There is therefore no justification of Emilia's death, and Odoardo's motivation and moral dilemma are not explained verbally. As he prepares himself (taking off his jacket and waistcoat, rolling up his sleeves), Odoardo mutters inaudibly to himself – perhaps battling with his conscience or praying. Twice he holds the gun to his own head, evincing internal conflict. But the momentum of the tragedy continues to be an unstoppable force for the characters trapped within it (and indeed Emilia's death is expected by the audience). It seems that verbal deliberation would only prolong the inevitable for a few more minutes. Odoardo's (bourgeois critical) reasoning is thus silenced and whatever reservations he must have are impotent against what he is compelled to do by the social norm, or some other external force. The critical negotiation between desire and duty fails. The political impotence that was a reality in Lessing's time appears in Thalheimer's production as impotence against the self and against the social forces that construct it.

Emilia enters from a panel on the right, and she too seems resigned to her fate:

> ODOARDO   So ruhig, meine Tochter? –
> EMILIA   Und warum nicht, mein Vater? - Entweder ist nichts verloren: oder alles. Ruhig sein können und ruhig sein müssen: Kömmt es nicht auf eines?
> ODOARDO   Aber, was meinest du, daß der Fall ist?
> EMILIA   Daß alles verloren ist - und daß wir wohl ruhig sein müssen.
> ODOARDO   Und du wärest ruhig, weil du ruhig sein mußt? - Wer bist du? Ein Mädchen? Meine Tochter?[62]

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[60] This is strikingly close to Fischer-Lichte's, Butler's and Merleau-Ponty's conception of emotion as something primarily physical, which does not express any prior authentic feeling (see chapter one). In Thalheimer's characters however this seems to be experienced as a crisis.

[61] The lines which Gail K. Hart suggests are suggestive of an erotic attraction or even relationship between Emilia and her father ("Geben Sie mir, mein Vater, geben Sie mir diesen Dolch!" etc., cf. Lessing, *Emilia Galotti*, v.7, p. 78) have been reduced to only one, no longer very suggestive line. Cf. Gail K. Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise*, p. 3.

[62] *Emilia Galotti*, v.1, p. 32. This last line also somewhat subverts the ideal of the dutiful daughter; apparently Emilia has not always been obedient and quiet when she should.

Both in Lessing's play and Thalheimer's version, Emilia has comparatively few lines, but Thalheimer gives her the last word. She screams at Odoardo:

> EMILIA   Ich bin aus Fleisch und Blut. Auch meine Sinne sind Sinne! Ich stehe für nichts. Ich bin für nichts gut. Was zögern Sie?[63]

Although the question of Emilia's guilt is not as central to Thalheimer's dramaturgy as to Lessing's, these lines could be interpreted as an admission of guilt or at least temptation. Her description to Claudia in II.2 of her meeting with the Prince is also ambiguous. Regine Zimmermann's arms are raised to the ceiling in a v-shape, implying rapture, yet her impression of the Prince's whisper sounds like the hissing of a snake. She also seems positively disturbed in her only scene with Appiani and even sheds a tear, which implies that this wedding is just as much or more against her will than an affair with the Prince. Fundamentally however, Thalheimer knows that a modern audience is not concerned with her chastity. Like the other characters, it is her utter powerlessness in the face of external forces which is his main concern. She is nothing but "Fleisch und Blut", controlled by her "Sinne", she stands for nothing, that is, she is an empty construct. Furthermore, she no longer stands for anything in a contemporary context: the specific bourgeois moral of chastity which motivated her murder before is rejected by today's bourgeois culture and is no longer relevant. This powerlessness is only underscored by the sense that the *character* Emilia is also trapped within the dramaturgical momentum of the tragedy: the audience is waiting for Odoardo to strike.

However, Thalheimer also shows this ambiguously or figuratively. Odoardo exits the stage and leaves Emilia alone in the darkness. She walks towards the rear exit, weaving from side to side, looking through the open doorways, carrying the gun limply in her hand – but there is no way out. As Emilia turns and walks back towards the audience, almost forty dancers dressed in funereal black appear from the panels on both sides and waltz across the stage. As the two lines meet in the middle and cross each other, Emilia is swallowed in this dance of death, and when they have passed, she is gone. Emilia's murder is thus strangely ambiguous and yet a clear visual image at the same time. On the one hand, this functions as an abstract symbol of an act which does not need to be shown literally, because the audience most likely knows the play. On the other, the lack of context

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[63] *Emilia Galotti*, v.1, p. 32.

shifts emphasis to the aesthetic experience and leaves the audience to interpret the ending subjectively. It seems, for example, just as likely that Emilia commits suicide.[64]

Perhaps prompted by this quite significant departure at the end, much of the negative press reaction misperceived the number of changes made to the text, complaining that little remained of Lessing's masterpiece.[65] However, a comparison of the Deutsches Theater script of *Emilia Galotti* and Lessing's original, shows that the text has not been altered as much as some critics believed, and indeed far more remains than I had originally suspected. Firstly, every word spoken on stage was written by Lessing, there has been no modern language added, though sometimes elements are repeated (such as the recurring "Gut!" or the Prince's opening line). Thalheimer tends to use modular blocks of Lessing's text rather than single lines, but the text is almost always in the original order. In some cases, where a large portion of the text has been cut, this forms amusing juxtapositions, such as the Prince's unprompted confession of his love for Emilia in his first scene with Marinelli ("Nun, ja! Ich liebe sie."). Thalheimer teases out the comic and the grotesque from Lessing's text, though in many instances this is also already present in the original.[66] Another effect of the heavy editing is that, as Thalheimer has removed many details of cause and effect, the action is motivated by the characters' desire at all times, which thus appears to have a life of its own as an external force The situation could be otherwise, as every marked step closer to tragedy underlines; the circumstances leading there seem almost irrelevant. This is also mirrored in the actors' high-speed delivery of the text.

Thalheimer's production of *Emilia Galotti* also subverts the conventional theatrical model of identification (and Lessing's ideal of empathy). The audience's pity and fear for Emilia is frustrated when she does not meet a clearly defined tragic end, for example. As I have suggested throughout my analysis, the tragedy seems rather to lie in the problematic nature of identification. The figures on stage seem to have no psychological depth and, both as characters and actors, seem to experience emotion primarily physically, on the surface, which language somehow to fails to express. They fail to empathise, for they can never reveal or communicate their inner world to each other, indeed perhaps find nothing 'in there' to reveal, as Orsina demonstrates to Marinelli. And yet neither can they dispense with language fully. With so few realistic elements in theatrical terms, language is the only element which gives the characters some contours of identity. Yet their physical and

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[64] It is also possible to imagine that she murders her father and stays with the Prince as a courtesan (the dancers are reminiscent of dancers at court), or that she murders the Prince, which would result in her own death anyway.

[65] For example the *Junge Freiheit* review already cited in note 50, p. 17.

[66] For example, Marinelli's repeated response of "Ebendie [...] ebendie" to any question the prince asks in 1.4 of Lessing's version, the humour of which is retained in Thalheimer's production, though the lines are gone.

emotional selves seem out of joint with the language they use. Furthermore, language seems to be the force which *acts* in a performative sense. All of the important physical acts take place off stage: the killing of Appiani, the Prince's possible seduction of Emilia and Emilia's putative death. The 'action' on stage in fact consists of almost nothing but dialogue. Language sets in motion the tragedy and carries it to its end: the Prince's whispers in Emilia's ear; his confession to Marinelli; Marinelli's request for diplomatic immunity; Emilia's confession to her mother, who in turn informs Odoardo; Orsina's letter and her conversation with Odoardo; and finally Emilia's last lines, which, though not an explicit admission of guilt, are not a protest either, and effectively sign her own death warrant. Speaking seems to amount to doing and yet somehow the figures cannot coherently connect their physical acts to their linguistic ones, and so in desperation blame everything on fate. As described already, the characters in the play are figures of today's bourgeois subject as an empty construct, the subject as subjection.

Faust: "Die Zeit ist kurz, die Kunst ist lang"

In 2004, Thalheimer applied his radical minimalism to perhaps *the* most canonical German drama, which Heinrich Heine called the "weltliche Bibel der Deutschen",[67] Goethe's *Faust*. While *Emilia Galotti* is important as part of the history of the *Bürgertum* and the development of a bourgeois dramatic theatre, *Faust* is arguably still an important symbol of German national identity and remains a cultural icon for the *bildungsbürgerliche* milieu. It is a measure of cultural capital as perhaps no other piece of German literature, a *Standardwerk*, even if it no longer read by many people in actuality. As Manfred Engel writes:

> So würde im deutschsprachigen Raum bei einer Kanonumfrage Goethes *Faust* sicher auch von vielen derjenigen genannt werden, die das Drama weder gelesen noch gesehen haben.[68]

Though Thalheimer's editing of *Emilia Galotti* deleted the minor characters and subplots, as well as some dialogue, most of the narrative structure remained intact. For his version of *Faust I* however, produced in collaboration with the Deutsches Theater dramaturge Oliver Reese, entire sections of the narrative have been cut. There is no prologue or epilogue in heaven, no "schwarzer Pudel", no "Auerbach's Keller" or "Hexenküche", and the "Walpurgisnacht" is extremely brief. Even an edited version of *Faust I* is usually a four

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[67] Cited in Karl Eibl, *Das monumentale Ich: Wege zu Goethes Faust* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 2000), p. 15.
[68] Manfred Engel, "Kanon – pragmatisch: mit einem Excurs zur Literaturwissenschaft als moralischer Anstalt", in *Literarische Wertung und Kanonbildung*, pp. 23-34; p. 25.

hour production; Thalheimer squeezes his version into just two hours and its brevity and staging make the production seem like one uninterrupted scene.[69]

This production is aesthetically similar to *Emilia Galotti* in several ways. The set, once again by Olaf Altmann, is a slow-turning black cylinder, closing off most of the stage. For the first half of the production, the cylinder remains closed and the actors are positioned at the very front edge of the stage, with the revolving black cylinder behind them, leaving them little room to move around. Once again most of the dialogue is delivered frontally and the actors are mostly arranged in fixed tableaux, rarely changing their positions within scenes. The opening scene, as mentioned, is not the prologue in heaven, but Faust's famous monologue. With the house lights still up, Ingo Hülsmann strides onstage, wearing slacks and a plain cream shirt buttoned only halfway, and positions himself in the centre. He will hardly move from this spot until after his pact with Mephistopheles. His head held proudly high, he stares at the audience for a full two minutes, as though goading them to begin his well-known monologue for him. The only sounds in the theatre are a few uncomfortable coughs and the gentle whirr of the revolving stage.

Hülsmann delivers the monologue at incredible speed, sometimes almost feverishly, sometimes with over-articulated, exaggerated, melodramatic self-pity bordering on the farcical, but always with the same sense of boredom and monotony with which the speech itself is concerned. It sounds like a mantra, which Faust has obsessively repeated to himself over many years (as the circle turns in endless repetition behind him), as if he is searching for some residue of authentic meaning in the language, for Walter Benjamin's original, unified signs, before they were torn apart into sign and referent.[70] Meta-theatrically this famous monologue *is* of course something of a mantra: as Hülsmann recites this famous text as if for the thousandth time, one can imagine members of the audience muttering the lines to themselves under their breath along with him.

Hülsmann's Faust figure seems modern, but not as Faust is often interpreted as modern by contemporary directors: he is neither Faust the capitalist, nor Faust the disillusioned university professor, nor Faust in any other specific social context. One reviewer writes:

> Das Problem aller 'Faust'-Inszenierungen besteht ja darin, daß deren Titelgestalt, auf deren ewige Modernität wir merkwürdigerweise so viel geben, doch in Wahrheit ein Papiertiger aus dem Mythenarchiv des Mittelalters ist […] Jetzt,

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[69] Peter Stein's production of both parts of *Faust* at the Hannover Expo in 2000, which was completely 'faithful' to the original text, famously lasted twenty-one hours.

[70] Walter Benjamin, *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, p. 193.

vielleicht zum ersten Mal, steht auf der Bühne zu allgemeiner Verblüffung: Faust ohne Füllung. Der nackte Mensch. Die wahre Leerstelle. Ein Rahmen aus Blut, Nerven und blankem Seelenfleisch.[71]

This description immediately recalls Emilia's description of herself as made of flesh and blood, but Faust is far more cynical and world-weary (although he cannot let go of life as Emilia does). For Faust it is not only his self that is empty, but there is also nothing "was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält"[72]. This can be seen as a crisis of *Bildung*: as in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, the more knowledge gained, the less the pattern becomes clear. The more knowledge Faust produces, the more relative and tenuous every position becomes, and the less likely his quest through magic or study would result in some final, objective truth. This reflects the postmodern epistemological crisis for the *Bildungsbürgertum*, when the ideal aim of *Bildung* – the search for truth – was radically called into question. Karl Eibl also argues for a new interpretation of Faust, viewing him as a figure for the disorientated (post)modern subject who can no longer find any clues to his or her self in society and culture, and describing the play as a "Formulierungsraum der Aporien moderner Individualität." [73]

Trapped in his subjectivity yet driven by a desire to find his 'true self', Thalheimer's Faust wallows in self-pity and becomes a victim of his own egotism. Even his suicide attempt borders on the pathetic. His weapon of choice is not some frothy potion but a pitifully mundane glass of water. Hülsmann drinks the glass of water and holds it in his puffed up cheeks until it dribbles out of his mouth. It appears that Faust is merely acting out a private drama of his own, with nothing but tap water as a prop (later Mephistopheles will chide him: "Hör auf, mit deinem Gram zu spielen"[74]). It is nothing but the semblance of action, an empty ritual, stale from repetition both within the play and meta-dramatically. Stadelmaier remarks that Thalheimer's production reveals Faust as in fact nothing but a selfish criminal, a strange figure for a nation to admire so much:

> In ganzen zwei Spielstunden das Faustische: Bestehend aus einem nackten, bloßen, armseligen, kriminellen Ego [...] Faust – Opfer seiner selbst. Ein Selbstquäler. Ein furchtbarer Mensch, der nur dann leben kann, wenn er Leiden schafft: Sich und anderen.[75]

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[71] Gerhard Stadelmaier, "Verdammter Faust", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18.10.2004, p. 37.

[72] J. W. von Goethe, *Faust: der Tragödie erster Teil*, version by Michael Thalheimer and Oliver Reese, scene 1, p. 3.

[73] Karl Eibl, *Das monumentale Ich*, p. 11.

[74] Goethe (Thalheimer/Reese), *Faust 1*, scene 7, p. 19; line 1635 of Goethe's text: Goethe, *Faust, der Tragödie erster Teil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1986). I will give the line numbers after each quote.

[75] Gerhard Stadelmaier, "Verdammter Faust".

As in *Emilia Galotti*, "die äußere Handlung ist wenig dazu angetan, eine positive Identifikation zu erleichtern."[76] Thalheimer deconstructs the Faust myth and leaves only a cipher of this quintessentially German hero, a cipher defined above all by his individualism and his crime against Gretchen. He is a barely held together embryo of a subject – like the homunculus – constructed from language.

Until the Gretchen narrative begins Faust remains as if transfixed downstage, speaking what essentially amounts to a forty minute monologue, interrupted only by Wagner, the Student and Mephistopheles, the only character Faust takes any notice of until he sees Gretchen. Peter Pagel's Wagner is dishevelled and awkward, and his line, "Mit Euch, Herr Doktor, zu spazieren, ist ehrenvoll und ist Gewinn,"[77] is ironic, and even more pathetically sycophantic, considering they have not gone anywhere. Horst Lebinsky, an older actor, plays the Student and delivers Goethe's lines like a schoolboy haltingly reciting a text he should know by heart in class. Faust does not even respond to this strange apparition, perhaps of an earlier self still hungry for *Bildung*, but trapped in the body of an old man. He is barely distracted by these other figures – for they can hardly be called characters – his train of thought hardly interrupted by their entrances and exits, as though they were figures of his own mind. When Mephistopheles (Sven Lehmann) finally appears, there is no poodle to be seen, no dry ice, devil horns or ominous signs, he simply saunters on stage in a sloppy green sweater at the exact moment Faust says "Im Anfang war der *Sinn*".[78] Once again this is reminiscent (or rather prescient) of Benjamin's fall of signification, in which the emergence of meaning strips things of their natural significatory integrity and unity. Later, in what remains of the *Walpurgisnacht* scene, Mephistopheles offhandedly list its elements in one line: "Gipfel Nacht. Feuer Koloss. Einsamkeit. Öde. Blitze. Feuersäulen. Rauch. Qualm. Geschrei. Mitternacht."[79] This devil has no magical trickery, only empty words, signs that do not even conjure the expected paraphernalia. Faust welcomes him with a half-embrace, a sign of deep intimacy for a Thalheimer production, considering how rarely the characters touch.

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[76] Bernd Stegemann, "Bruchlos: 'Wer klopft?'", in *"Verweile doch"- Goethes Faust Heute: Die Faust-Konferenz am Deutschen Theater und Michael Thalheimers Inszenierungen*, ed. by Michael Jaeger et al (Berlin: Henschel, 2006), pp. 137-152; p. 139.

[77] Goethe (Thalheimer/Reese), *Faust I*, scene 4, p. 11; lines 941f.

[78] Goethe (Thalheimer/Reese), *Faust I*, scene 5, p. 13; line 1229.

[79] Ibid., scene 24, p. 53; not in Goethe's text.

Indeed, it is possible that Thalheimer read Mephistopheles as a part of Faust's mind, or at least understood Faust and Mephistopheles as two sides of the same person.[80] Thalheimer may have been inspired by the famous lines:

> Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust,
> Die eine will sich von der andern trennen;
> Die eine hält, in derber Liebeslust,
> Sich an die Welt mit klammernden Organen;
> Die andre hebt gewaltsam sich vom Dust
> Zu den Gefilden hoher Ahnen.[81]

More importantly, Faust later says: "Der Teufel ist ein Egoist",[82] but it is Faust who is the biggest egotist of the play. It is his arrogant and narcissistic dismissal of the afterlife (as fundamentally irrational) which ultimately leads him to accept the bet. While he is negotiating with devil, Faust (Hülsmann) snorts at Mephistopheles' claims to power, smirking at the audience as he defines the terms of his own damnation.[83] Although Goethe is surely not advocating a return to medieval religious morals, the figure of Faust shows that a belief in the all-encompassing superiority of reason may leave a spiritual or a least moral void in the bourgeois subject.

Once the pact is sealed, there seems to be shift from the mind to the body and corporeal pleasure, underlined by Faust finally moving from his position at the front of the stage. As the first few notes of Deep Purple's "Sweet Child in Time" sound, cracks finally show in the closed, revolving cylinder behind Faust and white light streams through. Wagner appears again but his words are drowned out by the rock music. As the cylinder revolves faster and faster, creating a strobe light effect, and the electric guitar chords grow more intense, Faust begins to dance as though intoxicated by a powerful drug, while Mephistopheles looks on smugly. Faust runs back and forth across the stage, clutches at his own body, an expression of shock and elation on his face, as though surprised to find he might actually exist as a physical being. This is the rejuvenation process which replaces "Auerbach's Keller" and the "Hexenküche", and all that follows seems to be guided primarily by physical desires.

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[80] Cf. Alberto Destro, "The Guilty Hero, or the Tragic Salvation of Faust", in *A Companion to Goethe's Faust: Parts i and ii*, ed. by Paul Bishop (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), pp. 56-75; see especially p. 58.

[81] Goethe (Thalheimer/Reese), *Faust i*, scene 4, p. 11; lines 1112-1117.

[82] Ibid., scene 7, p. 19; line 1651.

[83] "Was willst du armer Teufel geben?/Ward eines Menschen Geist, in seinem hohen Streben,/Von deinesgleichen je gefaßt?/Zeig mir die Frucht, die fault, eh' man sie bricht,/Und Bäume, die sich täglich neu begrünen!", Ibid., scene 7, pp. 18-19; lines 1675-1687.

Gretchen's entrance is strikingly similar to the Prince and Emilia's first encounter in *Emilia Galotti*. When she hurries by across the stage,[84] Faust barely even looks at her before he stops her with: "Mein schönes Fräulein, darf ich wagen, meinen Arm und Geleit Ihr anzutragen?"[85] As in *Emilia Galotti*, it seems as if events are pre-ordained: any girl walking by might have become the object of his desire. Regine Zimmermann plays Gretchen as a simple girl hardened by poverty, delivering her lines as if the words are still a little strange and new. Frau Marthe is even more downtrodden: her walk is a stagger, her voice raw, deep and emotionless, as though every utterance required a great effort to go through the motions of living, feeling and communicating. While on closer inspection Lessing may be seen to be critical of bourgeois culture, after the *Sturm und Drang* movement dramatists took more of a direct interest in wider social conditions. Here Goethe depicts not just the internal crisis of the bourgeois subject, but the material poverty of the majority of society, as well as their exploitation (Faust's exploitation of Gretchen; Mephistopheles treatment of Frau Marthe). This vision of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* is far from the ideal of participating, independent and equal citizens.

After Faust and Mephistopheles have hatched their plan to hide a present for Gretchen in her room, the cylinder finally opens completely to reveal a circular space with a plain white single bed resembling a hospital bed, and a cross hanging above it. The remaining action plays here, the scene of Faust's crime against Gretchen, which is also the main focus of the second half. Thalheimer's production seems to be clearly divided into two parts and this marks the division. The first part focuses on Faust the egomaniac, possibly played only in his mind, the second portrays the effect this egomaniac has when let loose on the world, taking refuge in the sensual pleasures of the body, which Faust seems to believe will deliver him from the pain and frustration of a life of the mind.[86]

Once again there are almost no props to provide concrete guidance in the signification process. The glass of water, which Faust had used as poison for his attempted suicide, also functions as the sleeping potion he gives to Gretchen for her mother. It reappears in *Faust II* and becomes the artificial womb and birthplace of the homunculus. The only other props in *Faust I* are the gift Faust gives Gretchen (a simple box), the plain white bed and the cross above it. After Gretchen's transformation, the top half of the

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[84] I am sure it has not escaped the reader's attention that the three main characters are played by the same trio of actors as in *Emilia Galotti*, though one could argue that two men have switched, if one views Marinelli as the devilish character in *Emilia Galotti*.

[85] Goethe (Thalheimer/Reese), *Faust I*, version by Michael Thalheimer and Oliver Reese, scene 11, p. 24; lines 2605f.

[86] Heinrich Heine also praised Faust for rejecting the bourgeois world of the mind for the pleasures of the body: "[Faust] der mit dem Geiste endlich die Ungenügbarkeit des Geistes begriffen hat, und dem Fleische seine Rechte wiedergibt." Cited in Karl Eibl, *Das monunmentale Ich*, p. 16.

revolving set has shifted slightly to the right, moving the top half of the vertical line of the cross also to the right, resulting in a shape that suggests a *Hakenkreuz*.[87] Once again, these signs oscillate between a focus on their materiality and their status as meta-dramatic symbols, as described above.

The actors, however, seem to treat each other's bodies as props. When Gretchen and Faust are finally alone, there is no tender, physical intimacy. They remain far apart for most of the scene as they discuss the death of her baby sister. Gretchen's "Er liebt mich, er liebt mich nicht"[88] is a scream which borders on the deranged, and Faust's patronising confession of love reveals how little he values her as an autonomous individual:

> FAUST   Ja, mein Kind!
>   Er liebt dich!
>   Verstehst du, was das heißt? Er liebt dich![89]

Zimmermann has a childlike quality that makes this scene more disturbing than usual. Moreover, Gretchen's own confession, which has been added, seems an automatic response, a repetition of something she does not really understand herself ("Von Herzen lieb' ich dich"[90]). It seems clear that neither has any real capacity to love and that Faust is merely motivated by his physical desires, a desire to escape his nihilist vision of the world through the sensual: in short, hedonism. Here a connection can be drawn to '*Spaßgeneration*' of the 1990s interested in nothing but conspicuous consumption and parties, mentioned in my introduction.

In an historical context, Goethe's Faust figure shows the early modern bourgeois subject in crisis, caught on the final cusp of an age dominated by religion and the beginning of an era of autonomous self-definition and endless productivity. Gretchen's catechism reflects the conflict between these two world-views. In the hell of his own subjectivity, Thalheimer's Faust has a more complex conflict in terms of belief than an early modern Faust, who might still invoke reason or progress as compensation for the loss of God. The religion question here is not so much concerned with whether or not he believes in God, but how he can believe in anything. Goethe thus anticipates a very postmodern problem.

Gretchen asks the question: "Glaubst du an Gott?" six times, and each time she concludes with: "So glaubst du nicht". Faust too repeats his academic and rather evasive

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[87] A link can be made between Faust's rationalism and fascism, but this is beyond the scope of this chapter (cf. chapter two). For the fascist reception of Goethe and *Faust*, see Karl Robert Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland: Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, vol. II: *1918-1982* (Munich: Beck 1989), pp. 80-101.
[88] Goethe, *Faust I*, version by Michael Thalheimer and Oliver Reese, scene 16, p. 37; lines 3182f.
[89] Ibid.; lines 3184f.
[90] Ibid.; this line is not in the original text.

answer six times, first calmly, as though it were a prepared response for the theological faculty, then more quickly and desperately, then shouting, then in a whisper, until finally the language comes apart at the seams and his answer is reduced to nothing but gibberish. Gretchen remains persistent and sceptical of his linguistic trickery, and Faust seems momentarily defeated by this exercise in the meaninglessness of positions and beliefs – his relativist position is itself held together only by a few syllables of speech and dependent only on a convincing performance. Then, as if locked in a dance, they circle each other like animals, and suddenly kiss (once again Faust takes refuge in the 'presence' of the body). Though the kiss is grotesquely intense, it is neither affectionate nor erotic (similar to the kiss between Orsina and Marinelli). Neither Faust's encounter with Gretchen, nor with Helena in *Faust II*, seem to offer Faust a glimpse of the "Ewig-weibliche" and thus some chance of salvation. In *Faust II* Helena (Nina Hoss) looks as though she has crawled from a shipwreck, and with her slight hunch and stiff movements, reminds us rather of Frau Marthe than the eternal beauty of Troy.

There is no mercy or salvation for Gretchen either. After her transformation, Gretchen has also acquired some of the hardness of Frau Marthe. Her guilt, or perhaps rather her mental suffering, is portrayed in copious stage make-up. Black eyeliner and red lipstick have been applied heavily and smeared all over her face, making her resemble something between a clown and a child who has discovered her mother's make-up bag. She seems as resigned as Emilia, though significantly more damaged. In the final dungeon scene, she mocks her own foolish love for her "Heinrich"; her demands to be kissed are bitter and sarcastic. With her final words ("Heinrich! Mir graut's vor dir"), she takes her own life with a knife to the throat and a shocking amount of stage blood. Like a puppet whose strings have been cut, she falls back onto the white bed, beneath the broken cross. No voice sounds from the heavens; it is Mephistopheles who is given the last word in this scene: "Sie ist gerichtet!" Despite the fact that Gretchen is not saved, Faust seems to be absolved of guilt. Nor does he seem to feel any, emphasising his cruelty rather than his existential angst. The opening scene of *Faust II*, in which Faust is allowed to forget his crime by Ariel and the earth spirits, ends Thalheimer's production of *Faust I*: "Ihm Sinne nach und du begreifst genauer: Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben."[91]

The following year in 2005, Thalheimer also directed *Faust II* at the Deutsches Theater. It is an extremely rare occurrence that a German theatre produces both parts of Faust close together. In the Deutsches Theater, a leading theatre of the classics, this has

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[91] *Faust I*, scene 26, p. 61.

only been attempted twice before.[92] *Faust ii* is a poetically dense piece and traditionally it has been viewed as a 'closet drama', a piece to be read rather than performed. It might seem surprising that Thalheimer also attempted it, as his trademark dramaturgy usually focuses the production entirely on the narrative and the central dramatic conflict. In both *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust i* there is a clear and simple core narrative that holds the production together and is easily followed despite being staged in a radically different aesthetic. *Faust ii* on the other hand has a far more complex narrative, closer to epic form, and a tragic conflict more difficult to identify for an audience unfamiliar with Goethe, and other literature and mythology. Significantly, it is also much less focused on human relationships. It is a play of ideas rather than actions. This is one reason why it was not perhaps as successful as some of his other productions, although most likely this is simply because audiences know the first part of *Faust*, but generally not the more difficult second part. This is testament to the persistent power of a *Bildungskanon*.

In comparison to Thalheimer's other work, it can be argued that *Faust ii* represents the retreat into nothing but language, a piece of staged philosophy. Pilz also argues that it represents a nihilistic position and accuses Thalheimer of depoliticising his theatre.[93] Seen in the context of Thalheimer's production of the first part however, it critically addresses both bourgeois culture and today's society, continuing the theme of the existential crisis of the bourgeois subject and suggesting the failure of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*. It can be interpreted as a retreat from the body and back into Faust's mind, back to the individualistic pursuit of bourgeois productivity, though not this time the productivity of *Bildung*, but a political fantasy of improvement for all which eerily resembles a dictatorship that ignores the individualism of others.[94] The echoes of German bourgeois history are clear. Faust's nihilism, caused by the experience of relativism after years of study, mirrors late nineteenth century cultural pessimism and the sense of crisis caused by bourgeoisie individual's relatively insecure position at that time.[95]

The completely black stage is again characterised restricted spaces which eventually open out, and seems to visually reinforce the return to subjectivity. Its total emptiness and the use of black boxes apparently floating in mid-air, and into which the

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[92] See Bernd Stegemann, "Faust und das deutsche Theater", in *"Verweile doch": Goethes Faust Heute*, p. 6f.

[93] "'Faust 2' ließ dagegen Apologeten der Sinnlosigkeit auftreten, die ihren negativen Frieden mit der Welt geschlossen haben [...] im zweiten zelebrierte er [Thalheimer] ein leeres Virtuosentum, mit dem er Faust zum kontextlosen Nihilisten wandelte." Dirk Pilz, "Gestus und Gefühl". Cf. Dirk Pilz, "Diesseits des Klassenkampfes", in *Theater der Zeit*, no. 11, November (2005), pp. 13-15; see p. 13.

[94] Cf. Rüdiger Scholz, *Die beschädigte Seele des großen Mannes: Goethes 'Faust' und die bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (Berlin: Schäuble, 1995), p. 33f. Scholz describes Faust's colonisation and the fifth act as an "Orgie des Individualismus".

[95] Seen in this light Faust seems remarkably Nietzschian. Cf. Manfred Riedel, *Im Zwiegespräch mit Nietzsche und Goethe: Weimarische Klassik und klassische Moderne* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

actors are crammed, underline the sense of being somehow *inside* Faust's mind. Having failed to fully face his crime against Gretchen and therefore his social duty to others, he has returned to his own ego. It therefore seems to represent a hell of subjectivity for Faust, a megalomaniac fantasy, in which he is actually torturing himself. His endless dissatisfactions also tortures others: not content with the land he has acquired, he becomes obsessed with Philemon and Baucis' little hut, which he eventually burns down, with the elderly couple in it, in order to erect his own palace. It is therefore not difficult to discern a critical comment on our postmodern and highly individualistic age, in which we no longer recognise our duty to others, but live in a world of subjective fantasy, driven by endless, senseless productivity and desire which can never be satisfied. It thus seems a resoundingly negative diagnosis on the health of the present *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*.

Max Weber identified Goethe's criticism of the reduction of the individual to their functionality and "die rationale Lebensführung auf Grundlage der Berufsidee" in the fugures of both Faust and Wilhelm Meister. They demonstrate:

> Daß die Beschränkung auf Facharbeit, mit dem Verzicht auf die faustische Allseitigkeit des Menschentums, welchen sie bedingt, in der heutigen Welt Voraussetzung wertvollen Handelns überhaupt ist, daß also 'Tat' und 'Entsagung' einander heute unabwendbar bedingen: Dieses asketische Grundmotiv des bürgerlichen Lebensstils – wenn er eben Stil und nicht Stillosigkeit sein will – hat auf der Höhe seiner Lebensweisheit, in den "Wanderjahren" und in dem Lebensabschluß, den er auch seinem Faust gab, auch Goethe uns lehren wollen.[96]

For Goethe, the obligation to have a career was the end of a more harmonious age of humanity – the age Baucis and Philemon pray for in the chapel before they are killed. In Weber's reading Faust and Wilhelm seek to rebel against this and develop their 'true' selves.[97] In Thalheimer's version, however, Faust himself becomes an example of the failure of bourgeois ideals.

Finally, as Bernd Stegemann also writes in his analysis of *Faust I*, the very heart of "bürgerlichen Schauspielkunst"[98] contains a paradox between natural embodiment and the actor's control of his or her physical body, a tension between embodying the character and addressing the audience, the projected inner world and the actual exterior. The art of acting developed over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prescribed concealing this paradox and tension as much as possible, as discussed in the last chapter. In Thalheimer's work this tension is revealed once again. Language ultimately sketches the contours of the

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[96] Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, p. 200. Cf. Rüdiger Scholz, *Die beschädigte Seele des großen Mannes*, pp. 39-53.

[97] Cf. Franziska Schößler, "Progress and Restorative Utopia in *Faust II* and *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*", in *A Companion to Goethe's Faust*, pp. 169-193.

[98] Bernd Stegemann, "Bruchlos: 'Wer klopft?'" in *"Verweile doch": Goethes Faust Heute*, p. 138. Cf. also chapter three of this dissertation.

characters, yet Thalheimer's actors alienate this language, as already described. Furthermore, the language is in tension, or sometimes in contradiction, with the physical action, which expresses emotions (affects) much more strongly than the language. The minimalist yet intense physical acting somehow reveal language's limits, but cannot exist without it. For the language is ultimately the source of the many images in Thalheimer – they have been distilled from it, even if it is then discarded. The actors must return to it again and again, try to experience it as though it were new, but, just like many in the audience, they most likely cannot. For in particular with such well-known texts, stage language is never original or authentic, it is always already a quote.[99] Both Thalheimer's actors and the characters in his productions seem to experience and demonstrate the subject as constructed in language: recourse to performative physical demonstrations of emotion fails to generate authentic communication; escape to the presence of the body ends in the abandonment of all morals. In the end Faust exists in nothing but language, as he traverses the faded fiction of classical literature, itself nothing but a quote, over which he can have no real autonomy.

Thalheimer's radical departure from the text in his productions can be viewed as part of the German tradition of *Regietheater*, and he most certainly does not employ a nineteenth century bourgeois aesthetic. However, his work also incorporates aesthetic characteristics more usually associated with postdramatic or performative theatre, such as aesthetic self-reflexivity and the frustration of conventional identification. This may not be quite what an educated public is expecting. Or perhaps this is precisely what they are expecting. The final questions I wish to discuss are therefore in relation to the concept of canon. Does his work represent a reinvigoration of the canon to be welcomed by those who wish to defend the *bürgerliche Kulturgut*, or does he make classical works more accesible to all by focusing on the core narrative elements and keeping it simple? Alternatively, does Thalheimer's more abstract and formalist aesthetic in fact restrict access to those with the appropriate cultural education needed to appreciate it?

Canon and Cultural Capital

Michael Thalheimer's productions of *Emilia Galotti* and *Faust I* were extremely successful for the Deutsches Theater in Berlin and both won numerous awards.[100] Although it was not quite as successful, *Faust II* was also well-received. *Emilia Galotti* also toured extensively,

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[99] See chapter one and my discussion of Austin's etiolated language.
[100] For example, *Emilia Galotti* received the Friedrich Luft Prize awarded by the city-state of Berlin, the Austrian Nestroy Prize for Theatre and the Russian prize for theatre, the Golden Mask. *Faust I* also won the Friedrich Luft Prize.

from New York to Japan, and ran for eight years after its premiere on 27 September 2001. This success was certainly due in part to the canonical status of these two dramas, but not just because these two classics are guaranteed to attract an audience (perhaps a *certain* audience): Thalheimer also received critical praise for reinterpreting the classics for our times and reinvigorating the canon.

Peter Michalzik writes that before Bernd Wilms, the Deutsches Theater was a theatre associated with an unusual mix of the new, post-reunification *Bürgertum* and the GDR's cultural elite:

> Wer nach Restbeständen des Bürgertums suchte, der fuhr bisher ins Deutsche Theater nach Berlin. Dort hatte sich eine merkwürdige Allianz aus der Creme (ehemals) ostdeutscher Theatermacher und einem (immer noch) westlichen, klassiker-liebhabenden Publikum zusammengefunden [...] Die bürgerlichen Klassikerkenner im Parkett erkannten ihre Klassiker wieder. Man nennt das Verblendungszusammenhang: Innen glaubte man, der letzte Hort der deutschen Schauspielkunst zu sein, außen sah man Staub [...] Es ist eine fragile Balance, in der Wilms sein Theater führen muss, zwischen Erneuerung und Tradition, Bruch und Bürgertum, Ost und West.[101]

With Bernd Wilms the theatre took somewhat of a new direction. Directors were experimental with the classics, new writers were staged and directors associated with a more radically experimental theatre were invited to produce work (for example René Pollesch staged his play *JFK* there in 2009). It can be said however that the Deutsches Theater still represents the theatrical establishment, though it is not as conservative as the Berliner Ensemble, where Claus Peymann (who recently labelled Christoph Schlingensief a "Nichtskönner" only months after his death[102]) is still artistic director. The stated aim of the Deutsches Theater is to be a theatre of the classics and an institution which represents and contributes to the theatrical canon.[103] It is the educated, wealthy classes who have historically had an interest in this project. For reasons already described at length, the theatre can be viewed as a classically bourgeois institution (even if it is experimental) and therefore is likely to attract individuals who feel some affinity with values like independence, *Bildung*, critical thinking, the public negotiation of communal relationships, aesthetic 'beauty' and so forth.[104]

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[101] Peter Michalzik, "Denn die im Hellen sieht man nicht," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 29.9.2001, p. 17.

[102] Stefan Kirschner, "Interview mit Claus Peymann: 'Berlin ist eigentlich Barberei'", *Berliner Morgenpost*, 25.6.2011, p. 21.

[103] "Auf dem Spielplan stehen zum einen Klassiker und moderne Klassiker von Autoren wie Kleist, Shakespeare, Brecht, Schiller, Wedekind, Goethe, Tschechow und Hauptmann, zum anderen werden Stücke zeitgenössischer Autoren wie Dea Loher, Lukas Bärfuss, Roland Schimmelpfennig und Dennis Kelly gezeigt und zur Uraufführung gebracht." From the Deutsches Theater website: www.deutschestheater.de/ueber-uns/profil (accessed on 15.3.2011).

[104] Due to my guiding concept of *bürgerliche Kultur* (and lack of training as sociologist), I have not pursued empirical research into audience statistics or, for example, an investigation of where the Deutsches Theater

Despite the fact that the concept of canon has been radically questioned in academia in recent years, it continues to wield a huge amount of power in cultural practice, even if that power sometimes translates into the impact of subversion or reinterpretation. Many contemporary productions of canonical pieces are successful precisely because directors re-contextualise the plays and adapt the original text in their productions.[105] It is no exaggeration to say that it would be highly unusual for a contemporary director in Berlin to attempt an historically accurate and textually 'faithful' production of a classical text. The canon remains an important concept, particularly for the educated and cultural milieus, and an individual's familiarity with it remains a yardstick for his or her level of education and thus his or her cultural capital. As Pierre Bourdieu shows however in *Distinction*, based on studies carried out in the 1960s, the French bourgeoisie's reaction towards art tended to be marked by a disinterestedness which allowed for exactly this kind of experimentation or pure aestheticisation. This involved a suspension of the hermeneutic instinct. Bourdieu argued that those with the most cultural capital usually did not question what a work 'meant', but appreciated it for itself, thus demonstrating a concept of art as autonomous. Although arguably tastes have changed since the 1960s, Thalheimer's highly aesthetic modernisation of canonical text can be seen in this light: those with high levels of cultural capital would in theory not reject the altered content, but celebrate the aestheticisation as a re-assertion of the art work's autonomy.

But what constitutes a 'canonical text' in the first place? Jan Assmann views the canon as a component of cultural memory, the 'connective structure' which both links individuals across heterogeneous society and present society and culture with the past. These he calls the normative and the narrative functions, which combined "ermöglichen dem Einzelnen, 'wir' sagen zu können".[106] The concrete meaning of canon (kanón) in Ancient Greek is a 'measuring stick' used by masons, a standard or a template. Assmann emphasises that the canon should therefore also be understood as an instrument for measuring the relative worth of new and old texts: the concrete texts provide examples or models, which legitimise the criteria for their selection.[107] A canon can therefore be described both as performative and representational. The modern sense of a canon as a

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advertises (which might reveal the 'target market'). Based in the theatre's programme, however, it seems to aim to cater for a traditional cultural elite.

[105] For example, Ostermeier has also directed successful modern interpretations of *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. The Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin has done a spate of reinterpretations of classic novels (though not all German), for example *Der Zauberberg*, *Anna Karenina* and *Madame Bovary*. Michael Thalheimer has also directed Ibsen's *Die Wildente*, Hauptmann's *Einsame Menschen*, Chekhov's *Drei Schwestern* and Euripedes' *Orestie* in his trademark style.

[106] See Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), p. 16.

[107] Ibid., p. 112f.

collection of texts is derived from its religious use.[108] The religious canon was defined by the church as all texts originating from divine inspiration (excluding other texts which may have concerned Christianity, but were not considered Holy Scripture). Being divine, these texts had an infallible origin, though this infallible origin is in fact located within the canon itself, as it provides the standard against which to measure these and other texts. The religious canon thus legitimises its own legitimacy; it contains or constitutes *in itself* the rule of truth, it is its own regulating principle.

During the Reformation and the Enlightenment, blind acceptance of church authority was challenged. Martin Luther insisted on the critical engagement of the individual with theological content rather than abiding by the church interpretation. The literary canon thus only emerges with the waning of the power of the church,[109] and has a very specific function for bourgeois culture. The literary canon provided orientation for the *Bürger* no longer defined by his estate, nor guided by the religious moral system. It provided a new orientation for interpreting reality (as Clifford Geertz argued all culture does) and provides a 'measuring stick' for the individual's identity, in the sense that it was representative of the sum of bourgeois culture's values and ideals. This is one reason why bourgeois culture was never solely linked to class interests but aimed to be (and believed itself to be) universally valid:

> Damit enstanden weltliche Autoritäten für die Deutung der Wirklichkeit, für die Einrichtung der Verhältnisse, für die Bestimmung der Sittlichkeit und – darauf lief es überall hinaus – für das Verständnis der Natur des Menschen, der aus den alten – gesellschaftlichen und kulturellen – Ordnungen herausgetreten war, also nun Orientierung suchte. Mit diesen neuen Autoritäten einer weltlichen Kultur, die sich an alle wandte, war der Grund für die bürgerliche Kultur gelegt.[110]

Indeed Tenbruck goes so far as to suggest that bourgeois culture *is* modern culture per se, not just a specific aspect of it, being the first form of culture that spread across class divides (both the aristocracy and the working class ultimately accepted it, he points out). He acknowledges that "Risse" were created the more it expanded, but does not specify what these might be.[111] I would suggest of course that as bourgeois culture expanded in an attempt to provide identification for 'all' citizens, it occasionally incorporated contradictory values or least tensions, which had to be negotiated. However, given the

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[108] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 113f.

[109] Cf. Ruedi Graf, *Das Theater im Literaturstaat* and my discussion of it in chapter three.

[110] Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "Fragmente zur bürgerlichen Kultur", in *Die Bürgerliche Kultur und ihre Avantgarden*, ed. by Clemens Albrecht (Würzburg: Ergon, 2004), pp. 13-20; p. 13f. Cf. Thomas Nipperdey, "Kommentar: 'Bürgerlich' als Kultur", in *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Jürgen Kocka, pp. 143-148.

[111] Friedrich H. Tenbruck, "Fragmente zur bürgerlichen Kultur", in *Die Bürgerliche Kultur und ihre Avantgarden*, p. 14.

concept of a canon as its own self-regulating principle, it can be argued that adjustment or criticism, as an attempt to overcome these "Risse" is one of the canon's (and bourgeois culture's) characteristics. It is therefore also fundamentally self-reflexive.

The notion of the canon as a means to deal with heterogeneity in society and values by ordering and prioritising, but at the same time creating a space for negotiation, is also mirrored in the material circumstances of early bourgeois literature. As Jonathan Brody Kramnick notes in his study of the formation of the English canon, modernity creates tradition.[112] As already discussed, the development of a book market, printing technology, the increase in the number of readers and the professionalisation of criticism led to an explosion of literature, from which the canon was selected as a means of differentiating the more valuable from the less valuable. The emergence of a broad public sphere encouraged the delineation of a restricted cultural field, specifically literature (Kramnick is referring to Bourdieu here). He writes: "the idea of a separate domain of national, literary treasures went hand in hand with the idea of public [bourgeois] culture."[113]

Bourdieu regards the modern period as one defined by the expanding cultural market, which is divided into products of high-cultural and mass-cultural value. As cultural exchange expands, economic factors have a negative effect on the cultural field. Exchange value opposes itself to aesthetic value – the more commercial a product, the lower its aesthetic value.[114] Aesthetic value also seems to be differently opposed to use value in the taste in art of the various classes Bourdieu analyses in *Distinction*. The less obviously useful or directly related to everyday life a work of art is, the higher its aesthetic value for the most educated and the lower its aesthetic value for the less educated. Bourdieu's principle of stratification is thus based on a work's relative autonomy from economy. This creates two fields: one of restricted production (the high-value autonomous works which reject concerns with the market of recipients) and one of large-scale cultural production, which serves primarily the laws of demand. What makes the restricted field of literature (the canon) valuable is the accrual of many individual efforts to interpret and assign value to it (which cannot be reduced to economic value). Bourdieu calls this symbolic capital.

The concept of the restricted field serves in part to explain the growth of professional criticism and scholars, who were required to legitimise the restriction of the field using their expertise.[115] Only certain experts (the *Bildungsbürgertum*) could access

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[112] Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon: Print-Capitalism and the Cultural Past, 1700-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 1

[113] Ibid., p. 4.

[114] See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays in Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).

[115] See Jonathan Brody Kramnick, *Making the English Canon*, p. 8.

these works of art, for it was assumed that the common man could not understand their significance. Bourdieu's sociological research often confirms this: those with less cultural capital tended to demonstrate an aversion to abstract or modern art (though it should be noted that Bourdieu carried out his research in the 1960s when such art was relatively new), because in their view it could not be related to their lived experience. Bourdieu argues that is because they have not received the education which would enable them to know (how) to adopt the disinterested 'Kantian stance':

> Intellectuals could be said to believe in the representation – literature, theatre, painting – more than in the things represented, whereas the people chiefly expect representations and the conventions which govern them to allow them to believe naively in the things represented.[116]

However the relation between fields, between the restricted high-cultural field and mass-culture, is viewed as dynamic (for example, popularity due to mass consumption can eventually become a factor in ensuring a work's place in the canon).

If this line of thinking is applied to theatre, the literary canon corresponds to literary drama and the cultural capital valued by the *Bürgertum*. Theatrical production, along with schools and universities, represent the institutional mechanisms which evaluate, distribute and grant access to it. This would suggest that reinterpretations or revisions of the traditional canon in highly aestheticised, abstract or dehistoricised productions, such as those of Thalheimer – the disinterested aesthetic which Bourdieu shows was favoured by the most educated of the French middle class – represents a restructuring of the cultural field once more, restricting it to those with the appropriate training in taste. Or does it? For since Bourdieu wrote *Distinction*, postmodernism has largely done away with such clear distinctions – in both senses – between high and low culture. That which defines cultural capital now fundamentally changed and ideas of a traditional bourgeois capital are looked down upon as elitist. This has arguably led to the valuing of experimental works which question the canon, rather than those which reinforce it.

Even more strongly than Bourdieu, John Guillory anchors his examination of the canon debate in the concept of class. Based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, he focuses on the material and social conditions of the education system and its "historical function [of] distributing, or regulating access to, forms of cultural capital".[117]

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[116] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. xxviii. Bourdieu describes the Kantian aesthetic stance as "the detachment and disinterestedness which aesthetic theory regards as the only way of recognising the work of art for what it is, i.e. autonomous", ibid.

[117] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: the Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, p. vii.

> The fact of class determines whether and how individuals gain access to the means of literary production, and the system regulating such access is a much more efficient mechanism of social exclusion than acts of judgement.[118]

His study focuses on three phases of the distribution of literary cultural capital, beginning with the establishment of the value of literature in culture generally and followed by the establishment of literary studies in the university. According to Guillory, the latest phase is the introduction of a canon of theory at the highest level, for example, graduate schools, although theory is now often taught at undergraduate level too. Theory was viewed as a challenge to the authority of the canon and training in critical thinking.[119] Paradoxically, it is usually the educated elite who are given access to this canon of theory – once again it is the bourgeoisie who have the luxury of challenging their own system of values. At the same time theory has continuously produced new readings of that canon and so has a creative influence, but also remains bound to it. Once again bourgeois criticism is a gesture of both challenge and reinforcement.

While in my view this is not an entirely new development, the total focus on theory or criticism is. Guillory interprets the heated debate around the concept of canon of the 1980s and 1990s[120] as a new crisis in the cultural capital we call literature, noting that criticism of the canon is often targeted at the social or intellectual elite. Guillory argues that literature has become dysfunctional because of the rise of a new professional-managerial class, which has no need for the cultural capital of the old bourgeoisie and therefore targets criticism towards that group.[121] Literature is therefore increasingly marginal to the function of the present education system. It is the decline of the value of this cultural capital that has given rise to the canon debate, according to Guillory. Furthermore, this 'second canon' implied that literature was not sufficient as a curriculum by itself, thus generating the crisis in the canon. Nonetheless, the power of the classic ideals of *Bildung* and culture, even among the modern professional-managerial class, should not be dismissed too readily. The rise of the 'creative industries' and 'creative class', for example, could in fact be identified with the rise of cultural capital once again in an altered form. These new creative and cultural classes seem to value both high and low

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[118] John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: the Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, p. ix. Jan and Aleida Assmann also examine the relation of canon to censorship. See Jan and Aleida Assmann, *Kanon und Zensur: Beiträge zur Archäologie der literarischen Kommunikation II* (München: Wilhem Fink, 1987).

[119] This canon of theory plays an important role in René Pollesch's work, which I will examine in chapter six.

[120] Cf. for example John Searle, "The Storm over the University", in *The New York Review of Books* (6.12.1990), pp. 34-42.

[121] Just as occured at the end of the nineteenth century, cf. chapter two.

culture but again seem to display a tendency towards irony or criticism in relation to their cultural capital.[122]

Despite their differences, all these theories view canons as shifting and dynamic constructs, involving processes of interpretation and preservation, thus characterised by both creative and normative tendencies. Attacks on the canon, as well as conservative defences of it, tend to imply a non-existent homogeneity in the canonical works. As Ricarda Schmidt writes:

> Zunächst ist es durchaus nicht sicher, daß kanonische Texte tatsächlich eine spezifische Gruppe von Menschen sowie eine Homogenität ihrer Überzeugungen und Werte repräsentieren. Welcher Teil der Gesellschaft wird etwa durch Kafka repräsentiert? Welche Gruppe wurde dadurch ausgeschlossen, daß Hölderlin im 19. Jahrhundert nicht gelesen wurde? Welche gesellschaftliche Gruppe kann sich heutzutage durch Homers *Odyssee* repräsentiert fühlen?[123]

While Schmidt is correct in identifying the difficulty of allocating specific works to a social group or ideology, there is nevertheless a powerful normative function in the canon, though it may perhaps remain merely an ideal, a rather abstract construct with few specific values. The canon does not necessarily function as a list of works with which the person is familiar or as a clearly defined repository of values (even among students of literature, few ever finish reading 'the list'). It is rather a delineated cultural space, which individual subjects project onto or grasp in fragments. What is communicated to students in school, save a few major works, is not actually 'the canon' *per se*, but rather *the idea that there is a canon*. It is precisely the idea of a canon (an ideal canon), and not individual works which represent social groups of people, that enables the canon to survive.[124] Like the term 'bourgeoisie' today, it functions as a sort of empty marker, which can be filled with content as necessary, and this is arguably what makes it so powerful.[125] The ideal canon may thus be seen as normative, while the concrete canon is creative and shifting. In his

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[122] Cf. Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. There are many examples of 'remix' or 'mash-up' art, which uses or incorporates classic works of art in an ironic fashion. For example, a recent work by the Austrian artist Moritz Majce, *Schnellschuss mit den Meisterwerken (zack, zack)*, in which the artist reacreated fifty canonical pieces of art in eight hours, using everyday materials (as part of the exhibition *Quick and Dirty* in the Kulturpalast, Berlin on 30.1.2010). See: http://www.moritzmajce.info/zackzack/ (accessed on 13.4.2011). Ostermeier's Shakespeare productions can also be seen in this light.

[123] Ricarda Schmidt, "Der literarische Kanon: Ein Organ des Willens zur Macht oder des Gewinns an Kompetenzen," in *Literarische Wertung und Kanonbildung*, p. 11.

[124] Peter Kuon differentiates between an 'ideal canon' and a 'real canon' in his empirical study of the French canon. See Peter Kuon, "Zur Kanonisierung der französichen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts im deutschsprachigen Raum: Eine empirische Untersuchung", in *Kanon, Macht, Kultur: Theoretische, historische und soziale Aspekte ästhetischer Kanonbildungen*, ed. by Reante von Heydebrand (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998), pp. 246-270. In the same volume Rüdiger Zymner suggests a 'postulated' and an 'active' canon, see "Anspielung und Kanon", in ibid., pp. 30-46.

[125] It is similar to Lacan's concept of a "big Other", see Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan*, pp. 8-21.

book on *Faust*, Karl Eibl proposes the apt metaphor of "gepflegte" and "wilde Literatur".[126]

New thinking and historical circumstances will inevitably cause readers and interpreters to re-address what has been included or excluded from the canon. The obvious example of women writers springs immediately to mind, though changes can also be more subtle: in the past, when examining eighteenth century theatre, researchers tended to pay little attention to the plays which dominated the popular theatre of the wandering players. New theoretical developments already outlined in detail cast this cultural heritage in a new light, and even perhaps allow us to view it in relation to modern developments. Like a personal library, therefore, the canon reflects who we are, but does not mean we will never buy, lose or throw away another book.

There is also a tension between a work's historicity and its lack thereof. A work is deemed part of the canon both because of its place in the historical development of literature or culture, but also because it possesses a certain openness to be interpreted anew in later times. In this sense, the contradictions, ambiguity, problems and semantic gaps are far more important (and interesting) than inherent universal truths, which are historically relative. In fact, those works that fall out of favour over time tend to be precisely those that present a very specific, often historically dependent world-view. These 'gaps' are indeed what encourages constant reinterpretation.[127]

Thalheimer's radical treatment of the text does precisely this. It explores the problems and gaps anew, and reinterprets *Faust* and *Emilia Galotti* decidedly for our times. It also presents them in a formalised and self-reflexive aesthetic, which, if Bourdieu is to be believed, appeals to the educated and cultural classes. Even if that aesthetic is perceived as a more postmodern critical stance towards the canon, as I have argued, this may also appeal to the culturally educated, who are also likely to be familiar with experimental forms, as they are in a position to decipher the aesthetic as experimental in relation to the literary canon. Its high level of aestheticisation may therefore exclude some from finding it accessible, and those that find it offensive to the original play, or difficult, are likely to be less culturally educated and more conservative, as Klaus von Dohnanyi's outburst illustrates. Indeed such outbursts from cultural conservatives arguably add to the fame of such productions as revitalising reinterpretations, critical of elitist forms of cultural capital; the old bourgeois ideal of culture for a classless society, in this case no doubt enhanced by von Dohnanyi's aristocratic background. On the other hand, its simplicity and

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[126] See Karl Eibl, *Das monumentale Ich*, pp. 33-36.
[127] This is precisely what Karl Eibl argues for *Faust* in *Das monumentale Ich*, though he only discusses the canon briefly there, see above.

focus on the central tragic conflict arguably makes it accessible for those who would find the language an obstacle (indeed the speed of the actors' delivery highlights this, almost permitting the audience to find the language difficult). Thalheimer's productions are therefore a criticism of the normative aspect of the canon, the canonical interpretation, but it is also a reinvigoration and a reinforcement of the canon at the same time. For if no director ever undertook to question and challenge the canonical interpretation of a play, then that play would most likely be simply labelled as irrelevant and forgotten, except perhaps by scholars. In Thalheimer's productions of canonical dramas then, the bourgeois mode of criticism which both opposes and reinforces can be again be identified. He both rebels against 'conventional' dramatic theatre, but reasserts the relevance of the theatre as a part of the public sphere.

Chapter Five

Critical Realism: Thomas Ostermeier's Ibsen Productions

In the last chapter I analysed Michael Thalheimer's productions of two canonical German plays which were central to the early formation of a middle class theatre and a 'bourgeois' theatrical aesthetic. The focus was on the aesthetic form of Thalheimer's work in relation to canonical, dramatic texts which might be expected to be performed in a more conventional manner, and questions of canonical value in relation to the cultural capital of a largely middle class audience. I will now to turn to a director who in some ways seems to be working against the 'deconstructive' current in Berlin, by operating within a relatively conventional representational aesthetic, but at the same time incorporating contemporary aesthetic elements, such as video.

Thomas Ostermeier's productions of plays by Henrik Ibsen at the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz – *Hedda Gabler*, *Nora* and *John Gabriel Borkmann* – confront the contemporary middle class with an image of themselves perhaps more explicitly than any other director working in Berlin today. Moreover, his productions are often extremely critical of middle class values and the bourgeois family, though this critical perspective is already present in Ibsen's writing. Ibsen marks the beginning of the crisis of the bourgeois subject: his plays attack the values of sacrifice and duty, question the political and spiritual freedom of the individual within a framework of economic forces, and reveal as a lie the social contract which forms the basis of the middle class family. Ostermeier addresses the audience critically however, not through aggressive provocation, nor by radically questioning the traditional theatrical framework and aesthetic, but by employing a form of naturalism or realism which makes the content relevant to a contemporary audience. His work will therefore be explored in relation to questions of realism, to ask whether it represents the persistence of bourgeois realism or perhaps a 'reconstruction' after deconstruction.

This will involve a more traditional 'literary' examination of these plays, to ascertain how their content may still be relevant to the contemporary (middle class) audience, while also taking contemporary aesthetic elements into account. A performative or deconstructivist aesthetic sometimes implies a return to something somehow more real, or 'authentic', but as I have shown, this in fact this may also restrict the cultural field to those with the appropriately trained taste.[1] I will argue that Ostermeier is trying to resist

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[1] I will also explore the issue of the 'real' and the authentic versus realism in the final chapter on Pollesch.

this tendency and maintains a belief that his stage-worlds, despite being illusionistic, have direct relevance to his audience in terms of content, and that this is a less culturally restricted field than the highly aestheticised or deconstructivist theatre that can often only be appreciated by the theoretically trained.

Ibsen and the German Stage

It is not surprising to see Ibsen in the repertoire of any theatre across the world; he is one of a handful of playwrights who enjoys almost consistent, global popularity.[2] The question of his canonicity in Germany is related to a unique performance and reception history of his work there, and the playwright's own relationship with the country.[3] Ibsen made his first trip to Germany to visit the theatre in Hamburg in 1852 , lived in Dresden and Munich from 1868 to 1878 and again in Munich from 1885 to 1891. His first big success was in Germany with *Die Stützen der Gesellschaft* (*The Pillars of the Community*). In 1878 it played in five different theatres in Berlin, in three different translations, and was also in the repertoire of twenty-six other German theatres.[4] The Freie Volksbühne Berlin opened with this piece on 19 October 1890, by which time Ibsen had already created a stir in Berlin with *Gespenster* (*Ghosts*) in 1887, though it had initially been banned. Wilhelm Friese writes of the popularity of the *Die Stützen der Gesellschaft*:

> Die Beliebtheit der "Stützen der Gesellschaft" beruht aber vor allem darauf, daß der Zuschauer [...] sein eigenes Milieu in der Handlung und im Dialog wiederfinden kann. Kritische Akzente werden ohne weiteres hingenommen; Kritik wird sogar begrüßt, solange sie aphoristisch bleibt und nicht zum Urteil wird.[5]

The importance of the theatre as a part of the public sphere and as a space for criticism for the German bourgeoisie is once again evident. Although the German nation was by then established and some political aims achieved, as described in chapter two, compromises had been made and many new challenges had arisen as a result of industrialisation. This period is the beginning of cultural pessimism and a deep sense of insecurity in the *Bürgertum*, which led to the eventual rejection of some of its basic ideals.[6] On the one hand, political energy is once again redirected into the cultural sphere and tolerated by the

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[2] Cf. *Global Ibsen: Performing Multiple Modernities*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Barbara Gronau and Christel Weiler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

[3] Cf. Rüdiger Bernhardt, *Henrik Ibsen und die Deutschen* (Berlin: Henschel, 1989) and Michael Meyer, *Ibsen: A Biography*, 3 vols (London: Hart-Davis, 1967-1971), especially vol. ii: *The Farewell to Poetry: 1864-1882* and vol. iii: *The Top of a Cold Mountain: 1883-1906*.

[4] See *Ibsen auf der deutschen Bühne*, ed. by Wilhelm Friese (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1976), p. xii. By 1889 there had been no less than one thousand different productions on fifty German stages.

[5] Ibid., p. xiii.

[6] Cf. John Burrow, *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought 1848-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

authorities as a 'safer' form of political dissent. On the other, criticism of bourgeois values and social problems was more explicit than ever before. The Freie Volksbühne was an association based on the membership of its audience, enabling it to escape the censor and offer cheaper seats so that the poorer members of society could afford to attend.[7]

The world premiere of *Nora* (*A Doll's House*) took place in Copenhagen, but many early performances were also staged in Germany.[8] The German premiere took place at the Flensburger Stadttheater on 6 February 1880. Although Ibsen was extremely reluctant, fearing someone else would do it anyway and that such a version would be preferred,[9] he wrote an alternative ending in which Torvald forces Nora to look at her sleeping children and convinces her to stay. This shows just how radically subversive *Nora* was perceived to be. The first German production of *Nora* with Ibsen's originally intended ending took place a month later in the Münchner Hoftheater on 3 March 1880. It sparked debates on women's rights so heated that requests not to discuss it were explicitly printed on invitation cards in Berlin and Copenhagen.[10] *Hedda Gabler* on the other hand premiered in Germany, at the Court Theatre in Munich in January 1891, and though initially it was a critical failure, it was soon performed regularly elsewhere. After Otto Brahm took over the Deutsches Theater in Berlin in 1894, Ibsen was performed there so regularly that it became the main theatre in Europe associated with the playwright at the time.[11]

While Ibsen seems to have been better understood in Germany than in some other countries, reception in Germany too was not universally positive. His central characters are often equivocal and carry out morally reprehensible actions (from a bourgeois perspective), rather than providing exemplary models of virtuous behaviour. The audience was thus asked to sympathise with characters that were imperfect and complex, far from the conventional representation of the ideal, the heroic or the beautiful, and his work addresses the potential failure of those ideals in his contemporary society. Lessing's mixed characters are here taken to an intricate extreme. Theodor Fontane admired Ibsen's technical skill, but

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[7] In addition to the earlier Freie Bühne, founded in 1889, which was also a private association, but limited to a "select intelligentsia" according to Simon Williams. See Simon Williams, "Ibsen and the Theatre 1877-1900", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, ed. by James W. McFarlane (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 165-181; p. 165. It also opened with *Nora* in 1890.
[8] Dates of publication and premieres are listed in the "Works" section of *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, pp. xxi-xxvi.
[9] There was a proliferation of alternative versions and continuations of *Nora*. Ibsen's publisher for Northern Germany, Wilhelm Lange, warned him before the premiere that an adaptation by another writer with an alternative ending may be preferred by theatres. Ibsen therefore opted to do the damage himself.
[10] See *Global Ibsen*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte et al, p. 2.
[11] The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre and the director Aurélien Lugné-Poë also produced many Ibsen dramas in France, including no less than eight French premieres. See Simon Williams, "Ibsen and the Theatre 1877-1900", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, p168f.

disagreed with his apparent determinism and the "theses of the plays".[12] Julius Hart, who had initially been enthusiastic about Ibsen, confessed that he could not understand *Hedda Gabler*.[13] However, Ibsen's work was popular with audiences and he had some notable, extremely enthusiastic supporters (such as Otto Brahm or William Archer in London). As Simon Williams notes, unlike the consensus that seems to have been achieved by earlier dramatists in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in popular sentimental dramas, generally Ibsen divided his audience:

> Behind this hostility, one senses a fundamental concern that, in contrast to the theatre of the previous generation, a common consensus could no longer be found among audiences. The polemics of Ibsen's drama divided the audience and revealed rather than covered broader rifts within society as a whole. Ibsen challenged the most basic assumption of the function of theatre – his work did not create a community, it divided it.[14]

However, Ibsen divided his audience and critics not so much on the level of form, but on the level of content. Despite the symbolism of his later plays and the intricacy of his plots, Ibsen's aesthetic was not a radical departure from forms current at the time: "in the stage world he created, the illusion of a seamless whole was maintained. Consequently, his plays appealed to audiences raised on the aesthetic of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*."[15] His attention to lengthy exposition and to the realist psychologies of complex characters who develop throughout the play was seen by audiences as an improvement on the melodrama of the mid to late-nineteenth century stage, Williams argues. His work also demanded a more subtle and naturalistic acting style; actors could not play Ibsen's characters merely as types. The actor had to deal with creating a certain antagonism in the audience, because of the 'difficulty' of the plays and the immoral characters, while still maintaining a level of sympathy. This naturalism resulted in a more believable and apparently authentic form:

> The consequence of this focus on character was an apparent de-theatricalisation; in fact to the admirer of Ibsen, the word 'theatrical' had negative connotations, implying whatever was 'inauthentic'. Looked at historically, it is clear that through Ibsen the conventions of an earlier generation were beginning to lose their credibility. The plays and their performers were constantly praised for their denial of theatricality and their capacity to create a strikingly convincing illusion of everyday life.[16]

Here the complex relationship between realism, reality and authenticity is touched upon once more. In his time, productions of Ibsen seem to have achieved an authentic

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[12] Cited in Simon Williams, "Ibsen and the Theatre 1877-1900", in *Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, p. 170.
[13] Ibid., p. 167.
[14] Ibid., p. 171.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., p. 172.

representation of reality precisely by rejecting the then standard 'theatrical' conventions. It is in fact the well-executed 'illusion' that is perceived as authentic, while theatrical devices immediately recognised as such were dismissed as inauthentic. Today many theatre practitioners also reject 'illusion' and seek authenticity by presenting reality in as unadulterated a form as possible; authenticity is today located within 'the real', the presentation of reality without illusion, rather than the convincing simulation. It seems this may be an endless cycle of attempts to get closer to the 'real': as each aesthetic becomes conventional, it is subsequently perceived as inauthentic, motivating a new search for authenticity. I will return to these questions in the next chapter, but it is important to note that for Ibsen's audiences, paradoxically he too seemed to get closer to an unadulterated 'real' by employing a form of realism that is now rejected as inauthentic.

What is important to underline here, however, is that the content of Ibsen's dramas seems to have had a greater impact on his contemporary audience than any aesthetic innovations he did achieve. Furthermore, Ibsen also had a direct impact on reality performatively, by putting the issue of women's rights on the stage and generating a debate. By the end of the nineteenth century with the increasing prevalence of naturalism, his social dramas began to be more broadly accepted as the bourgeoisie's self-criticism became more outspoken. Yet at the beginning of the twenty-first century, they still appear to deal with issues relevant to a modern audience. Why?

Ostermeier's productions of *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* and to a slightly lesser extent the more recent *John Gabriel Borkmann* have been a major factor in the success of the Schaubühne in the last ten years. His engagement with the work of Ibsen also forms a significant part of his life's *oeuvre* to date. The productions have toured extensively, won numerous awards, and still play to packed houses (*Hedda Gabler* and *John Gabriel Borkmann* are still in the repertoire at the time of writing).[17] Part of the reason for this success is that the action is transposed to a twenty-first century setting. Ostermeier thus asks the audience to engage with and confront their own world and value systems, and their roots in bourgeois culture. Both *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* are new translations by Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel, while *John Gabriel Borkmann* is a reworked version of Sigurd Ibsen's translation by Marius von Mayenburg, the house writer and dramaturge at the

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[17] Both *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* were invited to the Berlin Theatertreffen. In 2003, *Nora* also one the Austrian Nestroy Prize and Anne Tismer was named *Theater heute*'s actress of the year for her title role in it. In 2006, Katharina Schüttler won the same *Theater heute* award for her role as Hedda Gabler. That production was also named production of the season 2005/2006 by the Berlin-Brandenburg Society for Theatre. The productions toured London, New York, Paris, Dublin, Avignon, Belgrade, Istanbul and Tokyo, as well as many cities around Germany. The Schaubühne filled 81% of seats in 2004, an excellent result. See Aureliana Sorrento, "Trauer tragen", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26.02.2006, p. 24.

Schaubühne. While the structure of the narrative and dialogue is retained, the language has been rendered in today's much less formal register and naturalistic contemporary details added (for example, Nora calls Doctor Rank "Rank" rather than "Doktor" and Tante Jule's hat becomes a "Capi" in *Hedda Gabler*). From the precarity of the life of the young academic Tesman and Hedda's fear of the settled life in an average middle class family in *Hedda Gabler*, through the undercurrent of domestic violence and power games that lurk beneath the sheen of perfection in *Nora*, to *John Gabriel Borkmann*, the banker who has gambled away that perfect middle class security, Ostermeier makes these themes and characters extremely contemporary.

When Ostermeier was made artistic director of the Schaubühne in 1999, he pursued a programme of new writing,[18] while also producing modern interpretations of classic plays by writers such as Shakespeare, Ibsen and Chekhov, as well as some dance.[19] The Schaubühne website describes its artistic aims as follows:

> Maßgeblich für die Spielplanentscheidungen [...] ist der kritisch-analytische, oft politische Blick auf die gesellschaftliche Wirklichkeit und die daraus folgende Befragung der Formen eines zeitgemäßen Realismus' in Inszenierung, Spielweise und Bühnenästhetik. Die Beschäftigung mit den Lebenswelten der heutigen Bundesrepublik umfasst den Blick auf Randgruppen und die Ausgeschlossenen der Gesellschaft genauso wie den ins Zentrum der bürgerlichen Lebenswelt zwischen der neuen Mitte und dem alten Westen Berlins.[20]

The location of the Schaubühne in former West Berlin, at the end of the high-fashion shopping boulevard, the Kurfürstendamm, situates it within a distinctly "bürgerlichen Lebenswelt", as explicitly stated above. The faded bourgeois grandeur and commercialism of the area seems to infiltrate Ibsen's plays – one can easily imagine Nora and Hedda shopping in the nearby Kaufhaus des Westens department store among other wealthy Charlottenburgers. In an interview with Focus magazine, Ostermeier emphasises that while the theatre was associated with "Charlottenburger Zahnärtze" and "Wilmersdorfer Witwen" under Andrea Breth (the former artistic director), their focus on new writing and modern interpretations of the classics has attracted the new, more liberal generation of the educated middle class:

> Die interessanteste Schnittmenge ergibt sich für mich, wenn Eltern, die sich noch an den aufklärerischen Impetus ihrer Studentenzeit erinnern, zusammen mit ihren

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[18] Ostermeier had made his name with new writing at the now defunct Deutsches Theater experimental stage, the Baracke, particularly with young British playwrights such as Sarah Kane.
[19] Since Sascha Waltz left the theatre in 2004, Constanza Macras and her dance group Dorky Park have also regularly performed there.
[20] See the Schaubühne profile: http://www.schaubühne.de/de_DE/house/profile/ (accessed on: 8.4.2011).

schon erwachsenen Söhnen und Töchtern kommen. Das sehe ich bei "Nora" und bei "Hedda Gabler".[21]

This suggests Ostermeier's work attracts a particular milieu of the *Bildungsbürgertum*: those who went to university in the 1960s and 1970s, and probably experienced the events of 1968 in some form but are now part of the establishment, and their adult children. As discussed in chapter two, this group has an ambivalent if not critical or antagonistic relationship to the values of bourgeois culture, and this is perhaps one reason for the success of Ostermeier's Ibsen productions, which are critical of these values.

Nora: the *Musterbarbiepuppenfrau* Takes Revenge

If, in the early bourgeois tragedies of the late eighteenth century such as *Emilia Galotti* and *Kabale und Liebe*, the daughter figures display the "totale Negation ihrer physischen Natur und deren Bedürfnisse, d.h. Triebunterdruckung und Verzicht,"[22] culminating in their physical sacrifice, *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* examine these dutiful daughters' suppression of desire in their adult lives and marriages, and its tragic consequences. While the most important relationship of the bourgeois tragedy is that between father and daughter, in Ibsen's social dramas it is that of the husband and wife, the centre of the bourgeois family. As already briefly discussed and as is well-documented, bourgeois culture redefined the role of the woman as wife and mother, and expected from women an ideal of virtue that was surely impossible to live up to.[23] For the bourgeois subject was of course constructed first and foremost as a male subject. This is another case in point of the antagonism between bourgeois ideals and social reality: until the Weimar Republic was founded in 1919, equality meant only fraternity and the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* excluded half of its citizens from political participation. Furthermore, as women were largely responsible for the cultural, moral and educational *Bildung* of their offspring, it is likely to have been even more intensely frustrating to have been prohibited from full personal development as a woman. Ibsen's women are concrete examples of this problem.

The husband represents the second patriarch, after the father, in the lives of these women, a second order of obedience coupled with sexual availability. Both plays are a terrible warning against basing the middle class institution of family on a loveless marriage of convenience or economics, which was not unusual (as discussed in chapter two). But

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[21] Andres Müry, interview with Thomas Ostermeier, "Berlin ist einfach rabiat", in *Focus*, no. 46 (2007), 12.11.2007, p. 82. In the same interview he says: "Wir spielen bislang 280-mal ausverkauft *Nora* und 150-mal ausverkauft *Hedda Gabler*." For a history of the Schaubühne, see *40 Jahre Schaubühne Berlin*, ed. by Harald Müller and Jürgen Schitthelm (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2002).

[22] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas I*, p. 277.

[23] See for example, Katja Deinhardt and Julia Frindte, "Ehe, Familie und Geschlecht", in *Bürgerliche Werte um 1800*, ed. by Hans-Werner Hahn and Dieter Hein, pp. 253-272.

Ostermeier's productions are set in the present day: surely women are no longer in the same position as they were in Ibsen's time? In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 2006, Ostermeier explains why his work at the time seemed to be dominated by portraits of the middle class family:

> Die bürgerliche Familie ist Ursache vieler Probleme, die wir haben. Und die bürgerliche Vorstellung von Ehe, wie auch andere konservative Rollenmodelle, feiern gerade wieder fröhliche Urständ. Auch das Ideal der bürgerlichen Familie erlebt eine Wiedergeburt. Deshalb muß ich mich heute mit dem beschäftigen, was als altes Allheilmittel angeboten wird, nämlich Familie.[24]

Despite the meritocracy promoted by bourgeois culture, the family was and still is the primary reproductive mechanism of the social order, especially in terms of transferring value systems and cultural capital. It can therefore be seen as a microcosm of a broader system of values. Moreover, though women are no longer forced to adopt the role of wife and mother today, doing so by no means a simple decision and often involves the sacrifice of personal development, or at a least a major career break. There is also still significant cultural pressure on women to have children and some women experience the notorious pressure of the 'ticking biological clock', despite being fulfilled in their careers. In Ostermeier's productions, the system of values identifiable in the microcosm of family is clearly associated with materialism and consumerism. In a paper for *Ibsen Studies* on staging Ibsen, Ostermeier writes that it is economic pressure which is the dramaturgical motor of all of Ibsen's plays and that "this unwavering belief in the power of money destroys all human relationships."[25] Ostermeier also identifies a renaissance of conservative bourgeois values caused by the need for orientation in a world driven solely by economics. This is what makes Ibsen's plays so relevant today in his view.

Ostermeier's *Nora,* which premiered on 26 October 2002 at the Schaubühne in Berlin, was his first major production there to address this particular contemporary social sphere. However, gone are the stuffy nineteenth century drawing rooms and period costumes. Instead the set is a naturalistic model of a stylish, modern house or maisonette apartment with numerous levels, which make it slightly disorientating. The family friend, Dr. Rank (Lars Eidinger), is suffering from AIDS rather than the unnamed syphilis in Ibsen's version, which according to Nora he has contracted during a promiscuous bisexual past. As is the case with Ostermeier's production of *Hedda Gabler*, small touches such as mobile phones and laptops, along with the set design and costumes, locate the characters

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[24] Aureliana Sorrento, "Trauer tragen", in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26.2.2006, p. 24.
[25] Thomas Ostermeier, "Reading and Staging Ibsen", in *Ibsen Studies*, 10 (2010), no. 2, ed. by Frode Helland, pp. 68-74; p. 69.

definitively in our time. In *Nora*, the pervasiveness of new media and technology also becomes a central theme (it is also present in *Hedda Gabler* but to a lesser extent): instead of dancing the traditional Italian Tarantella dressed as a "Neapolitan fisher lass",[26] Nora (played by Anne Tismer) gyrates with glazed eyes to the heavy, hip-hop rock of the American band N.E.R.D., dressed as the computer game character Lara Croft. She constantly adopts a posture of pouting, sexual availability, like a disturbing parody of a child imitating a pop star, to get Torvald's attention away from his laptop and mobile. Esther Slevogt writes in her review of *Nora* in *Die Tageszeitung*:

> Aber die Abgründe klaffen tiefer als je zuvor: Gegen die Gewalt, mit der die Nora von heute unterdrückt wird, ist die Welt der Nora des 19. Jahrhunderts fast noch ein Idyll. Während man diesem bis zur letzten Minute spannenden Theaterthriller zusieht, fällt einem all der mediale Müll ein, der täglich die Körperbilder und Lebensformen nach den Gesetzen des Marktes diktiert. Noras Puppenheim ist heute ein multimediales Gefängnis, aus dem es so leicht kein Entkommen gibt.[27]

Another major theme of Ostermeier's *Nora* is, as mentioned, the spread of economic forces into all aspects of private life. Sexuality is no longer suppressed – in fact the opposite – but is used as an instrument of power, or by Nora as a commodity to exchange with her husband for favours, forgiveness or money. Whatever performances of affection Nora and Torvald Helmer act out together, the reality of their relationship is based on financial and sexual transactions only. These furthermore appear interchangeable, and it is such hidden transactions which emerge in the course of the play.

Ostermeier's Helmers are a typical, successful middle class family with a designer home, three children and a bilingual foreign au pair. The set, designed by Jan Pappelbaum, whose designs are distinctly influenced by architecture,[28] uses wood, steel and glass to create a self-contained house or apartment inserted into the space of the theatre (an open black-box space which can be altered to suit each performance) on a revolving stage, rather than using the three walls of the theatre to create the illusion of a room, the norm in naturalistic productions. This creates the effect of looking through a security camera into a cross-section of a real apartment that has been dropped into the theatre. The set also

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[26] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, in *Four Major Plays*, trans. by James MacFarlane and Jens Arup (Oxford: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 37. For comparison purposes I will refer to this standard, English translation. There is no one standard edition in German and such a variety of translations that an adequate comparison would be an ample task in itself. A good, recent translation is: Henrik Ibsen, *Dramen in einem Band*, ed. and trans. by Heiner Gimmler (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Autoren, 2006). Hinrich Schmidt-Hinkel has also published his translations (the ones used for Ostermeier's productions of *Hedda Gabler* and *Nora*): Henrik Ibsen, *Nora; oder ein Puppenhaus, Hedda Gabler, Baumeister Solness, John Gabriel Borkmann*, trans. by Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel (Reineck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2006).

[27] Esther Slevogt, "Die Leiche im Aquarium", in *Die Tageszeitung* (28.10.2002), available online at: http://www.taz.de/1/archiv/archiv/?dig=2002/11/28/a0132 (accessed on 16.4.2011).

[28] Cf. *Dem Einzelnen ein Ganzes/A Whole for the Parts: Jan Pappelbaum - Bühnen/Stages*, ed. by Anja Dürrschmidt (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006).

contains many contemporary design quotes, such Mies van der Rohe chairs[29] or a large fish tank with Japanese ornamental carp, demonstrating the Helmers' conspicuous performance of distinction.

Torvald Helmer (Jörg Hartmann) has recently been made director of an investment bank and both Torvald and Nora repeatedly emphasise their happiness that they can now start to enjoy the fruits of their labour. It truly has been *their* labour, for unknown to Torvald, Nora has played a major part in their rise to success. As Nora tells Kristine in the first act, Torvald Helmer has worked so hard for success that he became seriously ill, perhaps suffering from 'burnout syndrome',[30] a typical contemporary ailment of the career-driven middle class:

> NORA   [...] Du weisst doch, dass Torvald aus dem Ministerium weg ist, als wir geheiratet haben? Er hatte dort keine Aufstiegsmöglichkeiten, und außerdem musste er nun mehr verdienen als zuvor. Aber in der ersten Zeit hat er sich fürchtbarüberanstrengt. Er musste alle möglichen Nebentätigkeiten annehmen und Tag und Nacht arbeiten. Das war einfach zu viel für ihn, und er wurde todkrank. Die Ärzte meinten, er müsse in den Süden, koste es, was es wolle.[31]

Nora immediately confesses her secret to Kristine that it was she who raised the money by taking a loan from Krogstad, an employee of the bank where Torvald is now director (and an old flame of Kristine's). To guarantee the loan, Nora forged her father's signature and has been secretly paying it off ever since: saving by buying cheaper clothes and working as an editor and translator at night. Nora is very proud of her self-sacrifice, for though her act was a crime, in her eyes she has acted alone (autonomously) to save Torvald's life.

However, in middle class value system, forgery is a cardinal crime as wealth is attained through dishonesty, not hard work.[32] Later, Torvald tells Nora that Krogstad had also been involved forging of signatures (he also blackmails Nora – another white-collar crime). Torvald's judgement of Krogstad rests not on his actual crime however, but on his dishonesty about it, his unwillingness to admit and pay for his crime:

> HELMER   [...] der [Krogstad] hat sich mit lauter Tricks und Kniffen durchgemogelt, und das ist es, das ihn moralisch untragbar macht.[33]

He describes dishonesty as a sickness, a poison, which can ruin an entire household:

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[29] The iconic "Barcelona" design.

[30] Burnout is defined by Maslach et al as a combination of exhaustion, inefficiency and cynicism. See Christina Maslach, Susan E. Jackson, & Michael P. Leiter, *MBI: The Maslach Burnout Inventory: Manual* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, 1996).

[31] Unless otherwise stated, references are to the translation of *Nora* by Hinrich Schmidt-Hinkel, kindly provided to me by the Schaubühne, stating the act and page number. *Nora*, act I, p. 10. Cf. note 24 above.

[32] See Stuart P. Green, *Lying, Cheating, and Stealing: A Moral Theory of White Collar Crime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Cf. also chapters two and three.

[33] *Nora*, act I, p. 28.

> HELMER   [...] dieser Dunstkreis von Unaufrichtigkeit [kann] ein Zuhause
> vergifte[n]. Jeder Atemzug, den die Kinder in so einem Haus tun, ist voller Keime
> [...] Fast alle, die es früh aus der Bahn geworfen hat, hatten verlogene Mütter.[34]

Torvald's misogyny and Nora's lack of autonomy makes her feel as though he is personally addressing her, believing his every word is an irrefutable fact. It is clear this conversation with Torvald first puts the idea of leaving into Nora's mind: she is convinced that she is somehow irreparably harming her children. However, when Torvald learns of Nora's crime, he will be just as willing to be dishonest in order to keep up appearances. This hypocrisy makes Nora see that the bourgeois moral principles she has tried to live by are in fact a lie.

Money is not only the cause and substance of Nora's crime, but a subject constantly discussed in the Helmer household. Almost all of the dialogue in the first act concerns money and work. In the first scene between Nora and Torvald, Torvald will only emerge from his office to see what Nora has bought the children for Christmas and then discusses with her how much more they can afford to spend that year. Nora encourages Torvald to simply take out a loan – a reminder of our modern credit-hungry culture – and tells Torvald that all she wants as a Christmas present is cash. Her first conversation with Kristine also quickly turns to money, when Nora asks whether Kristine's dead husband has left her enough to live on, before expressing any concern for her emotional well-being. Due to her husband's risky investments however, Kristine has been left with very little and therefore needs to find work. Nora's relief over having more financial security is constantly threatened by the figures of Kristine and Krogstad, who remind her that it is just as easy to slide down the social ladder as is it is to rise up it. On the other hand, she is envious of Kristine's independence. This is the reason for her confession: she boasts that she too has worked for herself. While Torvald embodies the protestant ethic of caution and frugality with money, Nora is visibly suffering from anxiety at the prospect of poverty and loss of status. The first sign of this anxiety is when she tells Kristine how happy she is about their new wealth, a line which Anne Tismer delivers through gritted teeth, while falling to her knees and clenching her fists:

> NORA   Nein, nicht nur genug, ich meine richtig viel Geld! So richtig viel
> Geld! Kristine, ich meine richtig viel Geld! So richtig viel Geld![35]

When Nora asks Torvald whether he can help arrange something for Kristine in the bank – with her hand on his crotch, in front of both Rank and Kristine – she inadvertently causes

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[34] *Nora*, act I, p. 29.
[35] Ibid., p. 10.

Krogstad to lose his job at the bank and sets in motion the events which threaten to reveal her own crime. Everything revolves around career, business, shopping and money.

Furthermore, Nora's only means of communication with Torvald seems to be her body. Apart from the constant groping and unbuttoning of her blouse whenever she asks Torvald for anything, in the second act she attempts to divert him from the impending revelation of her crime in Krogstad's letter with a dance she has learned for a Christmas party. This dance has been choreographed by her husband. It was also his idea to dress her as Lara Croft, in hot pants and a vest with two guns in a holster, a projection of male fantasy that combines the sexual and the violent.[36] This sequence reveals what an object, a 'doll' – or even a virtual character of no substance – she is for Torvald and even for Rank. The dance is comprised of repeated robotic movements. She gyrates her pelvis and convulses her body as though an electric current were running through it. She twirls and points a light-sabre sword (bought for her son as a Christmas present) like a cheerleader twirling a baton, and licks it suggestively. Finally, she climbs into the fish tank head first, cutting herself in the process. She ends up bleeding, hair soaked, with her skirt tucked into her underwear, while the men only laugh at her 'enthusiasm', which they believe is for their benefit.

Despite the obvious contemporary references to computer games and pole dancing (the music is the N.E.R.D. song "Lap Dance"[37]), Ostermeier's version of the dance is not as disconnected to Ibsen's original idea as it may first appear. In Ibsen's version, Nora dances the tarantella, a traditional folk dance from Southern Italy, usually danced in couples and accompanied by tambourines. However, its origins are in folk ritual:[38] the dance was believed to cure those bitten by the wolf spider, whose poison was thought to induce an hysterical state. It was danced in a frenzied manner by a solo dancer to intensely rhythmical music for up to twenty-four hours. Later it developed into a traditional courtship dance, but was also used sometimes to 'cure' hysterical or neurotic women.[39] Like the tarantella, Nora's frenzied dance is both a symptom of her oppression and objectification, but is also an expression of the anxiety, pain and desire that she is

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[36] See *Nora*, act II, p. 35.

[37] Some of the lyrics of "Lap Dance" are: "I'm an outlaw, quick on the draw, something you've never seen before, and I dare a motherfucker to come in my face. I got something chrome, I got it from home, and it ain't a microphone, and I dare a motherfucker to come in my face. It's so real, how I feel, it's this society that makes a nigga want to kill." The hook, sung by a woman, is: "Ooh baby, you want me? [...] Well you can get this lap dance here for free." This song seems to express the undercurrent of violence and rage in the Helmer household, and needless to say objectifies women itself.

[38] See Jerri Daboo, *Ritual, Rapture and Remorse. A Study of Tarantism and Pizzica in Salento* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

[39] See Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* (London: Tauris, 1996). Cixous and Clément explore the tarantella as a performace of suppressed female desire, a ritual response to the repression of patriarchy, symbolised by the spider's bite.

experiencing. She also lets herself slip into an almost trancelike state; even when the CD starts to skip her body continues to pulsate in time to the distorted rhythm, until Torvald finally stops it by kicking the stereo.

While on the one hand Nora's body is constantly on display sexually, on the other it is also controlled by Torvald (the famous macaroons are here chocolates which Nora keeps in her handbag). At the same time, any unpleasant aspects of the body are completely denied, especially in Nora and Torvald's handling of Rank's illness and impending death. This reflects the typical bourgeois suppression of the corporeal, though in a modern form. Nora has no qualms about telling Kristine that Rank has slept with both men and women, but yet will not mention his illness by name.

NORA   […] Er leidet an einer gefährlichen Krankheit, er hat –
KRISTINE   Krebs?
NORA   Nein – das andere, du weißt schon. Er war früher ein andere
Mensch mit vielen Geliebten, auch Männern.[40]

Despite liberal opinions, certain subjects remain taboo. When Rank informs Nora that he has carried out extensive tests on himself and that the prognosis is not good, Nora reacts with flippancy and denial. Moreover, Rank describes his "innere[r] Zustand" in financial terms, as "Bankrott". Even as a doctor who surely deals with the body and death every day, Rank seems at first incapable of speaking seriously about his own illness, much less saying how he feels about it. Nora has described Rank as their best friend, and her closeness to him is evident, yet she is also incapable of facing the gravity of the situation and its emotional implications. Her reaction is merely dismissive denial ("Pfui, wie hässlich du redest"), which causes Rank to finally break down and scream, "Die Sache ist verdammt hässlich!" Despite the fact that Nora must identify with Rank – she is also dealing with a grave problem alone – she allows this moment of potential intimacy to pass. Once again the rigid bourgeois system of morals, which demads the suppression of emotions for the sake of appearances, turns out to be damaging to those the characters care about most (as with Odoardo and Emilia). Indeed, once Rank has stopped crying he tells Nora that he does not want any visitors in the final stages of his illness. To signal this point, he will send her his business card marked with a black cross. Nora still refuses to face the possibility, insisting, "Rank, du darfst Torvald und mir nicht einfach wegsterben" and instructing him to be "vernünftig".[41]

To divert them from this uncomfortable subject, Nora deploys her default weapon: her body. She begins a strange reverse striptease, putting on a pair of tights slowly and

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[40] *Nora*, act II, p. 33.
[41] Ibid., p. 41.

allowing Rank to stroke her leg. When Rank seems to be getting a bit too aroused, Nora adopts the role of the dominatrix, chiding him and whipping him with the other stocking. Rank encourages her, laughing:

> RANK   Oh ja. Ja. Geil. Gib's mir, Baby. Geil. Ich komme schon. Ich komme. (*Schreit zum Büro hoch.*) Ich komme, Torvald![42]

Rank's attempt to make it seem like a silly game, and even to include Torvald, is a tactic to avoid being accused of some genuine moral transgression. There are, however, genuine emotions behind it, certainly on Rank's part, as shortly afterwards he confesses that he loves Nora:

> RANK   Ich habe mir geschworen, dass du es wissen sollst (*fährt mit seiner Hand zu ihrem Geschlecht*) bevor ich sterbe. Eine bessere Gelegenheit wird es nicht geben. (*Versucht AT* [Anne Tismer] *zu küssen, hält sie fest, AT windet sich heraus und schnell auf den Steg.*) Scheiße![43]

Bourgeois morality prevents Nora from experiencing true intimacy with Rank, in whatever form, for she is unable to identify what her own feelings might be or question her 'love' for Torvald yet. In fact she dismisses his confession as "überflüssig" – once again more concerned with appearance than reality. She is not taken aback by his actual feelings but merely by his inconvenient confession, which amounts to an admission that she was aware of how he felt and was content to continue living in the triangle of friendship and desire: "Es war gerade so schön."[44] Feelings and desire are thus acceptable and even acknowledged, as long as they are not acted upon. The institution of marriage and the family must be upheld at all costs and even small transgressions are tolerated in order to maintain it. Perhaps Nora's games with Rank are simply a tactic to divert some of her frustration and loneliness; however, within this structure it is impossible for her to develop her own autonomous sexual identity.

Nora's mental anguish and her isolation within the family are also shown in Ostermeier's production by her regularly talking to herself, and her erratic behaviour. At the beginning of the second act, already petrified that Krogstad will act on his threat to reveal her crime, Nora appears on the verge of some kind of breakdown. Hastily she grabs her coat and scarf, but then says:

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[42] *Nora*, act II, p. 42. Obviously this is one instance where the translator has taken some liberty with the script, though when he does so it is a rarely a major departure. In the standard English translation, Nora also slaps him with the stocking and calls him "naughty" when he asks what other "delights" he might see. Cf. Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, in *Four Major Plays*, translated by James McFarlane, act II, p. 47.

[43] *Nora*, act II, p. 43. Reading Ibsen's original, one might wonder whether Rank is not simply motivated by sexual attraction, but Lars Eidinger's portrayal of Rank suggests genuine feelings and suffering, particularly in his last scene after the party.

[44] Ibid., p. 44.

NORA   Da kommt jemand! Nein, niemand. Natürlich – heute kommt
niemand, am ersten Weihnachtstag; – und morgen auch nicht. – Aber vielleicht –
Nein, nichts ist im Briefkasten, ganz leer. Ach dummes Zeug! Er macht nicht Ernst.
Sowas kann ja gar nicht sein. Unmöglich. Schließlich habe ich drei Kinder.[45]

She is also extremely jumpy. Still lost in thought, she is startled when the au pair comes in.
Alone again a short time later, she returns to the same train of thought ("Wenn ich mich
nur aus dem Haus trauen würde"[46]) but again tries to convince herself that nothing will
happen:

NORA   Nur nicht so viel nachdenken. [...] Den Mantel sauber machen.
(Sieht ihre Hände an.) Schöne Hände, das sind aber schöne Hände. [...] Nicht dran
denken, nicht dran denken!
AT starrt ihre Hände an, hebt die Hände in Gesichtshöhe, dreht sie langsam mit
geöffneten Fingern in entgegengesetzte Richtungen, dreht sich selbst allmählich
langsam im Uhrzeigersinn (etwa eine dreiviertel Drehung).[47]

Once more she is interrupted (this time by Kristine) and screams in surprise. Later, while
decorating the Christmas tree, she tries to hug it, repeating, "Das ist aber ein schöner
Baum," and then tries to put a tree-branch into her mouth, until she is interrupted by
Torvald.[48] Only Kristine and the au pair show any concern about Nora's behaviour and
Torvald simply dismisses her episodes as "Hirngespenster", but Ostermeier's direction
makes it clear that Nora from serious anxiety problems.[49] Once again this demonstrates the
bourgeois unwillingness to confront difficult emotional subjects, and also the irrationality
of madness.

Despite the contemporary language and the many modern design elements, in
general Ostermeier closely follows the structure of Ibsen's original narrative. The ending,
however, is a radical departure and a controversial one for some audiences.[50] In the final
scene between Nora and Torvald, the undercurrent of violence that has been detectable
throughout finally bubbles to the surface. Jörg Hartmann plays Torvald as stern but jovial,
and despite the occasional signal of controlling behaviour and his patronising and
objectifying pet names for Nora, he carefully maintains the role of loving husband, even

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[45] Nora, act II, p. 31.
[46] Ibid., p. 32.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Nora, act I, p. 26.
[49] Some psychologists argue that depression and anxiety are not (only) caused by genes, but by certain
modern forms of capitalism and materialism. See for example Tim Kassner, The High Price of Materialism
(Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002). Ostermeier also writes that "our materialistic view of the world can be
re-discovered as symptoms in our bodies", mentioning burnout syndrome, diseases of the nervous system and
depression. See Thomas Ostermeier, "Reading and Staging Ibsen", in Ibsen Studies, 10 (2010), no. 2, p. 70.
[50] Charles Isherwood, reviewing the play for The New York Times when it toured there, felt that Ostermeier's
ending "has drawn a veil across Nora's spiritual awakening". See Charles Isherwood, "A Nora Who Goes
Beyond Closing Her Prison's Door", in The New York Times, 11.11.2004, Arts section, p. 3.

occasionally displaying apparently genuine affection (for example when they embrace at the end of act two after Nora's dance). At the end, however, he reveals a harsh side, which suggests that Nora may have actually been suffering genuine domestic abuse.

Knowing that Nora only has a few hours left before Torvald discovers the letter and she carries out her plan of suicide, Torvald physically drags Nora away from the party. They arrive through the front door with Nora clinging to everything around her and begging for "noch ein Stündchen".[51] Torvald is dressed in a dinner suit but wearing giant rubber ears, makeup and a red wig with a bald spot, which make him look truly monstrous; Nora is again dressed as Lara Croft, complete with fake bruising and cuts. He 'playfully' but aggressively throws Nora onto the floor and begins growling and clawing at the air, while Nora plays along, screaming helplessly and shooting at him with her toy guns.

When Rank, dressed as an angel, calls to the door, Torvald is visibly irritated that his conjugal rights have been postponed. Rank is so drunk he vomits into the fish tank[52] and then drunkenly kisses Nora before leaving and putting the business card announcing his death into the letter box. Torvald treats his friend with contempt for losing control, swearing at him and throwing him out, and then reacts callously to the news of his impending death:

> HELMER   […] Er war so eine Art bewölkter Hintergrund für unser sonniges Glück mit seinem Leiden und seiner Einsamkeit. – Tja, vielleicht ist es so am besten. Für ihn jedenfalls. Und für uns vielleicht auch, Nora.[53]

This is all merely a prelude to his true cruelty however. After he reads the letter revealing what Nora has done, he violently throws Nora on the day bed and interrogates her like a criminal, which indeed is what he calls her in his tirade, telling her that she disgusts him, spewing out a distorted form of the word "Liebe" and sticking out his tongue in a disturbing gesture of physical repulsion.[54] He takes the blanket she is holding and hits her with it; Nora cowers like a child, repeating, "Nicht schlagen, bitte nicht schlagen", which suggests that perhaps she has been beaten before.[55] His selfish concern for his reputation knows no bounds. When Nora tells him she will kill herself, he only says:

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[51] *Nora*, act III, p. 59.

[52] Despite watching this section of video repeatedly, I am still baffled as to how this was acheieved, for it really appears that Lars Eidinger actually vomits.

[53] *Nora*, act III, p. 66.

[54] Ibid., p. 68.

[55] This line is not in the script. In Ibsen's original, it is clear that Nora's father treated her in a similar manner to Torvald: "I passed out of daddy's hands into yours […] You and daddy did me a great wrong. It's your fault I've never made anything of my life", see McFarlane and Arup translation, act III, p. 80. Ostermeier seems to play down this pattern of abuse, by cutting all explicit negative comments she makes about her father: this line is directed solely at Torvald, see *Nora* (Schaubühne version), act III, p. 72. I assume this is because Ostermeier felt this may have laboured the point a little too strongly for a contemporary audience.

> HELMER   Dummes Gerede. Was würde es mir nutzen, wenn du aus der Welt wärst, wie du es nennst? Nicht das Geringste.[56]

He tells her hypocritically that they must cover up the truth at any cost and continue to perform their marriage, but that Nora will be forbidden from bringing up the children. But in the next moment, after reading Krogstad's second letter informing them of his change of heart, Torvald reverts to his usual self, calling her "mein erschrockenes kleines Singvögelchen".[57] Nora now sees how shallow this performance really is.

    Nora's 'transformation' is extremely moving and credible under Ostermeier's direction. Symbolically, she changes out of her costume and insists on having their first serious conversation.[58] The sing-song, girlish tone of her voice is gone, though there is still the odd tremble. Nora does not transform into another person; she merely drops the mask that has cost her so much energy to keep in place. She has seen the reality of their relationship and rips down the facade of their life in a few sentences:

> NORA   Du hast mich nie geliebt. Es hat dir nur Spaß gemacht, in mich verliebt zu sein. [...] Du hast alles nach deinem Geschmack eingerichtet, und mein Geschmack hat sich deinem angepasst; oder ich habe nur so getan, ich weiß nicht ganz. – Ich habe davon gelebt, dir Kunststückchen vorzuführen, Torvald. Aber du hast es so gewollt. Du hast dich schwer an mir versündigt. Du bist schuld, dass aus mir nichts geworden ist. [...] Unser Zuhause war nie mehr als ein Musterbarbiepuppenhaus. Und ich war deine Musterbarbiepuppenfrau. Mir hat es Spaß gemacht, wenn du mit mir spieltest. Das war unsere Ehe, Torvald.[59]

Torvald's deeply patronising suggestion is to end these games and begin with her "Erziehung". When she tells him she is leaving him, he simply tries to forbid her from doing it. When this tactic fails, Torvald beseeches her with every reason he can think of: the opinion of others, her "Pflichten", appealing to her "moralisches Gefühl", and finally resorts to telling her she must be unwell. But Nora remains steadfast:

> NORA   [...] in diesem Augenblick wurde mir klar, dass ich hier acht Jahre lang neben einem fremden Mann gelebt und mit ihm drei Kinder bekommen habe. (*Schlägt auf die Sessellehne, hält beide Hände, als würde sie ihn erwürgen wollen, dreht sich wieder ab und Bartreppe hoch.*) Ich kann den Gedanken nicht ertragen! Ich könnte mich selbst in Stücke reißen![60]

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[56] *Nora*, act III, p. 68.

[57] Ibid., p. 70.

[58] See Ibid., p. 71.

[59] Ibid., p. 71f.

[60] Ibid., p. 75.

Torvald's final desperate attempt is a cliché: a promise to change. But Nora ignores him and goes up to the office to get her things; Torvald follows her to the top of the stairs, calling after her.

Then Nora reappears on the landing with a gun and aims it at Torvald.[61] He stares up at her in disbelief, but Nora pulls the trigger and fires repeatedly, perhaps ten shots. Heavy hip-hop rock forms the soundtrack to her violent revenge, beginning with the words "fucking posers".[62] Torvald falls backwards and collapses on top of the fish tank and dies slowly, his blood seeping into the water. As Nora carefully wipes the pistol clean of fingerprints, the terrified au pair pushes the children through the front door. As the stage begins to turn again, Nora gets her coat and leaves through the front door. The final image is of the front of the house (the rear half of the stage) with Nora leaning against the front door, head in hands.

Is this emancipation? By turning the gun on Torvald, Ostermeier certainly achieves a shock factor that comes close to what Ibsen's audiences are likely to have experienced when the play was first performed. This does not mean that Ostermeier condones this violence, rather he restores the play's tragic ending. A modern Nora may find it difficult and painful to leave her husband, but would certainly have more chances in life than a woman starting out by herself in the nineteenth century. Ibsen's ending is therefore sad, but not particularly tragic in a contemporary context. Here, Nora's act not only takes the life of her husband, her prison warden, and physically destroys that prison, her marriage, but in so doing she also destroys her own life and, as if in terrible confirmation of Torvald's prediction, those of her children.

The use of the hip-hop rock with its extremely violent lyrics also forms a link between Nora's lap dance and her murder of Torvald. In the Helmers' highly mediatised world – our world – violence is aestheticised and 'theatricalised': from pop music to toys, to film, television and the media. How can ideals defeat such an onslaught from all sides? Furthermore, in their bourgeois pursuit of status and wealth, these individuals have become so functionalised (as wife, bank director, even Dr Rank as a 'friend') that they neglect their own and other's individual needs. Once again bourgeois empathy seems no longer to function; individualism has taken over. Indeed, Ibsen wrote this play at a time when the bourgeoisie were extremely concerned about their status as a class, and when as a result they began to turn away from their original democratic ideals and towards ultimately violent nationalism.

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[61] The gun itself had appeared first in act II, when Torvald proudly shows it to Nora, saying he needed it as protection because of his important new position, giving it to her to lock away. *Nora*, act II, p. 35.
[62] Again the music is N.E.R.D., this time the song is "Rock Star".

The ideals of marriage and family, the purpose of which was to uphold bourgeois culture and society, are shown to involve the systematic exploitation and oppression of Nora,[63] which she has partly enabled by internalising bourgeois culture's expectations of her – she fulfils her duty at the cost of her own desire and self-development. Bourgeois culture thus creates the conditions of violence. Ostermeier's Nora cannot free herself from Torvald through "spiritual transcendence"[64] or the pursuit of an ideal of self-awareness and her own *Bildung*, another middle class doctrine: this Nora violently destroys the structure which enabled her to play the "Musterbarbiepuppenfrau" in the first place.

While some critics disliked the new ending, others felt that Ostermeier's references to popular culture went too far, becoming incorporated into the aesthetic of the performance rather than functioning as criticism of media-saturated society. Rüdiger Schaper writes:

> Bürgerlichkeit scheint dem Theater jetzt gut zu tun. "Nora" aber hat mit ihrer unterkühlten Betriebstemperatur – und das ist die eigentliche Erklärung des Erfolgs – einen Sieg errungen, der vielleicht ein Pyrrhussieg ist. Hier wird einmal nicht – wie sonst so oft und überall seit Jahren – das allmächtige Fernsehen parodiert oder attackiert. Hier versöhnt sich das Theater mit seinem Erbfeind, dem TV. Diese "Nora" ist die allerschönste Soap. Fünf Jahre neue Schaubühne: schlechte Zeiten, gute Zeiten.[65]

While I agree with Schaper that there is something "kühl" about Ostermeier's realism, it does not however represent a 'soap opera aesthetic'. There is certainly a well-designed cinematic quality to the naturalism of his work,for example the audience's voyeuristic viewpoint of this family's life in the self-contained architecture of the stage, as described above. Between scenes, the use of the revolving stage with the music coming up and the lights going down functions like a film dissolve, normally used in film-making to indicate the passing of time. The turning of the stage is also reminiscent of a camera zooming out or turning around a scene, such as when Torvald takes photos of Nora in a doll positions, and they gradually slip from our view, though we can still hear their voices under the music.

However, Ostermeier also uses many theatrical devices: the revolving stage itself is of course such a device. Ostermeier also projects family photographs while the stage is

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[63] Herlinde Nitsch Ayers points out that, in a historical context, Nora's crime is only a crime because bourgeois society does not recognise her as a full legal citizen. She cannot take out a loan, work or earn her own money without her husband's permission. In effect, this forces her to lie and resort to illegal means. See Herlinde Nitsch Ayers, *Selbstverwirklichung/Selbstverneinung: Rollenkonflikte im Werk von Hebbel, Ibsen and Strindberg* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995), p. 77.

[64] Another American critic, Michael Feingold, gave the play a bad review in *The Village Voice*, primarily because of the ending, which he felt killed "Nora's spiritual transcendence". See Michael Feingold, "Nora Gets Her Gun", *Village Voice*, 9.11.2004. Available online at: http://www.villagevoice.com/2004-11-09/theater/nora-gets-her-gun/ (accessed on 16.4.2011).

[65] Rüdiger Schaper, "Nora et Labora", in *Der Tagespiegel* (15.1.2005), p. 25.

revolving, providing a non-naturalistic moment. Nora's dance is also very theatrical, but there are other similar physical scenes, such as when Nora and the au pair play guns with the children in strobe lighting, or when they look for Nora's costume and the au pair puts on a clown hat, moving robotically to the circus-like music, in surreal red and blue light. The function of Ostermeier's 'pop' quotes is not to incorporate the 'TV aesthetic' or condone the violence in some of the music, but to shed light on the 'theatricality' or 'mediality' which pervades contemporary life, forcing individuals to adopt certain roles and live up to expectations propagated through various media (for example Nora's display and use of her body as a commodity). Nora's life is indeed like a bad soap opera or a photoshoot from a lifestyle magazine. Furthermore, through his precise direction and the physical proximity of the audience to these characters in actual space of the theatre, Ostermeier achieves an intensely emotional effect.[66] It is one thing to witness violence on a film or TV screen, but quite another to see it close up, even if the audience knows it is only illusion. If the focus in traditional productions tends to be on the morality of Nora's act, in Ostermeier's it is clearly the economies of sex, career and images that combine to push Nora into an ultimately self-destructive act, from which there can be no redemption.

Shortly after *Nora*, Ostermeier also directed Franz Xaver Kroetz' *Wunschkonzert*, a 'silent monologue' depicting the suicide of a middle-aged woman living alone, also played by Anne Tismer. In an interview, Ostermeier stated that he viewed this as a kind of sequel or epilogue to *Nora*.[67] For what awaits Nora beyond her front door? Probably a prison sentence, certainly terrible guilt and pain caused by the loss of her children. It does not seem unlikely that she might eventually also turn the gun on herself. As Kroetz wrote of his play:

> Würde die explosive Kraft dieser massiven Ausnutzung und Unterdrückung sich nicht, leider, gegen die Unterdrückten und Ausgenützten selbst richten, so hätten wir die revolutionäre Situation. So haben wir nur viele Fälle von kleinen, törichten Selbstmorden und Morden.[68]

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[66] Though this scene is shocking and violent, it can be described as similar to the emotional reactions in the bourgeois theatre described in chapter three. It is 'moving' because the audience sympathises with Nora, who is played very effectively as an authentic psychological individual by Anne Tismer.

[67] With the German culture channel ARTE, in the programme *Kultur*, 18.3.2004. A production of *Ghosts*, the play that Ibsen himself regarded as the follow-up to *Nora*, was also produced at the Schaubühne not long afterwards in 2007, but was directed by Sebastian Nübling, not Ostermeier.

[68] Cited on the Schaubühne website, in the description of *Wunschkonzert* under the rubric Repertoire: http://schaubuehne.de/de_DE/program/repertoire/8684 (accessed on 25.4.11).

Hedda Gabler: the Suffocated Individual

While the Helmers and the Borkmanns represent the *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* in a historical context, and perhaps in contemporary terms the *nouveau riche* of financial derivatives and property speculation, in *Hedda Gabler*, which premiered on 26 October 2005, Ostermeier puts the other main segment of middle class German society under the microscope, the *Bildungsbürgertum*. Hedda Gabler (played by Katharina Schüttler), the local beauty from a military family, has married Jürgen Tesman (Lars Eidinger), a young academic hoping for a professorship. As Tesman desperately struggles for academic success and security, Hedda soon realises that she does not fit into the roles of wife and mother she has chosen. The apparently 'perfect' life quickly becomes a stifling prison. Tesman is completely absorbed in his obscure research subject, "mittelalterliche Kunsthandwerk in Brabant,"[69] of no interest to anyone but himself, especially not to Hedda. Like Nora, Hedda is an object of desire for every male character in the play and here once again the patriarchy of bourgeois culture results in violence.

Jan Pappelbaum's ingenious set has a glass wall dividing the revolving stage from left to right. On the right is what appears to be a raw concrete wall, creating the living room space to its left (which takes up most of the stage), but with two walls missing (the 'fourth wall' and on the very left). The space behind the glass wall, on the rear part of the stage, functions as an outside, the garden of Hedda's 'dream home'. An especially beautiful and poignant effect is created by water trickling down this wall between two sheets of glass. This perfectly evokes the boredom of a rainy day when there is nothing to do but stare out the window, as Hedda regularly does. The glass wall is constructed from sliding panels which can be opened. This is the entrance used by the family friend and lawyer Brack (Jörg Hartmann), who constantly drops in through 'the back door'. The small space to the right of the concrete wall represents a hallway leading to the Tesmans' bedrooms. Ostermeier cleverly uses this hidden space for one of the only scenes in which Hedda and Tesman really argue (over money needless to say), and to great dramatic effect when Hedda kills herself. Some scenes are played in the garden, such as Brack's interrogation of Hedda after Løvborg's death, with the end of the conversation taking place in the living room with the stage in reverse, so that the audience does not hear Brack's final 'deal' with Hedda. Also, when Løvborg arrives at the Tesmans, Brack and Tesman go out to the garden to drink their pre-dinner champagne, heightening the dramatic tension of

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[69] Once again, references are to the script kindly provided to me by the Schaubühne, which divides the play into acts only. Like *Nora*, it is a new translation by Hinrich Schmidt-Henkel. *Hedda Gabler*, act i, p. 6. Brabant is a tiny region in Belgium and Holland.

Hedda and Løvborg's first reunion against the backdrop of her husband and Brack chuckling in the garden.

Once again Pappelbaum has 'installed' an architectural interior and used many design quotes in his set. The expensive-looking green sofa which dominates the minimalist living room (the only other decoration is two vases of flowers) is a slick modern design, the floor is polished black granite, and Tesman's laptop is an Apple Macbook, underlining a particular modern bourgeois milieu keen on displaying their good taste through expensive décor and products. The sofa serves as one of the subtle devices which characterise Ostermeier's deft direction: almost every time Hedda sits down like a sulking teenager, she removes one of the pillows in order to be able to slouch properly. The pillow is then constantly replaced by Tesman – this one of the minute but significant battlefields of domestic life, a pointless and repetitive conflict with no possibility of resolution.

The use of concrete and glass echo modernist architecture, in particular the iconic Farnsworth House designed and built in 1951 by Mies van der Rohe near Plano, Illinois for Dr. Edith Farnsworth.[70] The house typifies the open plan architecture that is so common now and the interior is exposed on all sides by glass walls. Despite its huge success with critics (it is now a museum), Dr. Farnsworth complained that she felt exposed and constantly watched in the house.[71] The same holds true for Hedda in her own glass cage – there seems be no escape from the male gaze and, though she has her own bedroom, no real privacy. This is underlined by a huge mirror, hanging from the ceiling of the stage at a tilt, providing the audience with a second bird's eye perspective of the action, which means that even if Hedda retreats to the hidden corridor or the garden, she is still under observation, a voyeurism in which the audience is complicit. Hedda is thus forced to be constantly available as a sexual object to look at, which can be linked to a new form of patriarchy in contemporary culture: the ubiquituous sexualisation and objectification of women in images.

The play opens just after Hedda and Jürgen Tesman have returned to their new designer home from their honeymoon, which Tesman has used as a research trip. The finances to pay for this glass and concrete palace have been arranged by Brack, and involved Tesman's aunt Jule securing the loan with her pension, highlighting that modern bourgeois 'security' is often based on credit. This gamble is based on Tesman's

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[70] I am grateful to Professor Jörg Wiesel for indentifying this connection and for pointing out the 'menace' of the open plan house at a lecture in the Freie Universität Berlin in Autumn of 2008.

[71] "Do I feel implacable calm? ...The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. […] I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night." Dr. Edith Farnsworth, cited in Alice T. Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House: a Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 141.

assumption that he will be awarded his professorship, which he claims has been virtually promised. But in the opening scene, he learns that his old friend Eilert Løvborg (Kay Bartholomäus Schulze), has just written a book on "die Entwicklung der Kultur",[72] which is causing waves in the academic community and may put Tesman's professorship at risk. Tesman is outraged and feels that as a married man, he has more right to the security of the position than Løvborg, who has only recently given up a life of heavy drinking and partying. Tesman, the navel-gazing expert in fumbling around dusty old archives, is distinctly contrasted to the ragged but passionate Løvborg, whose follow-up work will focus on nothing less than the future of culture. Tesman and Løvborg therefore represent two poles of the *Bildung* ideal, Humboldt's "Einsamkeit und Freiheit": Tesman is dedicated and disciplined, working alone without much passion or creativity, while Løvborg is charismatic and creative, but has required the help of another (Thea) to carry out the actual work. By themselves, both of these aspects represent a corruption of *Bildung*: Tesman is nothing but a *Fachidiot*, while Løvborg is too bohemian to conform to the role of professor – even if he could keep producing work by himself.

Though Tesman does not realise it, Løvborg is also a threat with regard to Hedda, due to a relationship in their youth. Lars Eidinger plays Tesman with equal portions of well-mannered kindness and worldly stupidity. It seems he is somehow programmed to be nice to everyone, including his rival, and to doggedly carry out his research, though he has never stopped to question why. His comic reaction to almost everything that happens, "Stell dir mal vor!",[73] gives the impression that everything beyond his cosy circumstances is a surprise beyond his wildest imagination. He thus not only makes an easy target for Hedda's manipulation, but is so focused on mundane matters that he fails to notice the real threats to his situation. Not only Løvborg, but also the family friend and solicitor Brack (Jörg Hartmann) is also extremely interested in Hedda. At one point Tesman walks in when Brack practically has his hand up her skirt, but merely ignores it and changes the subject out of politeness.

His fear of financial insecurity is however exhibited in his panic when he learns of Eilert Løvborg's recent success. The precarious life of the young academic is still surely an issue for today's academic classes and the competition and jealousy between Tesman and Løvborg (though Tesman admits Løvborg's work is brilliant) is also regrettably still a feature of today's universities, perhaps even more so in our intensely competitive culture.

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[72] *Hedda Gabler*, act I, p. 14.

[73] At one point towards the end, when Hedda is in the garden with Brack, he rushes out and says: "Du, Hedda – ich bräuchte mal 'ne Schere. Stell dir vor!", *Hedda Gabler*, act IV, p. 76. Also more poignantly, he says the same thing when he hears the gun shot in Hedda's room: "Jetzt hat sie sich erschossen. Stell dir mal vor!", ibid., p. 80.

Tesman's worries are laid to rest however when, at drinks before Brack's fateful "Männerabend", Løvborg informs him that he will not even be applying for the professorship, so certain is he that once his next book is published, his career will be secured. To the audience this appears as yet another defeat for Tesman, showing him up as *spießig* – Løvborg is so confident that he is not concerned over some small-town professorship, and his passion for his work seems to override job security worries in any case (though much of this may be bravado).

Løvborg has not worked alone on *magnum opus*, however. He has been aided by Thea Elvsted (Annedore Bauer), another friend from Hedda and Tesman's youth (this time Tesman's old flame). Thea is married to an older man, and lives far from the town – another marriage of convenience – and Løvborg has been working for Thea's husband as a tutor to his children from a previous marriage, enabling he and Thea carry out 'his' research together. That they are having an affair is made clear later from Thea's emotional reactions and confirmed by her revelation to Hedda that she has left her husband. Thea demonstrates, however, that her feelings for Løvborg are almost indistinguishable from her feelings about the project. The only occasion she loses control of herself is towards the end, when she finds out that Løvborg has 'lost' the laptop, and yet she recovers fairly quickly from Løvborg's death once she and Tesman realise they may be able to recreate the document from notes. This also places a question mark over how much Thea has actually contributed to the book. Løvborg's fragile state, as well as her belief that it can be recreated after it has been lost, implies that Thea was at least an equal collaborator. Thea is thus another example of a woman whose potential and intellectual ability have been frustrated and unfulfilled, opting to marry someone she does not love in order to survive, and to pursue her academic ambitions as a mere research assistant for a man (and one of not particularly high social standing). While this may seem a little anachronistic, it is a fact that there are still far fewer female professors than male.[74] Also, the contemporary context implies these women have chosen these situations, and this makes them all the more tragic.

Once again Ostermeier's realism incorporates both cinematic and theatrical elements. The revolving stage is used again to similar effect as in *Nora*. The dreamy music from the Beach Boys' album *Pet Sounds* creates a consistent cinematic soundtrack throughout, and is used particularly between acts when the stage revolves, once again recalling a dissolve. When the stage is revolving, video is projected onto the concrete wall rendering the images slightly out of focus and dreamlike. This footage adds another

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[74] See German Federal Statistics Office, "Professoren und Professorinnen an deutschen Hochschulen 1999 bis 2009", available on http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/160365/umfrage/professoren-und-professorinnen-an-deutschen-hochschulen/ (accessed on 17.4.2011).

dimension of meaning to the play. Early on, we see footage of Hedda driving around the city in the back of a taxi and of leafy quiet streets in an affluent neighbourhood, which a Berlin audience would no doubt recognise. Later, while Hedda and Thea wait for the men to return from the party, video images of Løvborg dancing in a nightclub (with the pulse of heavy bass in the background) call to mind Berlin's notorious nightlife rather than three men sitting around drinking cognac. In the same scene, Hedda leaves Thea asleep on the sofa and footage is shown of Hedda scrambling through a forest, in the greenish tinge of film shot at night. The video thus provides a glimpse of the characters' loneliness outside of the stylish apartment and also provides three images of temporary and futile escape.

Hedda Gabler is a deeply complex female protagonist, one who tends to divide audiences into those who view her as manipulative and cold-hearted, and those who sympathise with her as a woman trapped in a loveless marriage.[75] Hedda is of course both of these things and more besides: stubborn, cowardly, intelligent, desperate, lonely, violent, frustrated, idealistic – she is a mixed character if ever there was one, full of contradictions and paradoxes. Early critics found this far from ideal portrayal of a woman hard to stomach; indeed some found the play incomprehensible because of its unsympathetic protagonist.[76] The English critic Clement Scott wrote of Hedda:

> She had made vice attractive by her art. She has almost ennobled crime… She has glorified an unwomanly woman. She has made a heroine out of a sublimated sinner. She has fascinated us with a savage.[77]

In Ostermeier's production, the pubescent looking Katharina Schüttler plays Hedda with precisely this balance of girlish naivety, manipulative flirtation and an unnerving violent streak. Yet she remains detached and aloof despite evincing an awareness of the reality of her situation (an awareness which Nora does not have). Indeed, except towards the end (which can be viewed as some form of breakdown), Hedda consistently demonstrates a high level of intelligence, no doubt the main reason for her desperate boredom.[78]

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[75] Joan Templeton notes in her review of reception history that there have been numerous attempts to psychoanalyse Hedda as pathologically disturbed, sexually neurotic or hysteric. See Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, pp. 206-210. In his famous production of *Hedda Gabler* (London, 1970), Ingmar Bergman implied that Hedda was frigid and that her associated fear of pregnancy was the motivation for her suicide. See Herlinde Nitsch Ayers, *Selbstverwirklichung/Selbstverneinung*, p. 94. Nitsch Ayers asserts that it tends to be women critics who sympathise with Hedda's social situation, ibid. Cf. note 96 below.

[76] See Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, pp. 204-206.

[77] Clement Scott cited in Simon Williams, "Ibsen and the Theatre 1877-1900", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ibsen*, p. 170.

[78] Hedda's identification with her father has often been postulated (cf. Herlinde Nitsch Ayers, *Selbstverwirklichung/Selbstverneinung*, p. 95, and Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, p. 230). She is shown as competitive in arguments, a good shot with a weapon, admiring of courageous acts and is described in Ibsen's version as being a good horse-rider. The conclusion often drawn is that Hedda has inherited these male traits, including her intelligence, from her father. Rather than emphasising the origin of these traits as

It is clear she is uncomfortable with intimacy with her husband, although this is hardly surprising, for while Tesman may be not as dominant as Torvald, he also treats Hedda like a child. For example, he holds Hedda on his lap at one point, squeezing her rather than hugging her; she immediately reacts by biting his hand. This violence masquerading as playfulness seems to provide her the only respite from her role as 'the beautiful Hedda' and an outlet for her anger. On another occasion, at the opening of act two, she casually shoots at the vases in her apartment. When Brack appears at the back door, she 'playfully' aims and shoots at him. Brack narrowly escapes injury by ducking behind the wall, but then merely laughs and scolds her like a naughty child. Her playfulness becomes more serious when she offers the bereft and drunken Løvborg one of her pistols,[79] when he comes to the house in the early hours to tell Thea he has lost the laptop. Her most significant violent act before her suicide is of course the destruction of Eilert and Thea's 'child', the book. In one of the most powerful scenes of the production, rather than burn a paper manuscript in a fire, Hedda smashes a laptop to pieces with a hammer and then subsequently burns it on the barbeque, which she later calmly confesses to Tesman:

HEDDA	Ich habe ihn zerhackt, mit dem Hammer – er ist völlig zerstört.
TESMAN	Zerhackt! Du hast Eilerts Rechner zerhackt!
HEDDA	Und danach hab ich die Reste im Garten verbrannt.
TESMAN	Nee! Das glaub ich jetzt nicht!
HEDDA	Ist aber so.
	Tesman geht durch die rechte Glastüre auf die Terasse.
HEDDA	Auf 'm Grill![80]

Hedda's violent behaviour is generally accepted by the other characters as childish playfulness or here by Tesman as a demonstration of love, though at first he is appalled at such irrational behaviour. Once again therefore, the other characters ignore the signs of her anguish. Her behaviour is a clear cry for help, an attention-seeking device to force those around her to notice her as an individual, rather than simply as the trophy wife. It is also a rebellion and a provocation, an attempt to push the boundaries of her existence so far that the entire structure might collapse, a goal she will ultimately achieve by turning this violent streak on herself. Ostermeier very clearly criticises this specific aspect of the modern middle class family in both *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler*: both women's extremely erratic behaviour is simply ignored or laughed off, the symptoms of their suffering swept under the carpet, in both cases with tragic consequences.

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male and abnormal for a woman, I would argue that Hedda simply does not conform to the bourgeois ideal of femininity in her individuality and intelligence and is therefore subversive to bourgeois culture.
[79] The drunkenness is brilliantly played by Kay Bartholomäus Schulze.
[80] *Hedda Gabler*, act ɪᴠ, p. 68. The burning of the laptop on the barbeque is not shown to the audience.

Some types from the early bourgeois tragedy can be identified in *Hedda Gabler*: the loving but oppressive father is replaced by the oppressively doting husband Jürgen Tesman, the seducer by Brack and the idealist by Løvborg.[81] The bourgeois ideal of family is presented in a distorted and 'perverted' form, also typical of bourgeois tragedy.[82] While the Helmers are a typical couple with three children, the Tesmans do not at all represent the traditional bourgeois family. Hedda's father General Gabler is dead, and no mention is made of her mother.[83] Likewise, Tesman does not seem to have any parents, though his aunt Jule functions as a mother figure for him.[84]

Hedda and Jürgen have no children and the prospect of pregnancy seems to disgust and terrify Hedda, as I have already briefly mentioned. While in Ibsen's original, Hedda's pregnancy is only implied, here it is explicitly stated. Hedda tells her husband that she is pregnant immediately after her confession that she has destroyed the manuscript, no doubt to distract Tesman from what she has just done. Hedda's horror about her pregnancy is based on a fear that her life as an individual will end if she becomes a mother. The social pressure on her to do so is clear from Tante Jule's constant dropping of hints in the first scene. Tesman is overjoyed and runs out to the garden to shout in jubilation, but Hedda's first words following this confession are: "Ach, es bringt mich alles noch um – all das hier bringt mich noch um."[85]

Ibsen's Hedda is denied self-development, let alone fulfilment of her intellectual potential through work, by rigidly prescribed social roles. Ostermeier's contemporary Hedda may be allowed to pursue her individual goals, but this does not make the prospect of ending this pursuit to be Tesman's wife and a mother any less devastating for her.[86] In fact, it may make the situation even more devastating and is perhaps a reason why she romanticises her youth and Løvborg (see below). Whether or not Hedda is thinking of her own pregnancy when she destroys the laptop[87] is less important than the fact that she

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[81] For example, Ferdinand in *Kabale und Liebe* can be seen as an idealist figure. See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Geschichte des Dramas I*, p. 283f.

[82] See Albrecht Koschorke et al, *Vor der Familie: Grenzbedingungen einer modernen Institution* (Constance: Constance University Press, 2010), pp. 14-16 and pp. 29-38. Koschorke et al argue that the bourgeois family has never existed in its ideal form. From the very beginning of the emergence of this ideal (at the end of the eighteenth century), it has been portrayed in literature as a "beschädigter, transitorischer und exzentrischer Raum", for example in the bourgeois tragedy, see ibid. p. 16.

[83] Absent mothers are another feature of bourgeois tragedy. Cf. Gail K. Hart, *Tragedy in Paradise*.

[84] In Ostermeier's version the maid Berthe has been cut and there is no mention of a second aunt, but the sentimentality with which Tesman accepts Jule's gift of his old slippers in the opening scene tells the audience that he has grown up with her.

[85] *Hedda Gabler*, act IV, p. 69.

[86] It should be emphasised that this is experienced as devastating *for Hedda*, not for all modern women, many of whom are no doubt perfectly fulfilled as mothers and wives.

[87] "Jetzt tote ich dein Kind, Thea! Dein und Eilert Løvborg's Kind", *Hedda Gabler*, act II, p. 66. Great import is usually placed on the ambiguous "*I'm burning... burning your child*", in Ibsen's version (or rather the

knows she is carrying a baby when she commits suicide. She cannot bear to reproduce, or to reproduce the structure that is the source of her pain, the bourgeois family.

Furthermore like Nora, Hedda's relationship to all the male figures, and especially her husband, takes the form of a distorted father-daughter relationship, but in which she is constantly sexually desired. Other characters frequently comment on her body and her beauty in her presence. The first sign of her aggression is in the opening scene when, in front of his aunt, Tesman teases her that she has put on weight during their honeymoon, which also hints at her pregnancy. Yet she is treated like a child by all the men, resulting in her behaving as though she were one, at least when it suits her. For example when Tesman first arrives home from the party at Brack's house with Løvborg's laptop, and Tesman refuses to let her see it, she whimpers at him like a puppy, sticking her lower lip out, as a child might do to get its way. When this fails she physically tries to pull it away from him and hits him. In the father-daughter relationship, there is also a link between Hedda and Emilia Galotti. Hedda's father General Gabler bequeathed her a set of pistols, and it is one of these pistols which Hedda uses to commit suicide. Her father thus essentially enables her death by providing the weapon, both a real and an emotional sense. For what kind of relationship did Hedda have with her father if all he left her was a set of guns? Was this the only way Hedda could relate to him, through the props of the soldier's life, by mimicking his military prowess?[88] In *Nora*, Nora's relationship with her father also seems to have been seminal: every time she speaks of her father's death she almost bursts into tears. This could therefore be another motivation for Hedda's behaviour: damaged by her relationship to her father, she allows Tesman and Brack to treat her like child and this harmful pattern prevents her from leaving Tesman, which arguably a modern Hedda could easily do. Ostermeier's modern Hedda is trapped in an emotional rather than a moral cage, which is however just as difficult to escape.

Many relationships in the play therefore seems to be a replication of some unhealthy parent-child relationship, or a distorted version of the family in the form of a triangular relationship, where someone is always the weakest party, and the configurations constantly shift: Tesman, Hedda and Brack; Tante Jule, Tesman and Hedda; Løvborg, Tesman and Hedda; Thea, Løvborg and Hedda, even Hedda, Løvborg and Løvborg's

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standard translation) as a sign that Hedda is thinking of her own baby in this moment. See McFarlane and Arup translation, *Hedda Gabler*, in *Four Major Plays*, p. 246.

[88] It is notable that Thomas Ostermeier's father was also in the military and that he spent some time growing up in military barracks as a child. He also professes to a difficult relationship with his father, claiming to have effectively stopped speaking to him when he was twelve. See Thomas Ostermeier, "Mein Vater", in *Focus* magazine, no. 13 (2011), p. 140.

prostitute friend-lover, here referred to only as the "Koreanerin".[89] This creates a disfigured, kaleidoscope image of the bourgeois family, perhaps the most significant of which is the threesome which Brack continuously hints at and finally actually suggests.

Hedda constantly flirts with Brack, visibly perking up and changing her body language whenever he is present. As I have already mentioned, early in act two before the party, Brack unmistakeably makes sexual advances towards her, touching her leg and leaning towards her as if to kiss her. When he comes to Hedda in the early hours of the morning to tell her about the events of the night, he also explicitly tells her he does not want Løvborg interfering in their cosy arrangement:

> BRACK   [...] Das ist ein Asozialer! Ich muss zugeben, ich hätte ein ziemliches Problem damit, wenn dieser Chaot hier ein- und ausgehen dürfte. Wenn er sich hier reindrängen würde.
> HEDDA   In unser Dreieck?
> BRACK   Ja – genau, in unser Dreieck. Da käme ich mir irgendwie entwurzelt vor.[90]

Brack's threat towards Hedda, usually only suggested, is also manifested as real violence here. He pushes her violently to the ground, trying to kiss her and, we must assume, to rape her. Only Brack's total inebriation allows Hedda to push him away and escape to the living room. She is visibly upset, perhaps the only time she lets let her own mask drop. It is important to underline that this attempted rape occurs *before* she commits her most serious violent acts: giving the gun to Løvborg, the destruction of the laptop and finally her own suicide. When Brack later reveals to Hedda that he knows she gave Løvborg the gun, she knows how serious the consequences might be.

Much is usually made of Hedda's longing for a great act of courage from Løvborg and her suicide has been interpreted as an attempt to re-assert idealism in the context of the petty, everyday and ordinary.[91] While it is clear in Ostermeier's interpretation that Hedda is suffering from boredom and fear of an ordinary middle class existence, "ein lächerliches Dasein"[92] as she calls it, she is not motivated by idealism of any kind. Even the interpretation that Hedda truly loves Løvborg, but lacks the courage to commit to him because of his lack of social standing, or out of fear of love itself,[93] is contradicted

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[89] Cf. Albrecht Koschorke et al, *Vor der Familie*.

[90] *Hedda Gabler*, act III, p. 59.

[91] Toril Moi interprets this as a sign of Ibsen's criticism of the anachronism of idealism in the modern age and his early Modernism. See Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, pp. 316-319.

[92] *Hedda Gabler*, act II, p. 34.

[93] Or even more astounding, the Freudian interpretation that she is simply a hysterical woman repulsed by sex or that her failure to love Tesman or Løvborg represents some sort of erotic failure to 'give herself' to these men. Critics such as Hermann Weigand or even the more contemporary Martin Esslin take this extraordinarily chauvinistic view. Cf. Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, p. 209.

explicitly by Hedda in this production. She repeatedly denies that she feels love for anyone. When Brack asks her why she was so bored on her honeymoon with Tesman, Hedda complains that she cannot face the idea of being with someone "immer und ewig":

BRACK   Auch nicht, wenn man die Person liebt?
HEDDA   Liebt? Hören sie doch mit dem Kitsch auf.[94]

Moreover, Hedda admits that her entire relationship with Tesman was based on a throwaway remark she made one evening when they were passing by the house, because she felt sorry for his awkwardness:

HEDDA   […] Aber durch diese Schwärmerei für das Haus hatten Tesman und ich etwas Gemeinsames! Und das hat dann Verlobung, Hochzeit, Hochzeitsreise und alles nach sich gezogen.[95]

The faked desire for a property turns out to be the basis for an entire marriage, indeed Hedda's entire life. Even when Løvborg himself asks Hedda if she loved him, she seems to suggest that she was simply exploring, most probably her sexuality:

LØVBORG   […] Aber sag mal, Hedda – war diese Freundschaft nicht doch so etwas wie Liebe?
HEDDA   Nein, eigentlich nicht.
LØVBORG   Warum hast du es dann gemacht?
HEDDA   Findest du es so seltsam, dass ein junges Mädchen – vor allem, wenn es so jung ist – dass es –
LØVBORG   Ja?
HEDDA   Dass es gern mitkriegen will von einer Welt, die –
LØVBORG   Die was -?
HEDDA   - von der sie in dem Alter normalerweise ausgeschlossen ist?[96]

Though immediately afterwards she does admit she ended the relationship because she was afraid "dass ich mich total in der ganzen Sache verliere", which in Ibsen's original implies fear of a scandal, here she may also simply be referring to the hedonism of her youth. It seems that her time with Løvborg (an intellectually stimulating partner) was one of self-exploration. His comments to her about throwing herself away on Tesman also imply that he may have treated her as an equal in intellectual terms.[97] It is this loss of her youthful autonomy and freedom, which is the primary cause of her anxiety about her pregnancy and the dissatisfaction with her drab, quiet life with Tesman. Earlier she says to Brack:

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[94] *Hedda Gabler*, act II, p. 29. Cf. McFarlane and Arup translation: "Ugh… don't use that glutinous word", p. 202. On another occasion she also rejects Løvborg's suggestion that she loves Tesman: "Liebe? Witzbold!". See *Hedda Gabler* (Schaubühne version), act II, p. 43.

[95] Ibid., p. 34.

[96] Ibid., p. 44.

[97] See ibid., p. 42: "Mein Gott, Hedda – dass du dich so wegschmeißt!"

> HEDDA   Ich hatte die langen Nächte einfach satt. Meine Zeit war um.
> (*Hedda steht auf, hält inne mit Blick ins Publikum, dann erschrocken*) Äh nein –
> das will ich dann doch nicht sagen. Nicht mal denken will ich das![98]

Although she is not trying to reassert youthful idealism, her attempt to orchestrate Løvborg's suicide may be an attempt to relive some of the dangerous behaviour of her youth or to force the 'reality' of violence into the sham of her materialistic bourgeois life. But Løvborg's 'great act' also turns out to be petty and ordinary: he is shot in the groin in a brothel after returning to look for his laptop. It does nothing to recapture the thrill of her youth and instead pushes her into a dangerously vulnerable situation with Brack.

However, Ostermeier's production emphasises that Hedda is not acting out of rational motivation. Her actions are rather the symptoms of depression.[99] Her manipulative behaviour and power games, with for example Thea and Løvborg, can also be seen as a warped attempt to re-assert her autonomy. The final straw that leads to her most violent behaviour and her suicide is however the genuine threat Brack poses to her. She sees that she would have no place in the new triangle emerging between Thea, her husband and the book, when they decide to begin work on recreating Løvborg's work from Thea's notes. Even Tesman's stifling adoration, which had obviously functioned as a poor substitute for love and a salve for Hedda's self-esteem, will now be taken away. But most importantly, when Tesman suggests that Brack, who is determined to take advantage of her through his knowledge of her crime, can keep her company, Hedda knows that her future will not just be boring, but abusive.

While Thea and Tesman become absorbed in their work, Hedda tells them she is not feeling well and is going to lie down. Music blares from offstage,[100] Hedda's last desperate attempt to force them to notice her, a final teenage rebellion. Tesman shouts down the hall at her to turn it down, which she does. Tesman and Thea have pinned up the notes all over the concrete wall on the way to the bedrooms. They move into the living room and begin laying their notes on the floor, discussing how things would be easier if Thea moved in with Tesman's aunt. A nonchalant Brack lounges on the sofa. He is the subject of Hedda's last line, which she shouts in from offstage.

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[98] *Hedda Gabler*, act II, p. 30.

[99] Ostermeier printed two excerpts from Sarah Kane's *4.48 Psychosis* (which he also directed at the Schaubühne) in the programme for *Hedda Gabler*, a monologue about depression written by a playwright who later committed suicide: "Ich kann nicht lieben [...] Ich kann mit niemanden schlafen. Ich kann nicht ficken. Ich kann nicht allein sein. Ich kann nicht mit anderen zusammen sein." Sarah Kane, *4.48 Psychosis*, reprinted in the Schaubühne's *Hedda Gabler* show programme, pp. 9-10. Cf. Sarah Kane, *The Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001), pp. 203-247. Cf. also, Wolf Lepenies, "Zum Ursprung bürgerlicher Melancholie: Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert", in *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969), pp. 76-114.

[100] Once again N.E.R.D.'s "Rock Star", beginning with the lyrics "Fuckin' posers!" (the same music that accompanies Nora's murder of Torvald), with the refrain of "It's almost over now, it's almost over now".

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HEDDA        [...] Und was soll ich dann abends hier allein machen?
TESMAN       Ach, der Brack schaut sicher gerne vorbei.
BRACK        Sehr gern, jeden einzelnen Abend, Frau Tesman! Wir werden uns
schon arrangieren, wir zwei!
HEDDA        Genau so haben sie sich das vorgestellt, was, Herr Brack? Der
Hahn im Korb...[101]
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There is a gun-shot offstage. At first no one reacts, then Tesman says: "Jetzt hat sie sich erschossen! Stell dir mal vor!" The stage slowly turns in time to the Beach Boys song "God Only Knows" and reveals Hedda slumped in the corridor beneath the notes, splattered by her blood. Brack gets the final word: "Um Gottes Willen, sowas macht man doch nicht!" – even Hedda's suicide is assessed in terms of bourgeois values.

Under Ostermeier's direction neither Hedda nor Nora act out of idealism, but in different ways choose to destroy themselves rather than face a future in the role that has been allocated to them, even if they originally believed they had chosen it.[102] This is another key aspect which links the two productions and indeed *John Gabriel Borkmann*, which I will examine next. In both productions, the middle class family is criticised as a sphere in which social roles become the total identity of the characters.[103] Once Nora's crime reveals the superficiality of her relationship Torvald, she cannot bear to revert to living a lie and violently destroys the structure that would keep these roles in place: her husband and her marriage. Hedda on the other hand has always felt uncomfortable in her role and this has slowly destroyed her ability to keep the mask in place, but the prospect of having to suffer Brack's sexual exploitation in secret and live the lie of a happy marriage, while Tesman and Thea grow closer through their work, is insufferable. For Hedda and Nora however, the collapse and destruction of their roles cannot be triumphant, for there is no underlying 'true' self to be uncovered. They have invested everything in the performance of an identity which was not theirs, and have defined themselves solely through conspicuous consumption and their sexual desirability to others. Once they realise all this is a lie, they are left with nothing. In the context of their limited autonomy and range of possible roles in bourgeois culture, the performance of identity is experienced as crisis.

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[101] This and the following citations: *Hedda Gabler*, act IV, p. 80.

[102] William A. Johnsen relates the sacrifice of individuals for the sake of the community to ancient rituals of sacrifice in: *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce and Woolf* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003). Chapters 2 and 3 are on Ibsen's *The Pillars of the Community* and *An Enemy of the People*, pp. 34-68.

[103] There is extensive research on the phenomenon of social role playing and identity, some of which I have already discussed in chapter one. The psychoanalyst Donald W. Winnicott differentiated between the true self and the false self, arguing that only the true self can feel 'real'. See Donald W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Tavistock, 1980 [1971]). Erving Goffman also used the model of theatre to investigate how we all 'act' our roles in everyday circumstances. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (London: Penguin, 1990 [1959]).

As Joan Templeton points out in her review of the criticism of both *Hedda Gabler* and *Nora*,[104] critics have often been at pains to deny the feminism in *Nora* and baffled when faced with an 'anti-woman' such as Hedda. Today, the transgression of traditional gender roles is unlikely to be seen as so scandalous, but Ostermeier shows – and this is the real scandal – that the conditions Ibsen placed these women in are just as credible and relevant today as they were one hundred and twenty years ago. By portraying physical and psychological abuse more or less explicitly, he places the central focus on the suffering of these women. Like Ibsen, his contempt is for the social lie rampant in the typical middle class family, which distracts from the truth, prevents confrontation, smothers potential and damages and destroys individuals.

John Gabriel Borkmann: the Fallen Merchant

Of the three Ibsen productions directed by Ostermeier at the Schaubühne, *John Gabriel Borkmann*[105] is perhaps the bleakest. While *Nora* and *Hedda Gabler* both portray the violent destruction of the cosy security of middle class life, *John Gabriel Borkmann* depicts the desolation and isolation of a family torn apart *after* the loss of this security. This play concerns perhaps the ultimate bourgeois tragedy: bankruptcy. As early as 1712, Richard Steele in *The Spectator* describes bankruptcy as "that most dreadful of all Human Conditions" and therefore a suitable topic for tragedy.[106] It was indeed the subject of early English bourgeois tragedies: Lillo's *The London Merchant* and Edward Moore's *The Gamester* both examine financial fall from grace. In Ibsen, this bankruptcy and attendant sense of loss extends to all spheres of the Borkmanns' lives: along with financial ruin they must endure emotional bankruptcy; the loss of love, hope and their squabbled-over son Erhard; the end of optimism, friendship and finally of Borkmann's life.

In his essay on *John Gabriel Borkman*,[107] Fritz Paul notes that Borkmann represents a typically modern version of the motif of the fallen tragic hero. While the fall of kings and political leaders seems to have largely disappeared from the modern stage, there are many examples of modern-day tragic heroes, especially in literature and film. However, he argues, the modern tragic hero tends to fall from financial not political power

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[104] Joan Templeton, *Ibsen's Women*, pp. 110-125 and pp. 204-211.

[105] Premiere on 14.1.2009 at the Schaubühne Berlin. The correct spelling of Ibsen's play and tragic hero is *Borkman*, but as the Schaubühne have Germanicised it to *Borkmann*, I will use that spelling throughout.

[106] Richard Steele, cited in Peter Szondi, *Die Theorie des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels im 18. Jahrhunderts*, p. 71.

[107] Fritz Paul, "'Als ob er ein König wäre': Aufstieg und Fall eines Gründerzeit-Fürsten in Ibsens *John Gabriel Borkman*", in *Der Sturz des Mächtigen: Zu Struktur, Funktion und Geschichte eines literarischen Motivs*, ed. by Theodor Wolpers (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), pp. 389-402. This essay was also reprinted in the programme of the Schaubühne production.

(though often the two are connected). One can think of many examples to confirm Paul's assessment, from Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* to the films *Scarface* and *Wall Street*, or Lucy Prebble's extremely successful play *Enron*, many narratives depict the downfall of the mightiest men of the industrial and post-industrial age. These modern tragedies tend to focus on either the path to power or the aftermath of its loss, and Paul identifies Ibsen's play as an early example of the latter.

Borkmann, played by Josef Bierbichler in Ostermeier's production, represents the typical new businessman of the *Bürgertum*. Like many of Ibsen's plays, the play is set during Norway's rapid industrialisation, which provided ample opportunity for men like Borkmann to acquire massive wealth. Borkmann is son of a miner who rises to the position of bank director and, at the height of his power, is a candidate for local minister. He dreams of investing in shipping and 'liberating' the great mineral treasures from the earth, which he says call to him. He makes a fatal mistake however, involving a "Weibergeschichte"[108], as he calls it, which ultimately leads to betrayal by his business partner, Hinkel. Rather than marry his first love Ella (played by Angela Winkler),[109] whom Hinkel also had his eye on, Borkmann married her twin sister Gunhild (Kirsten Dene). But Ella, broken-hearted, never accepts this marriage of convenience and remains herself unmarried. Borkmann also makes a far more familiar mistake, which certainly has resonance for a contemporary audience, by investing money belonging to the bank's customers in his own projects. His crime is speculation, gambling with money not his own, in short: greed. But he fails to see the immorality of his act, believing to the end that his plan only failed due to circumstances:

> Wenn ich dran denke! Ich war so kurz vor dem Ziel! Ich hätte nur noch acht Tage gebraucht, um alles zu arrangieren! Alle Konten wären wieder gedeckt gewesen. Das ganze Geld, das ich mutig genommen habe um es nutzbar zu machen, wäre wieder an Ort und Stelle gewesen. Um ein Haar wär die große Aktiengesellschaft zustandegekommen. Kein Mensch hätte auch nur ein Pfennig verloren.[110]

His attempt to sacrifice Ella for his career backfires when Hinkel takes revenge and makes Borkmann's crimes public.[111] The action of the play occurs thirteen years after Borkmann

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[108] Quotations are taken from the version of the script by Marius von Mayenburg used for Ostermeier's production, based on the German translation by Ibsen's son, Sigurd Ibsen, and kindly provided to me by the Schaubühne dramaturgy department. This version is divided into acts only. References are therefore to the act and the page number. Here: *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 32.

[109] In any case, Borkmann is certainly *her* first love, though whether Borkmann could ever give himself up to love remains in doubt.

[110] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 31.

[111] Possibly also his relationship with Ella: "Das infamste, was ein Mensch tun kann, ist, die Briefe seines Freundes zu mißbrauchen – in der Öffentlichkeit auszuposaunen, was ihm unter dem Siegel der Verschwiegenheit anvertraut wurde, unter vier Augen [...]" (act II, p.31). This is also, ironically, a breach of the distinction between public and private, which Borkmann himself seems unable to comprehend.

has been legally forced to file for bankruptcy. He spends five of the subsequent years in prison, and the next eight years sharing a house with his estranged wife in modest conditions, financed by Ella, though Ella's money had originally come from Borkmann himself, since he assigned the house to her as security. Gunhild and Borkmann live in separate apartments upstairs and downstairs, and while Borkmann maintains hope to the very end that he can make good again through sheer will and hard work, Gunhild's sole solace lies in their only son Erhard, who she believes will restore the family name. In the immediate aftermath of the court case, presumably for the period in which Borkmann was incarcerated, Erhard had been sent to live with his aunt Ella, and it is with her surprise arrival that the play opens.

Ibsen's stage directions instruct that all the action takes place at night in the middle of a freezing winter, and Jan Pappelbaum's set is more minimalist than the sets for the other two productions, but once again suggesting a modern setting. The trope of the fish tank appears again, though this time it is the entire Borkmanns' living space which resembles one. When the audience enters the theatre, the stage is separated from them by a transparent wall creating a kind of glass tank (Erhard repeatedly refers to the stifling atmosphere in the house). This transparent 'curtain' is raised for the first scene, but descends again for an important scene ending between Ella and Borkmann, when she convinces him to talk to his wife, preventing the audience from hearing the contents of this conversation, as the glass wall did in *Hedda Gabler*. It is also lowered at the end of the final scene, sealing Borkmann's tomb. The revolving stage is divided in half from left to right by another glass wall, with two white walls on either end forming a more traditional three-wall space on either side. One half of the stage is Gunhild's apartment and the other Borkmann's, the 'upstairs' where he constantly paces back and forth, and the stage is revolved to expose one side or the other. The set is capped by a ceiling, which is unusual for the large stage of the Schaubühne, reinforcing the image of a tank or box.

Though the apartments are divided by the transparent wall, Pappelbaum uses copious amounts of theatre fog and dry ice, pumped onto the half of the stage which is not facing the audience, to ensure that one half of the house is always hidden from the view of the other, and the audience. This simple but eerily beautiful effect makes the dividing wall appear opaque and it is only the strange slow movement of the fog and dry ice behind the glass wall that first intimates there might be another space behind it. This moving white and grey backdrop at times seems like the view of clouds from an airplane, at times like a gathering storm, at times simply a dense impenetrable fog. In the very first scene and very last, the transparent dividing wall is raised slightly, leaking more dry ice across the grey

floor of the front of the stage. This contributes to an already oppressive atmosphere that nevertheless remains cold and empty.

Because the action of the play takes place *after* Borkmann's tragic fall, the first two acts consist of three long scenes of exposition, all three mainly dialogue between two characters: between the two sisters; Borkmann and his friend Wilhelm Foldal; and then Ella and Borkmann. Ostermeier does not back down from the difficult task of maintaining the audience's attention through this first hour of explanation and analysis, which requires some degree of concentration to piece together into a narrative. As already mentioned, there is a cinematic quality to Ostermeier's directing style and these long scenes can be described as the equivalent of the rarely used single shot in film (normally the camera continuously switches perspective to keep us interested). There is a lot of dialogue and very little action, but Ostermeier courageously keeps distraction to a minimum, with little movement, almost no music, white light, understated acting and the sparse sets described above. His direction is confident that the narrative by itself will gradually grip the audience by itself and not let go.[112]

As in all of Ibsen's plays, a character arrives from the past to disturb the fragile status quo of the present, and here this is Ella. In the first scene, she arrives at the Borkmanns for the first time in many years, but her conversation with Gunhild, polite at first, quickly turns to bickering. Only later does Ella reveal her real motivation to Borkmann: that she has been diagnosed with a terminal illness and plans to leave everything she owns to Erhard, on the condition that he takes her family name, Rentheim. The two women cling desperately to their own versions of the past and Borkmann's crime against them, and in different ways are both obsessed with restoring the family's social status through Erhard: Ella wants to ensure her family name, Rentheim, lives on; Gunhild wants to rescue the Borkmann name from disrepute.

Though at first Ella elicits more sympathy, her demands on Erhard are soon revealed to be just as irrational as Gunhild's. Claiming that she could never love anyone or anything after Borkmann, she longs to possess the closest thing to the man that gave her up for his career: his son. It is immediately clear that Erhard, here the character whose autonomy has been smothered, has no interest in accepting a role in the women's demands on him. He is far more interested in his wealthy and attractive neighbour, Fanny Wilton, with whom he ultimately escapes his stifling parental home. In response to his mother's

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[112] In his article, Ostermeier discusses how it is important for a director not to 'dramatise' Ibsen's long sections of exposition, but to allow the complex dramatic conflict to unfold slowly, without over-emotionalising it. See Thomas Ostermeier, "Reading and Staging Ibsen", in *Ibsen Studies*, 10 (2010) no. 2, p. 72.

complaints when he is leaving for a party he says: "Da ist es hell. Da sind junge, fröhliche Menschen. Und Musik, Mutter!"[113] It is no accident that Erhard wears an unflattering suit that is far too big for him: he will never be able to fill his father's shoes, either as the charismatic businessman, or as the replacement love object for Ella and Gunhild.

In the second act, Borkmann and his version of events are introduced. The audience's first impression of him may come as a surprise given the way he has been described by Gunhild:

> GUNHILD   Und das hat er auch wirklich ausführlich gemacht – repräsentiert! In der Limousine vorfahren wie ein Politiker. Die Leute dienern lassen, wie vor einem Staatsmann. Und überall im Land haben sie ihn beim Vornamen genannt, grad so, als ob er zu irgendeinem Königshaus gehört, "John Gabriel", "John Gabriel". Jedes Kind wußte, was für eine wichtige Persönlichkeit "John Gabriel" war![114]

Instead of the dominating powerful figure she describes, Borkmann is slouched on a low chair on one side of a desk, wearing a plain suit with no tie, listening to the piano playing of Foldal's young daughter Frida, who visits Borkmann often to entertain him. Frida is sitting elevated on a stack of three chairs to play; Borkmann is contemplative, quiet, and seems almost in awe of the serene and musically gifted girl.

When Frida finishes playing, he tells her that the first time he heard such music was in the mines:

> BORKMANN   Wenn es aus dem Gestein gebrochen wird. Die Hammerschläge, die das Erz brechen, das ist die Mitternachtsglocke, die mit ihren Schlägen den Bann bricht und es erlöst. Deshalb singt das Erz – vor Freude – auf seine Weise […] Es will rauf ans Tageslicht und den Menschen dienen.[115]

Borkmann's poetic description of the mines and his connection of them with music immediately reveal that Borkmann's relationship to business is not just rational but emotional.[116] He asks Frida if she thinks about money when she plays for people at parties. When she answers that she simply feels sad because she cannot join in the dancing, Borkmann says, "Wenn man selbst nicht mitmachen darf, das ist das Allerschlimmste."[117]

For Borkmann, his sense of identity has not been threatened by what the neighbours think – right until the very end he never doubts himself or his actions – rather his greatest punishment is being prohibited from taking part, from activity. This manifests itself in a tenacious optimism that everything could be made good again, if only he were given the

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[113] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act I, p. 23.
[114] Ibid., pp. 4-5.
[115] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 25.
[116] It is also a trope from Romantic literature, as I will discuss below.
[117] Ibid., p. 25.

chance to act, an optimism that becomes more tragic as it becomes less likely. For Borkmann business is not a separate sphere of life, it is life itself. It has the potential to improve lives, which he claims was his aim when he invested the money. In this sense, Borkmann does not simply desire money for his own personal wealth; he desires money for its own sake and the power to create wealth, which he justifies with a fantasy of doing good and making people happy, a classic liberal position. He can find no other meaning in life than being part of this activity. His inability to separate money from happiness, and his public role from his private life, cause him to make the fatal mistake with Ella, and ultimately makes it impossible for him to rescue his last remaining human relationships.

As Fritz Paul also points out, this fantasy of doing good for the masses is related to the fantasy of empire, typical of the *Gründerzeit*. Borkmann compares himself to Napoleon in the scene with Wilhelm Foldal, albeit a Napoleon who has been critically wounded in the first battle.[118] Though Ibsen's play seems particularly relevant in light of the current financial crisis, it was also an observation of the social reality of his time in which many men from the *Bürgertum* for the first time began to obtain serious financial, industrial and political power. Bankruptcy was however just as common as success and stories like Borkmann's were common. Ibsen wrote the play in 1896, at the end of what is known as the "Long Depression", an economic crisis beginning 1873. This was the first truly international economic crisis, although it was largely concentrated in Western industrial countries. In Germany, it was known as the *Gründerkrach*, because so many of the newly founded businesses went under.[119] Living in Germany for most of this period, Ibsen was undoubtedly aware of it and there were surely many stories of financial ruin in the newspapers.

It is also significant that the trope of mining, which occurs in the second part of *Faust*, recurs in *John Gabriel Borkmann*. His fantasy of an empire seems to be based on a desire to conquer nature with industrial technology:

> Ja, aber ich – ich hätte Millionen haben können! Die ganze Bodenschätze, die ich erschlossen hätte! Massenhaft neue Bergwerke! Die Wasserfälle! Die Steinbrüche! Handelswege und Schifffahrtslinien in die ganze Welt. Alles, alles hätte ich allein zustande gebracht.[120]

His passion for mining the secrets of the earth underlines that for Borkmann wealth is not something which is created from nothing, but something which it is already there in the

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[118] "Wie ein Napoleon, der in seiner ersten Schlacht zum Krüppel geschossen wurde." *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 30. This fantasy of empire also appears in *Faust II*.
[119] See Rudolf Bock, *Staat und Wirtschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), pp. 36-41. Cf. Richard Tilly, *Bankenkrisen in Mitteleuropa im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000).
[120] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 30.

world and merely awaits transformation. This is analogous to the alchemists' fantasy of creating gold from lesser metals.[121] Indeed, the metals exploited in mining are the original source of capitalism and industrialism: they enabled the development of tools and the invention of money.[122] The ability to generate capital and create wealth thus requires a specific mode of perceiving the world: everything in nature – the mountains, the waterfalls, the sea, the forests – all become sources of potential wealth, treasure waiting to be discovered. This is why Borkmann, like Faust, is driven to restlessly transform the raw materials of the world into money, for everything he sees is the capital of the future. Just before he dies, Borkmann will once again return to this poetics of industrialisation, but this time as an elegy to his failure.

In the scene in the second act with Wilhelm Foldal (Felix Römer) , a civil servant and apparently his last remaining friend, Borkmann discards this friend in the same way he once discarded Ella, and the tangible emotional connection the two actors manage to portray makes this all the more poignant. Though the reason for his visit concerns an official matter, it is quickly clear that Wilhelm values Borkmann as a friend and explicitly says that he does not blame Borkmann for the bank's collapse. He even asks for his opinion of a tragedy he has written, reinforcing the impression that Borkmann is no stranger to the arts; he at first dismisses Wilhem's family's opinion of his hobby as ignorance.[123]

However, Borkmann's appreciation for the arts and capacity for genuine emotion remain ambiguous. On the one hand he seems to display genuine sensitivity, for example with Wilhelm and Ella, and even demonstrates sympathy for his son. On the other hand this understanding can quickly turn to cold-heartedness. When Wilhelm insists that true love exists if the right woman can be found, Borkmann dismisses his romanticism as the reason for his lack of success: "Ach, hör doch auf mit deinem Dichtergewäsch".[124] If only Wilhelm could forget "diesen ganzen Blödsinn",[125] Borkmann might be able to help him have a successful career. Insulted, Wilhelm points out that Borkmann is in no position to help him and could be waiting a long time to regain power. Borkmann immediately turns

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[121] Cf. Hartmut Böhme, "Geheime Macht im Schoß der Erde: Das Symbolfeld des Bergbaus zwischen Sozialgeschichte und Psychohistorie", in ibid., *Natur und Subjekt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), pp. 67-144; especially pp. 88-97.

[122] Ibid., p. 84. Böhme is describing Ovid's schema of the ages of the world in *Metamorphosis*; the Iron Age begins with mining.

[123] But Wilhelm insists that the reason he is so troubled is because of the opinion of his educated children, not his less-educated wife: "Weil die Kinder, die sind ja gebildeter. Und stellen deshalb ganz andere Ansprüche ans Leben." *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 28. Even if a certain quality of life has been achieved, the next generation insists on rising further.

[124] Ibid., p. 34. This almost exactly the same way that Hedda dismisses love as kitsch.

[125] Ibid., p. 35.

cold and, gesturing to the door, says "Dann habe ich keine Verwendung mehr für dich."[126]
Wilhelm angrily counter-attacks Borkmann's illusions: to be able to work again he would
have to be legally rehabilitated, Wilhelm points out. Yet still Borkmann cannot face the
truth, he believes that he is exceptional, that the power he had attained was in fact a part of
him, that he was its source:

BORKMANN	(*schnell*) Aussichtslos, meinst du?
FOLDAL	Es gibt keinen Präzedenzfall, wo das passiert wäre.
BORKMANN	Braucht es auch nicht bei Ausnahmemenschen.
FOLDAL	Das Gesetz macht keine Ausnahmen.[127]

The only reaction to this painful truth Borkmann is capable of is to once more insult
Wilhelm's ability as a poet. He again shows him the door and asks him not to return. This
rejection is not delivered in a rage however – Bierbichler's Borkmann rarely loses control
of himself – but as a matter-of-fact, utilitarian assessment in terms of effective use of their
time, and what they stand to gain from each other: "Wir verschwenden nur die Zeit
miteinander. Am besten kommst du nicht mehr hierher."[128]

This rejection of Wilhelm Foldal not only functions as an echo of his rejection of
Ella in the past, whom he also could no longer 'use', but also demonstrates Borkmann's
inability to handle and express his own emotions towards people. However, it also
indicates that he does have an emotional side, but has suppressed it and directed all his
energy into business. Indeed his insult about Foldal's romanticism is ironic, given the way
he romanticises business and mining. Bierbichler's Borkmann is not necessarily aggressive
towards the patient Wilhelm, but seems unable to break the habit of viewing relationships
in a utilitarian manner and drop his defences, though it is clear Wilhelm would be an
understanding friend. Ibsen's portrayal of human intimacy is as ever highly ambiguous and
its possibility is questioned. Even Wilhelm remarks that friendship is always based on a
certain degree of pretence or fraud, but yet seems to genuinely care for Borkmann:

FOLDAL	Solang du an mich geglaubt hast, hab ich auch an dich geglaubt.
BORKMANN	Dann haben wir uns gegenseitig betrogen. Und letzten Endes uns
selbst – alle beide.	
FOLDAL	Aber ist das nicht im Grunde Freundschaft, John Gabriel?[129]

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[126] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act II, p. 35. This is similar to Torvald telling Nora that she would be no use to him dead.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., p. 36.
[129] Ibid., act II, p. 36.

Wilhelm was perhaps a salve to Borkmann's ego (like Tesman to Hedda's), and he in turn a source of courage for Wilhelm, but in Borkmann's cynical perspective even friendship is reduced to an exchange of emotional capital. Wilhelm on the other hand is capable of recognising the true value of this and maintaining respect at the same time as feeling pity, which Borkmann is not.

This scene also acts as a portent. In the final scene of act two, Ella goes to Borkmann ostensibly in a last attempt to force him to recognise his guilt. That she convinces him to talk to his wife after many years of silence merely functions as a veneer of selflessness for her: she can always appeal to the fact that she wishes to reconcile the family. However, here Ella learns that Borkmann's decision to leave her for Gunhild was calculated and motivated solely by his lust for power. Ella's apparent charity in supporting the Borkmanns is also revealed as disingenuous – the money was in fact Borkmann's, though this in turn was Gunhild's inheritance. Borkmann's only seemingly selfless act, signing over the Rentheim property to Ella before his bankruptcy, which enabled her to generate an income by playing the same financial game Borkmann lost, reveals itself to be something very different: not only did the property belong to Ella's family in the first place, but Borkmann's reasons for signing it over to her were strategic. He knew that this would keep it safe from the bank and that therefore some security would remain in the family, for he must have been sure that Ella would leave never her twin sister and first love out in the street. This gift is merely a calculated result of the complex laws of the market, not an act of charity, selflessness or love. Furthermore, the very house to which Gunhild and Borkmann have retreated and spent their last days is actually built on the same financial sands which caused Borkmann's ruin. Nothing it seems is secure; nothing motivated by authentic feeling and all family relationships are bound by the convoluted relations of family finances.

The final scene of this act, in which the two sisters and Borkmann finally appeal to Erhard, each with their own vision of how he can rescue their lost souls, illustrates this even further. Borkmann has realised that Erhard will inherit Ella's money when she dies and suggests that they go into business together. Though it is almost credible that this is from a genuine desire to work with his son – to forge a relationship the only way he knows – the desperation in Bierbichler's voice reveals his true motivation: this is Borkmann's last chance to get his hands on some capital and start again. Gunhild reiterates her certainty and wish that Erhard will complete his "mission" and restore the family name. Ella too becomes increasingly desperate, but in the end Erhard chooses a life of adventure with his lover Fanny Winton, closing the door on the three adults who, without him, are forced to

finally face themselves. While the twin sisters can be seen as representatives of opposing forces, love (Ella) and power (Gunhild), in the end they turn out to be one another's double after all, both confusing their own power over Erhard with love, and satisfying their resentment of Borkmann in this way. They both represent the ambiguity and complexity with which love and life are confused and at odds with power and money throughout the entire play.

The final act of Ibsen's text is significantly cut and remains in the enclosed space of the apartment in Ostermeier's production. In Ibsen's drama, Ella and Borkmann leave the claustrophobic house to climb a hill they had often climbed in their youth. The openness of the snowy landscape specified by Ibsen in the original stage directions is perhaps suggested here by the return of the dry ice on the stage, but Ostermeier does not permit Borkmann this final climb to the summit. As Fritz Paul notes, these stage directions break with the theatrical conventions of Ibsen's time and visually describe what perhaps would be better caught by a film camera. The fact that Ostermeier regularly uses film in his productions (for example in *Hedda Gabler*) underlines the deliberateness of the decision to keep them indoors.

Borkmann is pale and his vision of the industry of the world begins to overtake him. He sees ships bringing "Licht und Wärme für Millionen Menschen",[130] he hears the factories incessantly producing, as he mourns his empire of mountains:

> BORKMANN [...] Ella! Siehst du die Gebirge da hinten – in der Ferne? Gestaffelt hintereinander. Eins höher als das andere. Das ist mein tiefes, unermeßliches, unerschöpfliches Reich. Ich riech sie, die gefesselten Millionen; ich spür das Erz, das seine geschlängelten, verzweigten, verführerischen Arme nach mir ausstreckt. Ich habe sie vor mir gesehen, wie lebendig gewordene Schatten, - damals, als ich nachts in die Bank zurück bin, um mir Zugang zu den Konten zu verschaffen. Ich war bestimmt, euch zu befreien! Und ich habs versucht. Aber ich habe es nicht geschafft. Der Schatz ist zurück in die Tiefe gesunken.[131]

In Romantic literature, such as E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Bergwerke zu Falun* or Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the mountain, or rather the interior of the mountain, is often represented as a woman, a *Bergkönigin*, as Hartmut Böhme describes, often driving protagonists to madness and death in their desire to possess her and unearth the treasures she guards.[132] Böhme reads this as the emergence of the subconscious in Romantic literature, re-inscribing the alchemical knowledge that had been associated with mining until its rationalisation in the Enlightenment as symbolism in literature. From this

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[130] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act IV, p. 64.
[131] Ibid., pp. 64-65.
[132] See Hartmut Böhme, "Geheime Macht im Schoß der Erde", in *Natur und Subjekt*, pp. 97-135.

perspective, Ella can be seen as the *Bergkönigin*, representing Borkmann's unconscious desires, which he has suppressed for the sake of that industrial rationalism, and leading him back into the dark underworld of the irrational and emotional (up the mountain). In Borkmann's vision all that he has suppressed – perhaps even a poetic inclination, given his attraction to the arts – re-emerges as an hallucination, the ramblings of a madman and the speculative fantasy of a megalomaniac, from which he cannot awake and can only be liberated from by death.[133] Lost in this fantasy (like Elis Fröbom lost inside the mine in *Die Bergwerke zu Falun*), Borkmann feels his heart being gripped and falls into the chair. Perhaps this confrontation with his subconscious desires, however, gives Borkmann a final moment of realisation; realising that there is no course of action left to take, he gives in to the irrational. Ella says she will go for help, but then changes her mind and tells him "Nein, besser so, John."[134] Gunhild returns, and the two sisters take each other's hands on the sofa, with John Gabriel Borkmann slumped dead in the chair.

In early 2009 at the height of the global financial crisis, when the play premiered, it would have been easy for Ostermeier to portray Borkmann as an evil, power-hungry speculator. It was certainly topical. A week before the premiere, a well-known and extremely wealthy German businessman committed suicide because of massive losses incurred in the financial crisis.[135] Bierbichler also physically resembles Josef Ackermann, head of the Deutsche Bank during the financial crisis. However, the production and Bierbichler's interpretation of the role instead created a more complex and sympathetic character, emotionally crippled by the capitalist fantasy of power and wealth, but also the only character who potentially reaches some form of self-awareness. Moreover, the motivation of each of the characters is equally questionable: Gunhild's concern is mere superficial reputation; Ella is driven by selfish emotional desperation and Erhard by the naivety and hedonism of youth. Compared to them Borkmann's idealism seems almost noble. However, none of the characters, including Borkmann, recognise the extent to which their identities are dictated by the external forces of market capitalism. Like Hedda and Nora, Borkmann plays his social role of the pro-active businessman to the detriment of every other aspect of his identity (for example his attraction to the arts and of course his feelings for Ella), while the two women make his crime the defining aspect of theirs. But

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[133] Franco Moretti calls attention to the relation of financial speculation and irrational vision, specifically in relation to Borkmann, in his essay on Ibsen. Franco Moretti, "The Grey Area: Ibsen and the Spirit of Capitalism", in *New Left Review*, vol. 61, January/February (2010), pp. 117-131; see p. 128- 131.

[134] *John Gabriel Borkmann*, act IV, p.65.

[135] Adolf Merckle owned one of Germany's biggest pharmaceutical wholesalers. He made a speculative investment based on the assumption that Volkswagen's share prices would fall, but due to Porsche's support of Volkswagen they in fact did the opposite and Merckle lost hundreds of millions of dollars. On 5 January 2009, Merckle committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a train.

unlike Nora and Hedda, Borkmann cannot escape his merchant's fantasy; he cannot live without the empire of future wealth before him.

Ostermeier's Critical Realism

All three of Ostermeier's Ibsen productions directly confront the audience with characters and social spheres that they most likely recognise, as well as topical issues such as financial speculation and domestic violence. Unlike much of the work considered ground-breaking in contemporary German theatre, Ostermeier's Ibsen productions are naturalistic – they create an illusion, a mimetic representation of the lives of a particular social milieu. However, he also uses deliberately theatrical devices and introduces occasional breaks in this naturalism, such as highly physical scenes (Nora's dance), the revolving stage or video. Realism is not the only style Ostermeier favours, however. For example, he has directed a highly physical production of *Ein Sommernachtstraum* (A Midsummer's Night Dream)[136] in collaboration with choreographer Constanza Macras. In his production of *Hamlet*,[137] Ophelia and Gertrude were played by the same actress, mud carpeted the stage and a camera was used throughout to film the actors' faces close-up and live. Rather than entirely reject realism as a 'bourgeois' form, Ostermeier uses it for a specific purpose: to examine what he considers to be the new bourgeoisie, who are indeed likely to be the very people in the audience.

As already discussed in chapter one, performative or postdramatic work does not aim at mimetic realism but emphasises the process of signification and the aesthetic experience above conveying specific content: it is the play of signs rather than their referents which is the main focus of this type of work. However, this opposition may be too simple. In *The Return of the Real*, Hal Foster shows that some visual artists since the 1960s have re-embraced and further developed realism, notably some pop artists, superrealists or photorealists and appropriation artists.[138] The opposition between either the idealist understanding of images as referential (mimetic) and attached "to referents, iconographic themes, or real things in the world", or the deconstructive view that images

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[136] Premiere at the Schaubühne Berlin, 2.9.2006. The production transformed the Shakespeare play into a chaotic and hedonistic drug-fuelled party, abandoning much of the plot in the process.

[137] Premiere at the Schaubühne Berlin, 17.9.2008.

[138] In his wonderful book, *The Culture of the Copy*, Hillel Schwartz shows how society's hunger for representations, copies, doubles and replicas has grown unabated over the last two hundred years. See Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likenesses, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996).

are only simulacra which refer to other images, "that all forms of representation (including realism) are auto-referential codes",[139] is reductionist in his view.

When Ostermeier produced this work, it was in the wake of the success of directors such as Frank Castorf operating more in the deconstructive mode, while today all kinds of other attempts 'to return to the real' are observable in theatre.[140] The use of non-professional actors is one example of this trend, as mentioned already. As I will discuss in the next chapter, René Pollesch directly disrupts the various levels of 'the real' in the audience's experience. While Ostermeier may not directly explore this issue on an aesthetic level, his plays *show* individuals in crisis because of their differing and conflicting experiences of multiple realities and selves. He too addresses the performative way in which identity functions and subjectivication (signification processes on a subjective level), particularly in the context of a highly mediatised society, but primarily does this through content rather than form.

The charge that Ostermeier is merely pandering to the tastes of the dominant class by employing 'bourgeois' realism and staging canonical drama does not take into account the fact that on the level of content, these plays are highly critical of bourgeois culture and values, although this, as my thesis contends, may indeed be their appeal to contemporary bourgeois milieus. More than any other playwright perhaps, Ibsen is *the* critic of the bourgeoisie and the potentially destructive consequences of its values.[141] Ostermeier's realism also involves an acknowledgement that life too can be inauthentic, involving many performed roles, rather than implying his realism to be an authentic form of representation of the 'truth' – or attempting an authentic and somehow innocent presentation of the real. This acknowledgement comes *after* twenty or thirty years of postmodernism and is therefore not merely more of the same bourgeois repertoire theatre, but a kind of 'reconstruction' after deconstruction. In the Goethe Institute website profile of Ostermeier, he is quoted as saying that he views his realism as an attempt to construct a 'reconstituted' or 'suggested unity' in a world which is increasingly fragmentary:

> Der dekonstruierende Gestus etwa eines Frank Castorf, der viele seiner [Ostermeier's] Altersgenossen geprägt hat, liegt ihm gänzlich fern. Wenn Ostermeier klassische Stoffe in die Gegenwart verpflanzt, lässt er ihre lineare Dramaturgie ebenso intakt wie die Sprache und Motivation der Figuren. Diesen

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[139] Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 2001 [1996]), p. 128. He is however referring to visual art here.

[140] This can in fact be seen as a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of theatre as mentioned already: Ibsen's realism was also celebrated for its lack of theatricality and achieving a more direct (re)presentation of the real.

[141] Cf. Franco Moretti, "The Grey Area". Moretti also explores a "dissonance" and "ambiguity" at the heart of bourgeois morality: the "grey area" of the title.

narrativ-psychologischen Ansatz verteidigt er auch selbstbewusst gegen die Klischee- und Banalisierungsvorwürfe bis hin zum 'Fernsehrealismus', die ihn seitens der Theaterkritik teilweise treffen: "Gerade, weil die sozialen Erfahrungen der Menschen so diskontinuierlich und vielfach gebrochen sind, wächst das Bedürfnis, etwas wie Einheit, Zusammenhang und Entwurf wenigstens zu fingieren."[142]

The temporarily reconstituted unity or structure enables a position to be taken towards specific social and existential problems, in a way that may be more comprehensible to those without the cultural capital which allows them to suspend the hermeneutic instinct, that is, the wider public as opposed to the academic or cultural elite. At the same time, Ostermeier confronts this audience with a rather scathing analysis of, at the very least, the foundations of their culture, if not specific aspects of their own social world. Fundamentally, this gesture is a critical one, which however once again is bourgeois in itself, and reconstituting such a unity or the bourgeois subject, paradoxically assumes or reinforces its continuity. However, Ostermeier recognises that the object of criticism may be within ourselves (like Hedda, Nora and Borkmann), rather than an 'other' bourgeoisie, who are supposedly always elsewhere, and judging by the approach of some other directors, apparently no longer in the theatre since postmodernism.

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[142] Christine Wahl, profile of Ostermeier on the Goethe Institute's list of 50 German-speaking directors: http://www.goethe.de/kue/the/reg/reg/mr/ost/por/deindex.htm (accessed on 10.5.2011).

Chapter Six

The Deconstruction of the Bourgeois Subject: René Pollesch

In the preceding chapters I have examined ways in which Thalheimer and Ostermeier exposed and critically examined the bourgeois subject in their productions of canonical bourgeois drama, once again revealing the antagonistic or paradoxical relationship bourgeois culture often has to its own value system. The work of both directors represents a nexus between historical constructions of the *Bürgertum* in the traditional, bourgeois dramatic form and a contemporary aesthetic and critical attitude towards these positions. This chapter will focus on René Pollesch, a director and writer working mostly at the Volksbühne Berlin, whose performances enact a more radical deconstruction, destabilisation or even destruction of the bourgeois subject on stage. This is done primarily through aesthetic means and therefore the aesthetics of his work will be my main focus. The issues of language and dramatic text in contemporary performance will also resurface in connection to this. Pollesch's work is both extremely textual and has a strong focus on language, but at the same rejects bourgeois representation and employs the trademarks of postdramatic theatre, such as unusual audience/actor arrangements, multimedia, lack of fixed characters, lack of linear narrative and so forth. His use of citation, directly or indirectly, explores the notion of performative language and in a sense performs the problem of Austin's "etiolated" language. Furthermore, his juxtaposition of numerous levels of mediated and 'unmediated' reality – video, the performance itself, and the 'reality' embodied by the presence of the performers and the audience in the space and time of the theatre – collapses definitive distinctions between these different levels of presence and makes clear oppositions between authentic reality and staged illusion highly problematic, therefore undermining the very foundations of bourgeois theatrical aesthetics: mimetic representation and catharsis.

Pollesch studied Applied Theatre Studies at Gießen and was taught by Heiner Müller and Hans-Thies Lehmann among others. He had his breakthrough with the piece *World Wide Web-Slums 1-10,*[1] a 'theatre soap-opera' project developed at the Schauspielhaus Hamburg, for which he won the Mülheim Prize for Drama in 2001. He has worked in major theatres in Berlin, Leipzig and Stuttgart, as well as in Switzerland and Austria. In 2001, Frank Castorf, the artistic director of the Volksbühne, made Pollesch the artistic director of the Prater, the smaller stage belonging to the Volksbühne. There he

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[1] See René Pollesch, *www-slums*, ed. by Corinne Brocher (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2003).

staged and developed some of his best-known work, such as *24 Stunden sind kein Tag*, the *Prater Saga* (together with Gob Squad), the *Prater Trilogie, Capucetto Rosso* and *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*. Pollesch is an extremely prolific artist, producing an average of around four productions a year[2] and so only a small selection of some of his more recent work will be taken into account here.

Rejecting Illusion

A central aspect of Pollesch's work is that his plays are generally not published as dramas.[3] He tends to work repeatedly with certain actors, creating temporary, small ensembles (for example Christine Groß, Sophie Rois or Fabian Hinrichs). The text for the performance is generated in collaboration with the actors during the course of rehearsals, which often involves prescribed reading for them and improvisations based on philosophical or critical texts. Though this does result in a 'theatre text'[4] which is then performed (underlined by the conspicuous presence of a souffleuse holding a physical text in many of Pollesch's performances), Pollesch does not allow anyone else to perform or direct his work, keeping the text and performance inextricably linked to one another. The refusal to publish much of his work also resists his work becoming literary drama and/or a cultural commodity, and reveals an understanding of theatre as a live, once-off, ephemeral event.

Although Pollesch has been recognised as both a dramatist and a director (he is entered under both rubrics on the Goethe Institute website), it is difficult to describe his writing as literary drama, not least because of the refusal to publish. The theatre text is also not intended to be a template to be reproduced or reinterpreted by others, or with a different group of performers. Despite the lack of fixed characters, it seems that the performances depend on the particular actors he works with, their responses, particular characteristics and the 'chemistry' of the group, so that he also never performs the same play with a different group of actors. Furthermore, as a director, though he sometimes incorporates references or material from other cultural forms such as film or TV, Pollesch

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[2] Fifty-four plays, dating from 1998 to the present, are listed on his publisher Rowohlt's website, however this does not represent his complete *oeuvre*, as some work developed for the Volksbühne for example, is not included (such as *Du hast mir die Pfanne versaut, du Spiegelei des Terrors!*, premiere 7.1.2009).

[3] Although the texts are available upon request for "the purposes of study" from his publisher Rowohlt (see Rowohlt website). Selected texts have also been published by Rowohlt and Alexander Verlag (see bibliography). His agent, Corinna Brocher, was kind enough to provide me with the texts discussed here.

[4] Theresia Birkenhauer lists some of the propositions for a new terminology to describe writing for the stage which does not conform to the category drama. She mentions Gerda Poschmann's "Theatertexte" and Hans-Thies Lehmann's "Theaterliteratur". See Theresia Birkenhauer, "Die Zeit des Textes im Theater", in *Dramatische Transformationen: Zu gegenwärtigen Schreib- und Aufführungsstrategien im deutschsprachigen Theater*, ed. by Stefan Tigges (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), pp. 247-261; p. 249. Cf. Gerda Poschmann, *Der nicht mehr dramatische Theatertext: Aktuelle Bühnenstücke und ihre dramaturgische Analyse* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997) and Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*.

has to date never directed productions of plays by other playwrights. According to him, his work is an attempt to deal with his and his actors concrete subjective positions, using the stage as a space to test out problematic concepts and theory, often related to his (their) own position as artists. These subjects are, however, necessarily diffuse and contradictory. As David Barnett argues, this is an attempt to reflect subjectivity in a globalised world, in which time and space have been radically compressed, reality is flooded with simulacra, dissent can be commodified and "the autonomous individual becomes a strategic commercial fiction".[5] As Pollesch says in a documented conversation with Carl Hegemann: "Ich denke von meinen täglichen Verrichtungen her".[6]

In many other respects Pollesch's work can be described as postdramatic or as operating beyond the limits of what is associated with traditional drama. The plays follow no linear narrative around a dramatic conflict and do not generate psychological characters or coherent identities. Occasionally a loose story is suggested; for example, *Tal der fliegenden Messer* follows the exploits of strip club owner Cosmo Vitelli, whose club is in financial difficulties after losing a bet, but as David Barnett writes, this may be merely "a ruse for the nostalgic spectator".[7] Any loose suggestion of plot merely forms a background or context for the intense theoretical debate between the 'characters' that is a feature of almost all of Pollesch's work, who are also usually addressed by the actors' real names. Even the Vitelli character in *Tal der fliegenden Messer* is swapped from one actor to another (both men and women) so that any attempt by the audience to imagine a coherent identity is completely in vain.[8] These debates involve the discussion of complex theoretical and philosophical topics, from the failure of socialism and the impossibility of the collective, to the myths of capitalism and the possibility of love. Pollesch's texts borrow heavily from philosophical texts and cultural criticism, from Marx and Michel Foucault to Jean-Luc Nancy and Donna Haraway, sometimes even directly quoting or paraphrasing. His show programmes even often include a recommended reading list for the audience. The process of the literarisation of the theatre in the bourgeois period described in chapter three is thus reversed by Pollesch to an extent. He resists the fixing of the text in the form of a commodity which could be reproduced by others and generates the work collaboratively, incorporating texts by others, rather than creating a representation of the

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[5] David Barnett, "Political Theatre in a Shrinking World: René Pollesch's Postdramatic Practice on Paper and on Stage", in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, ed. by Maria M. Delgado and Aoife Monks, 16 (2006), no. 1, pp. 31-40; p. 33.

[6] René Pollesch and Carl Hegemann, "Liebe, von der man sich selbst erzählt: Ein Gespräch über linke Kritik, Fake und wahre Liebe", in *Die Überflüssigen* (published by the Volksbühne Berlin), ed. by Stefanie Carp et al (Berlin: Alexander, 2006), p. 114.

[7] David Barnett, "Political Theatre in a Shrinking World", in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, p. 37.

[8] David Barnett describes Pollesch's figures as "Textträger" (Gerda Poschmann's term). See ibid., p. 33.

world from the sole position of the author (although this resistance is not entirely unproblematic, as I will discuss below).

This attempt to juxtapose numerous perspectives on a textual level is reflected in the aesthetic of his work in performance. The actors recite great quantities of text at the speed and pitch of excited news reporters, or friends arguing late into the night, and appear as though they are talking at each other rather than to each other.[9] While the argument does sometimes develop somewhat coherently throughout the play, it cannot be described as dramatic dialogue as such, but rather something more akin to a debate, or a series of probing questions; though neither does it conform to the structure of an academic argument. At the same time, the intensity of this recitation, and the frequency with which complex ideas are addressed, discussed and then abandoned again, is constantly undermined by and juxtaposed with the profane and the ironic, for example the search for a missing part of a costume or questions about what to do next. The performers also engage in meta-theatrical discussion about their status as actors, the success or failure of the performance they are presently involved in and the possibilities and limitations of theatrical performance. The performances therefore oscillate between periods which require intense concentration from the actors and the audience and playful, humorous scenes with elements appealing to the other senses such as loud music, physical sequences and dance. There are frequent costume changes, all of which happen on stage (though the stage is usually not delineated in a traditional sense). The actors smoke and drink (in one case the audience also has the opportunity to do so, see below), fluff their lines without a flicker of concern (for the souffleuse is usually close at hand) and often corpse, while always maintaining the same manic energy. The bourgeois ideal of the perfect illusion is thus utterly abandoned.

All this also often takes place within a multimedial context. The *Ruhrtrilogie*, which began in 2008 with *Tal der fliegenden Messer*, uses video in all three parts. This trilogy, which also includes *Cinecittà aperta* and *Der perfekte Tag*, was a co-production between the Volksbühne Berlin and the Ringlokschuppen in Mülheim an der Ruhr, and culminated in the final part in 2010, when Mülheim was European Capital of Culture. The world premieres were staged first in Mülheim, on a piece of wasteland outside the city designated for redevelopment, and then again in Berlin at the Volksbühne and the Prater. Pollesch made use of this fact in the Berlin performance of the second part, *Cinecittà aperta*, which largely consisted of a film of the performance in Mülheim (which concerned

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[9] The failure of communication between individuals has been a recurring aspect in the work of all three directors, perhaps a sign that the bourgeois public sphere of critical communication is not as healthy as is sometimes assumed by proponents of civil society.

the attempt to make a film) with most of the actors present in the Prater in front of the screen, live-dubbing their own voices. This is unusual for Pollesch, because his use of video in this particular phase of his work was usually directly related to the present situation of the performance rather than a recording of a past event, evocative imagery or snippets from popular culture. The camera crew is in fact usually present on stage throughout the entire performance, filming the actors as they perform, the result of which is simultaneously projected onto a video screen that can also be seen by the audience.

Pollesch's stages[10] usually contain some kind of division within themselves and a less defined division from the audience. This consists of a space that is hidden from the view of the audience, an intermediate space and the space in which the audience sits. For example in *Tal der fliegenden Messer*, the Prater theatre was cleared of its fixed seating and the play was performed lengthways in the space. In one half were cheap, white, plastic outdoor chairs – the kind one might buy at a DIY shop – loosely arranged for the audience to sit on, and in the other, two old-fashioned circus wagons, in which most of the 'dialogue' takes place. To the left of the circus wagons was a large screen onto which the live video was projected. To the left of this again, perpendicular to the audience and the screen, was a small stage with a backdrop of cheap-looking light bulbs and two poles, which was used as the pole-dancing stage of the nightclub.

The actors use all of these spaces: the space around the wagons, behind the screen, the pole-dancing stage and backstage. The camera and sound operator follow the actors around, even when they leave the wagons, so that the audience always has the choice to focus on the screen with close-ups of the actors' faces or to focus on the actors' physical bodies and peer into the wagons, some of the interior of which can be seen through the open doors or the windows. In this production, Pollesch even uses the space beyond the confines of the theatre, which is enabled by his use of video: at one point the actors burst through the front doors of the theatre and run out on to the street (Kastanienallee) to climb into a waiting car. Towards the end, in a gun-fight scene, the actors run out the back entrance of the theatre, across the courtyard and into the adjoining Prater beer garden (where an unsuspecting public, sipping their beers, involuntarily becomes a second audience). These scenes are all the while being filmed and projected on to the screen inside

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[10] He most frequently works with the set designer Bert Neumann, who has also designed for Frank Castorf at the Volksbühne for many years, for example for Castorf's production of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (premiere in Zurich 29.03.2001 in the Schiffbauhalle; premiere in Berlin 16.06.2005 in the Palast der Republik). Neumann uses cheap, industrial materials and furniture, such as prefabricated containers, and employs a certain kitsch aesthetic that seems to be inspired by seedy neighbourhoods, run-down urban environments, circuses and strip-clubs. Cf. interview with Bert Neumann by Ute Müller-Tischler, "Der Raum muss ein Geheimnis haben", in *Theater der Zeit*, no. 11, November (2010), pp. 8-12.

the theatre, so that the audience is momentarily transported outside with the actors. In *JFK*, performed at the Deutsches Theater Berlin (premiere: 19.12.2009), Pollesch used a similar set-up in which the actors performed both in front of and behind the set (in fact the lengthy first scene concerns the actor's unwillingness to go on stage because of boredom and exhaustion). The boundaries that were drawn around theatrical performance in the bourgeois period with the creation of fixed buildings and proscenium arch theatre architecture (also described in chapter three) are thus also broken through temporarily. However, again this is more complex than at first it appears.

In the more recent *Schmeiß dein Ego weg!* at the Volksbühne Berlin (premiere: 12.1.2011), the main gag of the evening was the physical presence of a 'fourth wall' that sealed off the stage and was 'camouflaged' to match the décor of the rest of the auditorium. Again the actors (here Margit Carstensen, Martin Wuttke and Christine Groß) performed both behind and in front of this fourth wall and later literally broke through it, revealing that it was constructed of nothing but a flimsy material, possibly cardboard or plasterboard. This must be understood as ironic however. Pollesch is criticising the trend for 'breaking through the fourth wall' in contemporary theatre (using audience interaction and so forth), which merely oversimplifies the problematic division of the audience from the performers. As he shows here, despite breaking through it (which turns out to be comically easy), the division in fact remains, with neither the actors nor the audience changing their conventional behaviour. Indeed breaking through it may in fact reinforce the very opposition that is claimed to be overcome: the familiar bourgeois gesture. In this sense the structuring of his stages described above should not be understood as the colonising of new spaces in the theatre, thus creating new divisions, but rather as an attempt to expand the intermediate space of the backstage onto the stage, the stage into the auditorium, the theatre into the outside and so forth, blurring the divisions and questioning the demarcations of various borders.[11]

Pollesch thus juxtaposes numerous 'levels of the real' on top of each other. Rather than create an illusion of reality, as was the ideal of bourgeois theatre, and disturb or disrupt that, the coherent illusion is never allowed to be established in the first place, due to the constant switching from a direct physical presence to a mediated one, from the visible to the obstructed view and even, as described above, from inside the theatre to outside its

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[11] Diedrich Diederichsen argues in his essay on Pollesch that the hidden space of the backstage represents a space of retreat from both the obligation to play a role or to be authentically 'ourselves' in our lives, an in-between, outside of the space of as-if but yet still in the theatre and not in 'real life'. The exposure of this space and the backstage staff (the souffleuse, the camera crew) therefore releases a kind of subversive potential in his view. See Diedrich Diederichsen, "Maggies Agentur: Das Theater von Rene Pollesch", in *Dramatische Transformationen*, ed. by Stefan Tigges, p. 103.

confines – the physical theatre building being the most fundamental framework for the delineation of a space of the 'as-if'. Tactics such as the direct address of the audience are no longer perceived as such a break in an illusion in this context, but rather form just another part of the constantly shifting multiple realities. In any case, audiences have been directly addressed in Germany at least since Brecht[12] and this may therefore not be experienced as unusual – in fact it may be experienced as a predictable device which is still part of a coherent whole. When Pollesch does use this device, it is also pushed to extremes, such as when Trystan Pütter hands out a tray of shot glasses of vodka to the audience in *Tal der fliegenden Messer*, or when Fabian Hinrichs threatens to brush a member of the audience's teeth with an electric toothbrush in *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!* While Thalheimer creates highly aestheticised new versions of literary dramas and Ostermeier 'reconstitutes' realist coherency in order to criticise bourgeois culture, Pollesch problematises the whole distinction between realism and reality in the first place and ultimately pushes this dichotomy into collapse. His work is a performance of deconstruction, as well as a perpetual deconstruction of its own terms and performance.

Deconstructing the Bourgeois Subject

This undoing of the opposition between illusion and presence in the theatre is also reflected in what I argue is the common aspect of much of Pollesch's work: the performative destruction of the bourgeois subject, the construction of which was the subject of the early chapters of this dissertation. This involves a twofold move: one on the level of language and another on the level of character, and is directly related to his problematising of theatrical presence through his use of media described above. In *The Death of Character* (already mentioned in chapter one), Elinor Fuchs examines the gradual development away from realistic, psychological characters on the stage throughout the twentieth century and, in particular, strategies in postmodern theatre which question the notion of a unified subject with an original or essential interior character. In chapter four of the book, "Signalling through the Signs", she examines the emergence of concerns with presence in theatre from the 1960s onwards. Inspired by Antonin Artaud and Jerzy Grotowski, many theatre practitioners in that period, "came to regard the author's script as an element of political repression in the theatrical process, demanding submission to an external

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[12] It was also common in pre-bourgeois theatre (such as the theatre of the travelling players) and therefore only suppressed for a period of time by bourgeois representational realism.

authority."[13] This rejection of the authorial voice embodied in the drama was linked to a suspicion of rational language and a preference for emphasising speech, improvised and nonsensical or irrational language, a focus on the physical body – the presence of performers and audience – and experiments with ecstatic and ritual forms as a means to achieve a quasi-transcendental presence and temporary community in the theatre.[14] As Fuchs writes, "critics and scholars who followed in the wake of such theatre in the 1970s extolled theatrical presence as had no previous generation, presenting it in almost religious terms."[15] A seminal example of this is Peggy Phelan, whom Fuchs does not mention, perhaps because Phelan was also writing in the 1990s, although her work focuses on performance art from the 1960s and 1970s. Phelan argues that the presence of the performance, manifested in the performer's body, the spatial and temporal situation, and the fact that it cannot be reproduced, is its central ontological characteristic – this she believes allows the performance to escape the economic system of reproduction. Phelan writes:

> Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility – in a manically charged present – and disappears into memory, into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control.[16]

Though Phelan makes explicit reference to Jacques Derrida in *Unmarked*, as Solveig Gade points out,[17] Phelan fails to take into account that according to Derrida, signification "is a matter of *general iterability*, which one cannot decide to choose or not to choose [Gade's emphasis]."[18] As soon as one employs signs of any kind, especially language, one enters into the realm of reproduction and re-presentation.

Fuchs suggests that this desperate cry for presence at the dawning of postmodernism was the sign of the imminent demise of such presence, for new forms of theatre were already emerging which deliberately disrupted theatrical presence and the

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[13] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 70. On one level Pollesch also seems to regard the script in this manner, considering his refusal to allow others to perform his work (in which case he would become the authority), and also because he never directs any other author's work himself. However, his treatment of the script as an authority is more complex – see below.

[14] The classic example is Richard Schechner's Performance Group and performances such as the previously mentioned *Dionysus in '69*. Fuchs also mentions Peter Brook's *Orghast* experiment and Meredith Monk's *Education of the Girlchild*. This development was also evident in the new forms of performance art. See Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 70. For a more Germany-focused review of theatre and performance art since the 1960s, cf. *Theater seit den 60er Jahren*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Friedemann Kreuder and Isabel Pflug.

[15] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 70.

[16] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 148.

[17] Solveig Gade, "Playing the Media Keyboard: The Political Potential of Performativity in Christoph Schlingensief's Electioneering Circus", in *Performative Realism*, ed. by Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2005), p. 19-50.

[18] Ibid., p. 30.

cohesive structure of performance, as well as the actors' communion with the spectator, through a highly formalised theatrical aesthetic. She cites Robert Wilson as an example, but one could also see the German development of *Regietheater* in this light, for example Peter Stein, and perhaps one could also identify a similar problematisation of empathy in Thalheimer's highly formalised theatre aesthetic. Fuchs' primary interest in "Signalling through the Signs" is one which has direct relevance to Pollesch however, that of "the undermining of the presence effect"[19] through the introduction of that 'other' which is usually banished from the here-and-now of theatre: writing. This entails the "de-authentication" or "absencing" of the speaking subject.[20] Her approach is also strongly influenced by Jacques Derrida's thinking about the dominance of presence in the Western metaphysical tradition, especially in his *Speech and Phenomena*, *Of Grammatology* and *Writing and Difference*.

Derrida challenges the idea that it is possible for the human subject "to enter a now, to become entirely present to itself."[21] For fundamentally any 'now' is always already contaminated by a trace of outside the present/presence. This trace or 'differánce', to use Derrida's by now famous term, is both temporal and spatial. The present is only ever a reconstituted state, which always depends on reference outside itself – to the past or the future – just as language always depends on references to other signs. Pure presence is thus an illusion. In Derrida's thinking presence is associated with all the privileged terms in the Western metaphysical systems of binaries.[22] Derrida is primarily interested in the binary opposition of speech and writing to investigate this privileging of presence. Throughout Western philosophy, speech is considered authentic and present while writing is not, according to Derrida. Writing is somehow lifeless, secondary, depersonalised. However, Derrida argues that writing always infiltrates speech, and in fact may precede it.[23] In any case, both writing and speech involve a perpetual displacement of meaning and always display a citational quality, iterability, which depends on previous usage and constructions of meaning. All language can therefore be viewed as referring to social norms, in the way that a quote is always an invocation to an authority. I have already discussed this in more detail in chapter one in relation to Austin's 'etiolated' or 'parasitic' language on the stage and the reader may recall the idea of the double-citationality of language on the stage, which could easily be applied to Pollesch. Fuchs sees a similar structure in operation in

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[19] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 71.

[20] Ibid., p. 72.

[21] Ibid., p. 72.

[22] See ibid., p. 73.

[23] See Jacques Derrida, "Signature Event Context", in *Limited Inc*, pp. 1-23. Cf. also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*.

theatre: "that is, drama has evolved as the form of writing that strives to create the illusion that it is composed of spontaneous speech."[24]

Fuchs investigates the tendency in some postmodern performances since the 1970s to 'retextualise' theatre performances, by incorporating the act of writing or the text as object into the performance, the aim of which is to "complicate the spectator's experience of theatrical presence".[25] Correspondingly, "this has important implications for dramatic character, which begins to re-assume its cursive, pre-psychological meaning – character as impression or inscription".[26] She identifies the forerunners of this development in Bertolt Brecht, Samuel Beckett and Peter Handke. Brecht wanted to create 'theatrical footnotes' and demanded that his actors achieve a critical distance from their characters or rather figures (which is closer to the German term in any case). In *Krapp's Last Tape* for example, Beckett uses a tape-player to mediatise the presence of speech, and also to address the problem of a never-present self, an endless regression of versions of former selves recorded on the tape, which may ultimately only be fiction and, as Fuchs points out, are based in fact on writing: scribbled notes on the back of envelope.[27] Referring to Beckett's *Ohio Impromptu*, Fuchs writes: "This figure is indeed a *figure*, in the literary sense, of lost origination and indecipherability; all three [figures: the Reader, the Listener and the Dear Name] might be said to be uncertainly poised between ontological and cursive character, character as mark, as a stroke in a configuration."[28] This could also be a reading of character (and subjectivity is always the trace or even corollary of character) as dissolved into just this inscription, this figure woven in text, in Pollesch's work. Fuchs goes on to examine theatre practitioners who project text onto screens, incorporate it into their sets, have figures engage in writing on stage or use quotation or repetition, such as Richard Foreman, Elizabeth LeCompte and Daryl Chin,[29] in which "the 'space' of speech in theatre, with all its character(istic) associations of authenticity, origination, presence, has already begun to contract."[30]

Though Pollesch does not usually employ any of the above in any production that I am aware of (with the exception of Cosmo Vitelli signing his/her signature digitally in *Tal*

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[24] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 74.

[25] Ibid. Cf. her earlier article on this subject: Elinor Fuchs, "Presence and the Revenge of Writing: Re-Thinking Theatre after Derrida", *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, ed. by Bonnie Marranca, 9 (1985) no. 2/3, pp. 163-173.

[26] Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 74.

[27] See ibid., p. 75.

[28] Ibid., p. 76.

[29] Ibid., pp. 78-88.

[30] Ibid., p. 88.

der fliegenden Messer[31]), he achieves similar effects through various different means. Firstly, through the use of video outlined above, which disrupts the cohesive now or presence of the theatrical experience by mediatising it and also by taking the performance outside the physical space of the theatre to 'reality', a 'reality' which is however only perceived through the medium of video. This creates multiple spaces of varying degrees of presence. Secondly, theatrical presence is disrupted by the intermediate figure of the souffleuse,[32] who carries the script visibly (sometimes marked clearly on the cover with the word 'text'), drawing attention to the trace of the written text in the immediate 'presence' of the actors' speech, which in its imperfection and line fluffs also challenges the idea that in speech we are somehow unified in thought and action, mind and body – present – as well as drawing attention to the fundamental fact that the actors have learned their lines. Thirdly, it is Pollesch's extensive and evident use of quotes and paraphrases of philosophy and cultural criticism that disrupt the presence of dramatic dialogue and the revelation of character through speech.

While on one level Pollesch could be seen as appealing to the authority of (bourgeois) academic discourse to support his theatrical experiments and hypotheses, which I will discuss below, in terms of presence it is first and foremost important *that* he quotes. The characters dissolve into speakers of fragments of various codes, which often can only be deciphered by those who already speak the codes (someone familiar with Michel Foucault or Jean-Luc Nancy for example). The characters become *figures* inscribed by a multitude of discourses running together, splitting, contradicting each other and breaking off with no conclusive argument. The use of quoting also points to multiple levels of trace within the speech and the writing in the performance: the actors' speech is constantly anchored back into the text that is visible onstage, but which has also been created by the performers and Pollesch in the process of rehearsals, in turn on the basis of other texts. It therefore functions authoritatively as a piece of documentation of a presence now past (the moment of inspiration and creativity as opposed to the moment of the *(re-)production* in both senses) and as an 'instruction manual' for the future of the

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[31] This calls to mind Derrida's investigation of the signature as having a particular (legal) status of presence. See Derrida, "Declarations of Independence", in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001*, ed. and trans. by Elizabeth Rottenburg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 46-54. A signature has legal force because it testifies to the presence of a subject and legitimates their absence. It also constitutes a speech act in writing. Once again Pollesch collapses this by having Cosmo sign his/her signature in a mediatised context but in the 'presence' of the stage: it appears as a scrawl on the video screen, but the signatory is present (Christine Groß, the actress) and absent (the character Vitelli). Furthermore, it is etiolated by taking place in the context of the stage.

[32] Fuchs also includes Peter Handke's *Kaspar* as an early example of 'textualised' theatre, in which Kaspar is constructed as a subject through language by anonymous offstage prompters (in German *Einsager*) who speak to Kaspar through technical media such as microphones or telephones. See Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 76f.

performance (what the actor should say next), and is exposed as such. The quotations within the theatre text (and the performers' speech) once again point outside the written text that forms the basis of the performance, beyond it to the discourses which have informed it, which are in turn informed by other discourses and so on. This is also underlined by the bibliographic references given in the programmes. Pollesch thus reveals the endless chain of deferral or differánce which Derrida claimed was the movement of all language.

Questioning Authenticity

Is Pollesch just another postmodern writer and practitioner in thrall to poststructuralism then? Daryl Chin, described by Fuchs, was also an artist who also incorporated long passages of theory and criticism into his work in the early 1980s.[33] It must be emphasised, however, that Pollesch's citation of discourse also appears alongside the utterly banal, the comic and trashy musical or physical sequences and thus is itself constantly disrupted. This confronts yet another opposition related to presence and to character and identity: that of the art/life distinction, which was primarily established in the period of bourgeois realism. This distinction was a reflection of the emergence of a bourgeois subject, which itself was split into a private and public subject, who employed the cultural sphere, as part of the public sphere, to mediate and negotiate between the subject as individual and as part of a much wider community, as discussed in chapters two and three.[34] Almost ever since this was established, there have been attempts to undo this distinction. Even Ibsen's naturalism, as discussed in the last chapter, was perceived as ridding the theatre of theatricality and bringing it closer to real life. In the twentieth century, the focus switched to the effect of the performance on 'reality': Brecht for example asserted that the theatrical performance must emphasise its status as a performance in order to generate critical distance so that the audience might change their attitudes, behaviour or politics in 'real' life. Today many theatre practitioners import 'real' life into the theatre in order to emphasise 'real' life's performed quality. This new style of documentary theatre, represented by groups like Rimini Protokoll and SheShePop, can however be seen to assert the authenticity and presence of 'real' life by using non-actors and their life stories or 'expertise' in the theatre. These artists seem to seek solely to 'present' the material of reality rather than 'represent' it, albeit as constructed or performed, in some kind of pure form with as little intervention

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[33] See Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character*, p. 78f.
[34] As already repeatedly emphasised, however, the cultural sphere becomes the space in which bourgeois culture criticises its own values and into which it channels its suppressed energies and desires.

as possible from those who are staging the performance. This amounts to a rejection of bourgeois illusion and representation, and the assertion of 'life' over 'art' and artifice.

But is that really possible in the context of the theatre? For the non-actors are not simply 'living' onstage,[35] but have gone through a rehearsal process with the directors, dramaturges and sometimes professional performers, who *must* intervene on some level, even if it is merely the decision to involve these non-actors in the performance. Other theatre directors work with marginalised groups in society, for example Volker Lösch, who has created choruses of the unemployed, of ex-convicts and of prostitutes, apparently in order to access some more authentic truth about these groups' experiences and social situation.[36] In the case of Volker Lösch, this intervention is even more conspicuous, as his choruses speak in one voice and speak a text which, though it may have been inspired by their experiences, has yet been scripted by Lösch or his dramaturge.[37] These choruses are also not an altogether neutral form, despite the valid and I believe genuine motivation to give these marginalised groups a voice. For these social groups are actually constructed as other to the audience in the process (depending on the social position of the audience): they are put on stage so that the audience might learn more about 'the marginalised', but this is based on an assumption that the audience is 'normal' and the socially marginalised group on stage is not. Like the breaking of the fourth wall, the presentation (or appropriation, or colonisation) of the other merely reinforces the opposition it claims to overcome; the 'otherness' of the other is only perceived in relation to the perspective of the theatre practitioners and probably a large part of the audience, as a degree of difference to the norm, which is arguably usually an educated middle class norm (though constructing *that* as undifferentiated is equally problematic, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, and which I will discuss presently).

This apparently bourgeois normative narrative position is Pollesch's main criticism of representational theatre, which he regularly attacks in interviews. It assumes that such marginalised groups have no language of their own with which to express themselves, as he argues for example in the conversation with Carl Hegemann already cited, and that only

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[35] There are of course always interesting exceptions. Rimini Protokoll dispensed with actors altogether for their contribution to *Lange Nacht der Theatern und Opern* 2010 in the Hebbel am Ufer theatre, which was entitled *Heuschrecken*. Instead they set up a small biosphere taking up most of the central area of the theatre space in which were hundreds of locusts, which were, as living ready-mades, doing nothing but that, living.

[36] Cf. Moray McGowan on Lösch's work with the unemployed in his *Die Dresdener Weber*: Moray McGowan, "Von Webern und Gurkenfliegern", in *Das Analoge sträubt sich gegen das Digitale?: Materialitäten des deutschen Theaters in einer Welt des Virtuellen*, ed. by David Barnett, Moray McGowan and Karen Jürs-Munby (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006) pp. 71-85.

[37] McGowan also notes how Einar Schleef's choric work was heavily criticised in the 1980s for being reminiscent of Fascist rally chants and for seemingly championing the obliteration of the individual. See Moray McGowan, ibid., p. 73. Cf. Christina Schmidt, *Tragödie als Bühnenform: Einar Schleefs Chor-Theater* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010).

these theatre practitioners have the education and ability to speak *for* them, to represent them (politically and aesthetically). In his view, this also relieves the audience of some of their guilt caused by occupying the dominant subjective position. The frame in which this representation occurs is not questioned and consensus is in fact re-established, a consensus which is perhaps suspect, even dangerous, for the reasons described above. It is also above all a middle class consensus, and consensus is at the very core of the ideals of the *Bürgertum* (democracy, equality, fraternity and so forth, which also obscure inequality and reinforce difference in terms of power). It is worth quoting the entire passage:

> Ein Theaterabend, der sich mit der sogenannten Unterschicht beschäftigt, und zwar als Repräsentationstheater, performt vor allem die Differenz zum Mittelstand, der im Zuschauerraum sitzt und auf der Bühne. So eine Darstellungspraxis, wie zum Beispiel auch Sigourney Weaver, die eine Autistin darstellt, performt nie den Anderen, sondern nur die Differenz zu dem, was gesund, männlich, heterosexuell und Mittelstand ist. Auch immer, um die Differenz zu erhalten oder sogar zu vergrößern. Es darf sich vor allem nichts vermischen. Sonst würde die Schauspielerin auch keinen Oscar dafür kriegen. Während der Andere sein Leben lang die Differenz zur Gesellschaft performen muss, zementiert seine Darstellerin vor allem die Erzählposition, von der aus der Andere überhaupt erst zu erkennen ist. Sigourney Weaver kommt dann auch auf Ideen wie, dass man die Welt durch die Augen einer Autistin sehen sollte, aber das ist natürlich PR, denn Sigourney Weaver ist vor allem Millionärin.[38]

Pollesch is wary of any narrative position that assumes to speak for someone else – which according to him is the starting point of any representation. Speaking for someone else is in fact the very definition of dramatic writing. This immediately begs the question however: how can Pollesch escape these structures? For he too seems to be constructing an other to his critical, intellectual perspective: "gesund, männlich, heterosexuell und *Mittelstand* [my emphasis]", that is, an undifferentiated bourgeois subject viewed as some kind of universal enemy, and presumably as something he is not (though arguably he fulfils all the criteria). Here, once again, the 'bourgeoisie' functions as an empty marker for all that which the educated, intellectual milieu opposes about *themselves*.

In the same conversation, Hegemann questions Pollesch's rejection of traditional drama, arguing that Shakespeare, for example, often probed these very oppositions in his plays and that the diachronic, historical dimension of other writers from the past can also help to challenge our positions today.[39] One might also add that many other contemporary playwrights attempt to speak from a different position: Elfriede Jelinek and Kathrin

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[38] René Pollesch and Carl Hegemann, "Liebe, von der man sich selbst erzählt", in *Die Überflüssigen*, p. 103f. Cf. Pollesch's article for the *Tagesspiegel* on the occasion of the anniversary of Brecht's death: René Pollesch, "Dialektisches Theater now! Brechts Entfremdungs-Effekt", in *Liebe ist kälter als das Kapital*, ed. by Corinna Brocher and Aenne Quinones (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009), pp. 301-305.

[39] As opposed to what Pollesch calls "Pimp my Shakespeare", see Pollesch and Hegemann, "Liebe, von der man sich selbst erzählt", in *Die Überflüssigen*, p. 109 and p. 112f.

Röggla, for example, both write for the stage in ways which seek to challenge the dominant subjective position, without resorting to essentialist female versions of the same problem.[40] As I have shown also, neither Lessing nor Ibsen write from this normative, bourgeois position, in fact both can be seen to question and criticise it in different ways, and there are many other examples.

One might also pose the question as to what conditions would have to be in place to completely escape the frame of representation in aesthetic terms. No language? No gestures? No theatre building? Marina Abramović's stare?[41] Ultimately Pollesch cannot wriggle free from the constraints of representation or avoid its pitfalls, at least not any time anyone utters a single word on the stage, for language, as already described, always refers outside of itself and defers its presence to itself. What makes Pollesch such an interesting and challenging artist, however, is that his work exposes this problem (whether or not he too is aware of it): even though it may be his intention as an artist to escape from the dominant bourgeois narrative position and a bourgeois aesthetics of representation, his work is better described as an *attempt* to do this, *testing* it, and exploring and exposing the limits of the non- or anti-representational.

The problem exposed is that of an opposition between representation or illusion associated with a bourgeois normative perspective and an authenticity associated with presence.[42] However, authenticity may also disintegrate under closer scrutiny, especially in the context of the theatre:

> Gerade weil das Theater als tradierter Ort der 'Darstellung von etwas' seine eigene Rahmung nie ganz übersteigen kann, entlarvt es das Authentische zugleich als vorgestelltes: Das vermeintliche Reale muss vor dem Hintergrund theatraler Inszenierungen mithin immer als 'Form, Resultat bzw. Effekt medialer Darstellung verstanden werden'. Als Produkt eines theatralen Prozesses wird das 'Authentische des Theaters' seine Aufführungszeichen nicht mithin los und in eben dieser Uneigentlichkeit scheint zugleich die Irritation und der Reiz seiner Wahrnehmung zu liegen.[43]

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[40] Cf. Kathrin Röggla, "theater ist stottern" in *Dramatische Transformationen*, ed. by Stefan Tigges, pp. 199-201. Cf. also David Barnett, "Text as Material? The Category of 'Performativity' in Three Postdramatic Theatre Texts", in *Performance and Performativity in German Cultural Studies*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger, Lucia Ruprecht and Andrew Webber (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 137-157, in which he examines Rainald Goetz, Albert Ostermaier and Ginka Steinwachs as examples of 'anti-representational' writing for the stage. He also mentions Elfriede Jelinek, Heiner Müller and Peter Handke.

[41] I am referring to Marina Abramović's recent performance at the MOMA in New York, *The Artist is Present* (14 March to 31 May 2010), in which gallery visitors had the opportunity to sit at a table across from her, while she sat immobile for seven hours a day, staring at them.

[42] Two excellent volumes on this subject are *Reality Strikes Back: Tage vor dem Bildersturm* (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2007) and *Reality Strikes Back II: Tod der Repräsentation*, already cited, both edited by Frank Raddatz and Kathrin Tiedemann.

[43] *Wege der Wahrnehmung: Authentizität, Reflexivität und Aufmerksamkeit im zeitgenössischen Theater*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Barbara Gronau, Sabine Schouten and Christel Weiler (Berlin: Theater der Zeit, 2006), introduction, p. 6. The citation within the quote is of the introduction to *Authentizität als Darstellung*,

The authentic is not perceived as such unless it appears within the framing of the potentially inauthentic or illusionistic – otherwise it is simply banal and everyday. There is always a trace (or more than that) of the 'authorial' voice, of intervention and specific modes of representation as soon as these performances take place within the institutional frame of art or the theatre, as soon as any decision is taken in that context. If theatre truly collapsed into life, there would be no ticket to buy, no programme timetable and certainly no applause at the end, which always marks the end of the illusion, or rather the consensus to perceive what is being experienced as theatre, no matter how minimised that illusion seems to be. Pollesch's work is an attempt to somehow walk the thin line between authenticity and artifice, between representation and presence, and constantly shifts between these two 'registers'. Though they do not represent coherent psychological characters, the performers maintain a sense of spectacle throughout the performances, for example in their fast-paced, emphatic delivery as well as their ostentatious and sometimes camp costumes, which are frequently changed (the circus aesthetic in *Tal der fliegenden Messer* also underlines this). They do not purport to be representations speaking for an other, nor to be presenting the unmediated, authentic versions of themselves as actors, but shifting constructions of various identities.

One way, however, in which 'life' does invade Pollesch's work, is in the banality of some of the scenes and subject matters as well as in the remorseless imperfection of the performances.[44] Occasionally, in its imperfection and exposure of mistakes, in its constant change of register and quotations from highly demanding, perhaps not very entertaining texts, Pollesch's work does come close to life in its capacity to overwhelm and collapse into banality.[45] In this way, the perfection of the illusion that was the bourgeois ideal of theatre is once again resisted. His prolific production often involves rehashing material, returning to previously examined theoretical issues and even repeating gags. This all results in a curiously rarely discussed theatrical effect, which can feel painfully real: boredom.

Normally, everything is done to expel boredom from the theatre; intervention is usually precisely on this level, that is to say, tactics are used to keep the audience interested. Pollesch – and his performers, who always come across as extremely

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ed. by Jan Berg, Hans-Otto Hügel and Hajo Kurzenberger (Hildesheim: University of Hildesheim Press: 1997), p. 5.

[44] Hans Thies Lehmann identifies performers' willingness to expose themselves to risk, embarrassment and mistakes as a characteristic of postdramatic theatre. See Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatisches Theater*, pp. 35-39.

[45] I am indebted to my friend and colleague Sandra Manhartseder and her own excellent work on Pollesch for drawing my attention to the issue of banality in Pollesch's work.

comfortable in the situation, given that mistakes are permitted – seems completely unconcerned with keeping the audience interested or that they may not be able to follow the dense theoretical arguments. In "Die Arbeit am Nicht-Perfekten", Jens Roselt, describing how a group of security guards were practicing a drill in his (theatre) department, and how he was unable to tell whether this was a real breach of security or a joke, writes:

> Das war unerträglich und machte auf eine Dimension von Wirklichkeit aufmerksam, die bei aller Emphase für das wahre Leben schnell vergessen werden kann: Nämlich ihre unerträgliche Seite. Ungefragt drängt sie sich jeden Morgen auf, wenn der Wecker klingelt. Penetrant zeigt sie sich in den Schlangen vor Aldikassen, in überfüllten U-Bahnen und schwitzenden Mitmenschen. Aber auch der eigene Körper ist eine stinkende Zumutung, die steter Pflege bedarf. In Wirklichkeit hat man nie Zeit oder sie ist schrecklich langweilig.[46]

Though it is the constant switch of registers on the one hand that keeps the audience entertained in Pollesch's work, I often find myself momentarily distracted, drifting off in my thoughts, unable to follow or indeed bored, but there is a sense that this is expected and permitted. In their banality, some of the moments in Pollesch thus *almost* collapse into life, in that art almost becomes as banal as the real. As will hopefully by now have become clear, there is however always another level in Pollesch: the performers themselves also express boredom (such as the actor who refuses to come on stage in *JFK*, played by Felix Knopp) or accuse each other of missing the point, digressing too far or talking nonsense. But it must be remembered that this is not the spontaneous expression of an 'authentic' emotion: Felix Knopp *must* complain of boredom and exhaustion in *JFK* even if he is feeling fantastic and extremely interested. Furthermore, performed boredom is no more 'real' than any other emotion performed; it merely appears as such, because it is so rarely performed. Thus even the 'real' of boredom is simultaneously plugged back into the performance: attention is drawn to the real, everyday situation of the actors, but this ultimately may or may not be actually present in the sense described above.

Though Pollesch constantly insists that his theatre is 'anti-representational', his work seems rather to analyse the aporias of this collapse between art and life in the many juxtaposed levels of 'realities', mediated and otherwise, which push those distinctions to their limits, without however positing an authentic presence beyond representation. To return to the instance of his performers leaving the theatre in *Tal der fliegenden Messer*: here theatre invades life, it literally breaks outside of the frame, while keeping the audience *within* that frame, thus focussing their awareness on it. In this way he maintains the trace of

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[46] Jens Roselt, "Die Arbeit am Nicht-Perfekten", in *Wege der Wahrnehmung*, pp. 28-38; p. 29.

theatre outside of it (also more obviously by the conspicuous costumes and the gun fight the actors play out in the beer garden) and a mediated presence of the outside within it. Furthermore, what seemed quite anti-illusionistic or authentic in the context of the theatre suddenly seems outrageously performed and artificial in the context of the beer garden. This is fundamentally different from site-specific performances, which, it can be argued, often establish quasi-theatrical borders around the space of representation, just somewhere *else* and temporarily. Admittedly, Pollesch also makes site-specific theatre: all three parts of the *Ruhrtrilogie* were first staged on a piece of wasteland near Mülheim. However, in the production of part two in Berlin, *Cinecittà aperta*, Pollesch reverses the breaking-out from the theatre in *Tal der fliegenden Messer*: a film of the premiere in Mülheim is shown in the Prater theatre in Berlin; the past performance invades the present theatre. But does that constitute the representation or re-presentation of a performance; or the invasion of the outside, in the form of a record of a past but live event, into the present performance? Does the presentation of the recording of a performance have the same presence as the 'live' one in Mülheim? As usual with Pollesch, it is impossible to come down on one side or the other. The various levels of performance, recording, presentation, re-presentation in turn 'performed over' live by the actors' voices dubbing the film (of the making of a film) create a multi-layered interplay of different kinds of presences and non-presences which cannot be apprehended as a simple opposition.[47]

Challenging Corporeal Community

Another opposition which Pollesch performatively tests and radically questions is that between body and mind. Once again this opposition can be traced back to bourgeois culture, and the conflicting subjective experience of duty and desire, public and private, in which eventually in the nineteenth century, the rational mind was favoured at the expense of the irrational body, which was increasingly subject to all kinds of control.[48] Neo-avantgarde performance art and theatre has often privileged the body as the site of another kind of authenticity or presence, in which the body and its materiality – its corpo*reality* – is privileged over character or identity. Many performance artists since the 1960s have used the body as a means to attempt to short-circuit representation, particularly in a feminist

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[47] In *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008 [1999]), Philip Auslander argues that the opposition between a live event and a mediatised one can no longer be maintained in contemporary society, in which electronic media and mediatised reproduction are ubiquitous. For example a 'live' rock concert is usually simultaneously shown on video screens at the event. See Auslander, ibid., p. 73f. Furthermore, many artists are also now active on the internet, producing 'live' performance art in a mediatised context.

[48] Cf. Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation* and chapters two and three of this dissertation.

context, for example in the extremely explicit performance art of Karen Finley,[49] or in work by the already mentioned Orlan and Marina Abramović, to name just a few examples. Erika Fischer-Lichte identifies the physical presence of the bodies of the performers and the audience as the primary constituent of her 'autopoietic feedback loop'. She also identifies corporeality as a central feature of her aesthetics of the performative.[50]

Perhaps beginning with Nietzsche's suggestion in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* that before 'Alexandrian culture' and Socratic 'theoretical man',[51] the human subject was capable of experiencing authentic togetherness in the ecstatic corporeal abandon of Dionysian festivals, but certainly influenced by interpretations of classical Greek theatre since, the physical presence of a group of bodies in the theatre has been associated with an original, lost sense of community.[52] This can also be seen to reflect nostalgia for pre-bourgeois small, local communities. Subsequently in the age of the *Bürgertum* (which can be equated with Nietzsche's theoretical man), the body in theatre – and in other spheres such as the prison or the hospital, as Foucault has shown throughout his work – was disciplined.[53] The body of the actor becomes a tool for representation, a carrier of signs and its own bodily corporeality is suppressed. Jens Roselt writes:

> Der Körper des Schauspielers ist Vorraussetzung sowie primäres Medium des Ausdrucks und zugleich von einer Materialität, die jede Darstellung begrenzt und ihr einen Widerstand entgegenstellt. Das Ideal der Schauspielkunst seit dem 18. Jahrhundert war es, diese immanente Widerständigkeit zu beherrschen und sie schon gar nicht die Zuschauer merken zu lassen.[54]

Later in naturalism, Roselt continues, Stanislavski sought to make the body transparent to the 'true' inner workings of psychology. In contemporary theatre, he argues, the experience of the 'non-perfect' brings disharmony into this harmonious relationship, especially when non-professional actors are involved.

> Auch der Körper ist nicht fertig oder abgeschlossen. In jedem Moment einer Performance schwitzt und atmet er. Während professionelles (perfektes) Schauspielen den Körper als virtuoses Ausdrucksinstrument trainiert, sucht das Nicht-Perfekte eher die körperlichen Widerstände und Grenzen auf und macht diese erfahrbar. Besonders deutlich wird diese Dimension im Moment der

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[49] Cf. Elinor Fuchs, "When Bad Girls Play Good Theaters", *The Death of Character*, pp. 108-127.

[50] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, in particular chapter 3: "Die leibliche Ko-Präsenz von Akteuren und Zuschauern" pp. 58-126 and the "Körperlichkeit" section of chapter 4, pp. 129-186.

[51] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), especially pp. 91-96 (chapter 15).

[52] Fischer-Lichte also discusses *Gemeinschaft* in *Ästhetik des Performativen*, pp. 82-100. As I have argued in chapter three, the community in the theatre functions as a substitute the 'lost community' of the pre-bourgeois culture, experienced as lost as a result of the individualisation of the subject in bourgeois culture and industrial capitalism.

[53] Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* and chapter three of this dissertation.

[54] Jens Roselt, "Die Arbeit am Nicht-Perfekten", in *Wege der Wahrnehmung*, p. 34f.

While the former was undeniably the ideal advocated by theorists and critics of early bourgeois theatre, it did not always correspond to the reality of performance, considering the outpouring of emotions, the eating, drinking and shouting that took place in the theatre well into the late nineteenth century, as noted in chapter three, as well as the rather 'inauthentic' formal acting style, which naturalism later attempted to surpass. Perhaps the apogee of the disappearance or veiling of the body only really occurs in the twentieth century, when the body appears as 'natural' and 'truthful' – present – in all its undisciplined materiality. In any case, this citation indicates the tendency to interpret illusionistic acting techniques by professional actors as inauthentic, while the presentation of the body, simply 'as it is', is associated with a kind of authenticity that once again appears to be another attempt to find a path out of representation and into presence.

In their introduction to *Performative Realism*, Anne Jerslev and Rune Gade have the following to say about the status of the body in performance art and contemporary theatre:

> The body is often seen as the locus of a certain production of authenticity working to stress the 'reality' of whatever takes place, but rarely in any naïve way. Instead, the body as a potential instance of authenticity is used in combination with complex means of mediation that cooperate with the bodily signs to produce *a theatre of truth*, an illusion of referentiality, in which it remains impossible to decide whether we are witnessing something real or fictitious. Obviously, this not only questions the status and function of the body but also seriously challenges conventional understandings of artworks and representations in general as autonomous and clearly demarcated entities or 'bodies' [my emphasis].[56]

While Pollesch's actors sometimes display "die körperlichen Widerstände und Grenzen" as Roselt describes them above, in my view this is not in order to "produce a theatre of truth", but does "question the status and function of the body", especially that of the actor as the embodiment of a coherent psychological character and/or as the vessel of some essential form of identity, even if that is the identity of the performer.

In *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig* (premiere 2.4.2009), this is achieved partly through the use of the eponymous chorus of women,[57] who sometimes figure as a distorted form of the traditional Greek chorus (which traditionally represented the collective or the

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[55] Ibid., p. 33.

[56] Rune Gade and Anne Jerslev, introduction to *Performative Realism*, p. 11f.

[57] A chorus also reappears in *Mädchen in Uniform* and in *Schmeiß dein Ego Weg!* The chorus has been used in a variety of different ways in the theatre of the twentieth century, often to subvert bourgeois realist forms. Cf. Detlev Baur, *Der Chor im Theater des 20. Jahrhunderts: Typolgie des theatralen Mittels Chor* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999).

community and therefore social norms), sometimes as the lead actress Sophie Rois' suitor/lover and sometimes merely as split subjectivity (perhaps Rois' own). The intertexts which inform this production are Dietmar Dath's socialist analysis of technology, *Maschinenwinter*,[58] and Yves Robert's film, a French comedy from the 1970s, *Un éléphant ça trompe énormément* (An Elephant Can Be Extremely Deceptive), which concerns a middle class man trying to have an affair, aided by three of his womanising friends. The escapades of the characters in Robert's film form the basic building blocks for what comes closest to a plot in all the of the Pollesch productions I am discussing here: numerous characters or figures all trying to have an affair. In the opening scene, Sophie Rois, wearing a late Victorian dress, plays the character Bouly who comes home to find his wife has left him and taken all the furniture, and much comedy is wrung from the other figures (played by Jean Chaize[59] and Brigitte Cuvelier) attempting to teach her correct French pronunciation (the multilingualism of this play also explores the problematic assumption that language can accurately reflect our true selves and intentions[60]). However, this character and plot are only briefly suggested and appear again only sporadically throughout the remainder of the play, along with numerous other figures played by Rois.

The bourgeois subject as a stable, singular individual is undermined by the refusal to allow coherent psychological characters to emerge. Moreover, the double morality of the bourgeoisie is taken to comic extremes by the complex web of affairs and attempts at seduction. Sophie Rois also plays numerous other men and it seems a woman (Sally), with whom the chorus of women (addressed as Paul, later Lucien and then Michael) wants to go to bed. These figures are often mixed together in one scene, for example in the first scene with the chorus (as Paul). It arrives to take her (Sophie Rois as Sally) on a date to the opera, but Rois interrupts them/him to phone 'her' ex-wife, Marie-Ange (the wife who left the character of the first scene, Bouly). The chorus is even addressed as Bouly too at one point. The chorus thus also seems to have a polymorphous identity. Just when it is making progress in its seduction of Sophie Rois' figure(s), she exclaims:

> S   Himmel! Mein Chor! […] Er steht vor der Tür. [...] Der Chor mit dem ich zusammenlebe. Mein Ehe-Chor. […] Liebling, was soll ich denn sagen? Du bist doch nicht so naiv und denkst du wärst der einzige Chor in meinem Leben![61]

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[58] Dietmar Dath, *Maschinenwinter: Wissen, Technik, Sozialismus: Eine Streitschrift* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008).

[59] Jean Chaize seems to play Sophie Rois' mother.

[60] There are multilingual sections in French and Italian with no subtitles. See René Pollesch, *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, pp. 16-18 (the script has been kindly provided to me by Pollesch's agent Corinna Brocher).

[61] Ibid., p. 10. The 'figures' are marked in the script only by the first letter of the actors' names.

When she asks the chorus to hide, it merely switches roles, enters through another door and becomes her 'Ehe-Chor', Lucien. The characters and figures are thus swapped around so much that it appears as though Sophie Rois may be trying to have an affair with herself.[62] What might *that* mean? Apart from the obvious satisfaction of sexual and romantic desire, an affair can be viewed as attempt to momentarily escape the circumstances and relationships that have coalesced to partly form one's identity, without giving up that identity entirely. It can be described as a temporary period of being someone else. By having an affair with herself, so to speak, Sophie Rois' figure accepts that she is indeed a multiple subject (the various lovers are always the multiple chorus). Later, Christine Groß suggests 'polymorphous' relationships as the solution to this complex:

> T   Was wäre denn, wenn die Freiheit darin bestünde, nicht einem langweiligen Gemeinplatz wie dem der Sexualität zu unterliegen? Wenn die Dinge, die Leute, die Körper polymorphe Beziehungen haben könnten? Aber dieser Polymorphismus, den die Erwachsenen um sich zu beruhigen, Perversität nennen, überstreichen sie mit dem Grau in Grau ihres eigenen Sexes.[63]

As explored in detail in the previous chapter, the bourgeois subject was contructed first and foremost as a male subject. By constantly swapping the gendered positions of the characters from one actor to another and creating "polymorphous" relationships between them, Pollesch thus also deconstructs this aspect of the bourgeois subject, without however simply asserting the female perspective, which would arguably reinforce the traditional gender binary opposition.

On the other hand the chorus is constantly trying to seduce Sophie Rois ("Ich hab Ihnen vierzehn [Briefe] geschickt. Ich will Ihren Busen, ja wirklich, ich will nicht mehr ohne ihn leben."[64]), in a predatory but often comic fashion. The chorus as a group of bodies trying to seduce Sophie Rois' individual figure can also be read as the community trying to swallow the individual – perhaps as an alternative to the individualism of bourgeois culture. This is echoed in the discussion of capitalism and communism throughout the play, in which it is often argued that the individual should be willing to give up his/her individuality and egotism for the sake of a functioning community. Towards the end, Sophie Rois says to the chorus:

> S   Lucien, weißt du, was ich an dir so mag? Dass der Verlust der Individualität nicht die größte Angst ist in dir. Ein Sozialismus aus Eigeninteresse,

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[62] This is also how I interpreted it the first time I saw the performance, with no aid of a script.
[63] René Pollesch, *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, p. 20.
[64] Ibid., p. 14.

das ist es. Ich bin so froh, dass ich mit einem Chor zusammen bin. Diese Egoisten, diese verblödeten Einzelkämpfer, die sind alle so harmlos.[65]

This problem of group subjectivity and the individual subject inherent to bourgeois culture is also of course hinted at in the title. Pollesch is criticising a false sense of community valorised by theatre practitioners and critics, based purely on the presence of an assembly of bodies (which was also the ideal of bourgeois theatre and politics). In an interview with the *Tagesspiegel* on the occasion of the premiere of this production, Pollesch was asked whether he is concerned with criticising theatre as a "Selbstbestätigungsnummer":

Genau, das stiftet ein Gemeinschaftsgefühl. Das ist opportunistisch und bequem, solange das Theater sich dabei nicht selbst verändert und Kritik nur benutzt, um die eigene Existenz zu legitimieren. […] Man macht scheinbar kapitalismuskritische Theaterstücke, praktiziert aber in der eigenen Arbeit gegenüber Assistenten, Schauspielern, Praktikanten, Chormitgliedern Ausbeutungsverhältnisse. Man übersieht die Widersprüche, in die man verwickelt ist, und stellt sich auf irgendeine Künstlerposition. Daran finde ich besonders interessant, dass das in aller Unschuld passiert, nicht zynisch und bewusst.[66]

He also directly criticises Volker Lösch in the same interview for 'exploiting' his choruses and failing to examine the complexity of group subjectivity in his work, especially in relation to its conditions of production:

Wenn Volker Lösch in Stuttgart ein Stück mit Migrantinnen macht, ist doch die interessante Frage, wie er jenseits der Theaterhierarchie zu einer Kooperation mit diesen Frauen kommen könnte. Und genau das scheint ihn und viele andere nicht zu interessieren, sondern nur die Herstellung eines Produkts, für das diese Frauen Mittel zum Zweck sind. Künstler reproduzieren in ihrer Arbeitsweise genau die Verhältnisse, die sie angeblich kritisieren.[67]

Though he works collaboratively, as already mentioned, it is difficult to see how Pollesch escapes these structures. However, in his work the unity of the chorus figure is constantly undermined by the fact that it takes on different identities and paradoxically, *individual* rather than group identities. Furthermore, the irony of a chorus, a group of bodies, attempting a seduction – conventionally a situation of intimacy between two individuals (two bodies) – appears comic and almost absurd. Lines such as "Sie sind eine… Sie sind eine sehr schöne Frau" and "Rede nicht so viel! Laß uns ins Bett gehen!"[68] delivered in unison and with the staccato rhythm of a rehearsed chorus, alienate the passion

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[65] René Pollesch, *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, p. 30f.
[66] Peter Laudenbach, interview with René Pollesch, "Im Chor der Egoisten", *Der Tagesspiegel*, 30.3.2009. Available online at: http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/buehne-alt/im-chor-der-egoisten/1485486.html (accessed on 5.6.2011).
[67] Ibid.
[68] René Pollesch, *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, p. 34 and p. 35. When Rois asks the chorus (Lucien) if they know what it feels like to feel afraid when they are alone, they answer: "Mhm… Oh, das ist ja schrecklich", p. 33.

and affect usually associated with such scenes. How can these desires come from some authentic, inner source if they are coming from a multitude of sources? The voice of many that normally purports to speak for every individual here speaks *as* an individual. The climax of this comic seduction is when Sophie Rois finally acquiesces to the chorus, which physically swallows her in the mass of its many bodies. Again reduction to mere oppositions is frustrated by Pollesch: a community into which the individual's egotistical desires are subsumed is apparently advocated (which can be read as communism, but also as democracy), but while Sophie Rois eventually yields, the chorus figure clearly does not function as a unified group, but rather as a series of individual identities projected absurdly onto a group of bodies; it thus embodies that very conflict and contradiction between individual and group subjectivity.

The body itself as a vessel of essential identity and as a stable presence is also deconstructed. In *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, the audience is reminded that the body is not a fixed object, but an organism in process:

> T   Das Sterben ist kein Übergang! Ich weiß gar nicht, warum das immer erzählt wird. Da passiert nichts anderes als schon zu Lebzeiten! Der Körper verwest! Ab dem 11. Lebensjahr, nichts als Verwitterung und Verwesung! Und zwar ausgerechnet dann, wenn die Kinder, weg von ihren Fähigkeiten polymorphe Beziehungen zu anderen Lebewesen aufnehmen zu können, auf die öde Insel der Sexualität verbannt werden.[69]

Even recourse to the body as the stable location of gendered identity in the 'facticity' of biological sex, which bourgeois patriarchal discourse so often appealed to, is rejected. The theme of the body is taken up again in more detail in *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, which also examines the construction of a temporary community in the theatre more extensively and directly.

The body is immediately more in focus in this production, as it consists of a *tour de force* solo performance by Fabian Hinrichs, for which he was awarded the accolade of actor of the year by *Theater heute*, and who has also worked extensively with Laurent Chétouane in physical or dance theatre pieces. The opening line immediately disrupts the audience's expected and learned modes of experience, behaviour and reception in the theatre, resisting the either/or of realism and interactive theatre:

> Das hier ist kein interaktives Theater. Es sieht zwar so aus, mit dem Sitzkissen und dem Zeug, aber es handelt sich hier nicht um diese widerliche Kunstform der Geselligkeit. Das hier spricht nicht für alle. (*Weist auf seinen Körper*) Das ist ganz klar ein weißer männlicher Heterosexueller, der hier spricht, von einer Platform,

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[69] René Pollesch, *Ein Chor irrt sich gewaltig*, p. 25.

der auch nur ihm gehört, und keinem Hund, keiner Kakerlake, und keinem sonstigen Zeug.[70]

Hinrichs goes on to suggest in these first few minutes that the simple fact of an assembly of bodies, gathered in a space, does not automatically produce a communication based on a shared consensus. This once again attacks the very foundations of bourgeois theatre and politics. Alternatively, he proposes, the theatre should aim for a communication based on "was wir nicht teilen", because:

> Das, was wir hier normalerweise teilen, können wir ja auch nicht teilen, aber das fällt uns nicht auf. Das ist der Verblendungszusammenhang.[71]

Here he references the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, questioning how the singular individual can also be part of a plural collective and whether it is possible to be "singular plural".[72] Being physically together in the theatre does not automatically create a shared meaning (or even, as Fischer-Lichte argues, a shared production of meaning). Perhaps, Hinrichs suggests, there is no meaning or sense (*Sinn*; Nancy also uses the French word *sense*) that can be shared outside of us being, or being our bodies (Hinrichs gestures to his body at this point). The *Vergemeinschaftung* of individuals through the public sphere and culture (specifically in the theatre), which is one of the main foundations of bourgeois culture (and modern civil society) is thus radically questioned and undermined.

The audience is therefore immediately put in a rather confusing or unusual position: this is clearly not interactive theatre, but neither is it some form of realism that the audience can observe from the Kantian stance of disinterestedness.[73] Fabian Hinrichs is speaking directly to the audience about the present situation in the theatre and yet interaction is being criticised and explicitly rejected. Later Hinrichs sings an anthemic song on acoustic guitar and ask the audience to sing along, throws *Reclam Hefte* at them, hands out "Zeug" (such as a ribbons and garlands of fake flowers) and, as mentioned, threatens to brush someone's teeth with an electric toothbrush. In both performances I attended, the

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[70] René Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, p. 2. The title is a reference to Adorno and to the famous line from *Casablanca*: "Here's lookin' at you kid", translated into German as: "Ich schau dir in die Augen, Kleines!" It is directly taken from the title of a book: *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, ed by Jan Deck, Sarah Dellmann, Daniel Loick and Johanna Müller (Mainz: Ventil, 2001).

[71] René Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, p. 3.

[72] Ibid. Cf. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Nancy's book explores what it means to exist as both an 'I' and a 'we', asserting that we cannot 'be' in isolation, but are always 'being with'. He investigates this in relation to the idea of community, individual freedom and the circulation of meaning or "sense". Obviously, however, this and Hinrichs' recounting of Nancy's complex theory are rather simplified.

[73] I have mentioned this at the beginning of chapter three, when I described how Fischer-Lichte opposed aesthetic to expressive, cathartic and mimetic concepts of art, and also in relation to Bourdieu, who defines this as a bourgeois tendency to appreciate art solely aesthetically, without relating it to everyday experience or considering a use-value (as those with less cultural capital tend to do).

audience members accepted the "Zeug" with bemusement, unsure of how to cooperate, passively ducked to avoid the onslaught of books and did not sing along to the song. These ironised gestures of interaction suddenly appear absurd, comical. It is also no accident that it is Reclam edition books, that iconic symbol of *Bildung*, which he throws at the audience: he literally assaults the audience with the cultural capital that forms the basis of their expectations and learned behaviours.[74]

Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang! also deconstructs the body as presence more explicitly than just in the context of the corporeal co-presence of actors and audience. Just as Hinrichs mocks the gestures of interactive theatre, so too does he demonstrate the limits of the physical body as the delineation of our identities and as a refuge from the problems of representation in the context of performance. This also collapses the bourgeois dichotomy between mind and body to some extent. For while the production is quite physical on many levels, with Hinrichs running around, dancing, singing, scratching himself, spraying gold spray paint on himself (into his underwear at one point), the evening is primarily a performance defined by language and ideas. This is heightened by the fact that it is a solo performance, precluding any emergence of characters through dialogue. It resembles a 'performative lecture', but one in which the physical action often seems to have little connection with the content. For example, towards the end, a giant ball of red theatre lights – a kind of theatrical death star[75] – descends from above the stage. Hinrichs grabs onto it as it ascends again, leaving his half-naked body dangling in space. Does the mere presence of a body on the stage generate meaning, or does it precisely have no meaning? And how does it relate to the ball of lights? This is left unanswered, but rather than come away with the self-satisfaction at having interpreted or not interpreted such an action, the audience is left feeling disconcerted, with the suspicion that any attempt at an interpretation, even of its meaninglessness (another consensus of sorts) is futile or resisted.

The body is also explicitly discussed by Hinrichs throughout the play. There is no inside and outside the body he insists, no "Wesen" that it holds or is:

> Das ist gar nichts, da drinnen. Wir sind eine Außenbeziehung unseres Körpers mit sich selbst. Das sind wir, wo wir an uns kratzen, beißen, stöhnen, kneten, bürsten, wischen, wichsen, aber nicht nebeneinander, nicht nebeneinander sitzen.[76]

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[74] Reclam, along with Cotta, were the main two publishers of canonical literary collections in the nineteenth century. Displaying such a collection was an important way in which the *Bürgertum* demonstrated its *Bildung*. Cf. chapter two and Andreas Schulz, *Lebenswelt und Kultur des Bürgertums im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, p. 20.

[75] The script refers to it as the sun. See René Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, p. 13.

[76] Ibid., p. 6.

Our body does not regenerate, rather it replaces itself slowly. Our skin is replaced by another and then another layer of skin.[77] Nothing changes with death, he insists, we merely stop replacing ourselves, stop becoming rather than cease to be. This assertion is followed by an anecdote describing the death of his mother, but Hinrichs tells the audience that the woman who lay on her death bed was fundamentally and *physically* not the mother of his childhood. The hand that fed him is not the hand that he held as she lay dying:

> Nein, eine die mich füttert, und eine die stirbt, das sind zwei unterschiedliche Dinge. Wir müssen sie nur Hand nennen, weil wir unsere Herkunft und unsere Gegenwart nicht als instabil erzählen können.[78]

Therefore, he deduces, he does not in fact come from his mother, if that mother is also neither an unchanging body nor a fixed identity, which questions the most basic, emotional concept of the origin of identity and of course the bourgeois ideal of family relationships. He suggests that we should have an open past, not an open future, as the past is the repository of our notion of a fixed identity. We do not come from a mother (or a nation, a class, a birth), but from the stories we tell ourselves:

> Das wird ja auch nie offengelegt, dass man eigentlich aus ERZÄHLUNGEN KOMMT! Die tun ja immer so, als würden sie sich damit beschäftigen, woher man kommt, aber man kommt ja von denen. [...] Man wird ja sowieso aus einem Geist geboren und nicht aus einer Mutter! Aber dieser Geist sitzt dann eben auch am Sterbebett meiner Mutter, und will dauernd daran festhalten, dass ich aus ihr komme, aber das tu ich ja nicht. Ich komme ja aus dem Geist, der mir das erzählen will.[79]

He then asserts that his mother never helped him so much, as in the moment when she died, when she ceased trying to be an identity and became something other than "ein Melodram oder der Geist oder der Sinn",[80] namely a nothing but a body, a dead body.

In one sense this appears as liberation, in another, it suggests that subjectivity can be reduced to nothing but language, which can also be viewed as a far more diffuse structure of origin (subjectivity as subjection): "Der Schmerz lässt sich nicht mitteilen. Und darauf sollte eine Sprache beruhen."[81] Obviously Pollesch is overstating the point somewhat and is as usual pushing theory, here the subject constructed in discourse, to its

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[77] This line contains an in-joke for the Berlin theatre crowd: "Und die Haut löst sich, und kein Plan von Haut bringt die wieder, und was dann kommt ist Haut 2 und dann kommt Haut 3", ibid., p. 7. The reference is to the multimedia and experimental theatre, the Hebbel am Ufer, which has three houses, the HAU 1, 2 and 3.
[78] Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, p. 7
[79] Ibid., p. 13.
[80] Ibid., p. 12.
[81] Ibid., p. 13.

limits. However, the sentence just cited moves closer to tragedy[82] – perhaps the tragedy of language – by communicating that which cannot be communicated. The pain (putatively caused by the death of someone's mother) is both present and absent, paradoxically expressed in the very impossibility of its expression. The two primary media of theatrical representation (and social communication) – language and the body – are thus problematised.

Interpassive Criticism?

Earlier Hinrichs proposes that a new form of theatre that might escape these problems of pathos and replace interactive theatre: 'interpassives Theater'.[83] The concept of interpassivity has already been mentioned in chapter two, in relation to 'double-standard' consumerism and the way in which criticism of capitalism and bourgeois culture may in fact paradoxically reinforce these value systems. Žižek's example (discussing Lacan) was the canned laughter of sitcoms (which Pollesch also employs in this production). If interactive theatre 'outsources' signification and the production of meaning to the audience, suggests Hinrichs,[84] then interpassive theatre outsources the audience's emotions to the actor. This is the concept of bourgeois *Empfindsamkeit* ironised and taken to absurd extremes. He describes how it might consist of the actor taking your partner home for you after the show, looking dreamily into their eyes and going to bed with them for you. By delegating their feelings to the actor, Hinrichs suggests, the audience will be alleviated of some of the hard work involved in being a subject and may even be liberated from aspects of his or her identity that seem fixed, but do not in fact bring happiness:

> Der jahrzehntelang herrschende Terror des interaktiven Theaters bestand darin, Dinge erleben zu müssen, die man nicht erleben wollte. Das interpassive Theater könnte nun im Gegenteil darin bestehen, Dinge nicht zu erleben, von denen man dachte, dass man sie erleben wolle.[85]

As mentioned, however, the concept of interpassivity also describes how criticism may alleviate us from the obligation to *do* something about the objects and situations that are criticised. As Joseph Vogl writes in his cultural analysis of the economic market, the capacity to absorb protest and criticism is a defining feature of modern financial markets and capitalism, indeed this is viewed by some economists (Joseph Schumpeter for

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[82] As discussed in chapter one in relation to Lehmann's analysis of Orlan's work.

[83] The idea of interpassivity comes from Jacques Lacan and the Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller. See *Interpassivität: Studien über delegiertes Genießen*, ed. by Robert Pfaller (Berlin: Springer, 2000) and Robert Pfaller, *Illusionen der Anderen*.

[84] See René Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, pp. 4-5.

[85] Ibid., p. 5.

example) as part of the market's self-regulating principle – the 'invisible hand'.[86] The problem of the impotence of "Kapitalismuskritik" is also addressed explicitly by Pollesch, in *Cincittà aperta* for example, but arguably his work ultimately performs precisely the same process. Here, he seems to directly address the problem in a kind of doubled version of the bourgeois critical gesture: he criticises the audience for their (inter)passivity, but also criticises the impotence of his own criticism.

The spectre of the market reappears at another point in *Ich schau dir in die Augen, gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!* A huge sign of the date 1971 descends at the back of the stage and then bursts into flames, as though Pollesch wishes to burn the date into the minds of the audience. Hinrichs then makes explicit reference to the Bretton Woods agreement, arguing that in the theatre there are still "Wertedepots" (bourgeois values perhaps?), even if these have been abolished in financial markets, "und die lassen sich ja nicht einfach abschaffen, wie durch das Abkommen von Bretton Woods 1971."[87] The Bretton Woods agreement was an international agreement which had governed the global economy since the end of World War Two.[88] This system was effectively abandoned after President Nixon decoupled the American dollar from the gold standard (the value of gold), also known as the 'Nixon Shock' in August 1971, and the agreement was officially terminated in 1973. The end of the gold standard resulted in the floating of most of the major currencies and paved the way for the kinds of financial transactions which ultimately created the conditions for the particular forms of global financial crisis of recent years.

Beyond the economic and social aspects of this, which Pollesch is surely also interested in, in my view this can also be interpreted as a comment on representation. With the decoupling of the dollar from gold, the sign becomes decoupled from its referent and financial transactions become self-referential (futures, derivatives), no longer anchored in an, albeit partly mythical, material basis.[89] This can be seen as analogous to the process which was occurring in art and theatre in the 1960s and 1970s, when neo-avantgarde theatre and performance art set about dismantling bourgeois systems of representation. The signifier and the signified diverged, and increasingly the system of representation in which artists operate sought refuge in either pure materiality (the body) and/or the endless free-

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[86] See Joseph Vogl, *Der Geist des Kapitals* (Berlin: Diaphenes, 2010), p. 13.

[87] René Pollesch, *Ich schau dir in die Augen, Gesellschaftlicher Verblendungszusammenhang!*, p. 8.

[88] Cf. Joseph Vogl, *Der Geist des Kapitals*, pp. 84-90.

[89] Cf. chapter five, in which I discuss alchemy in relation to capitalism and John Gabriel Borkmann's industrialist fantasies of mining. Joseph Vogl calls this process of liberalisation "eine ökonomische *condition postmoderne*" and "ein Regime flottierender Signifikanten ohne Anker und Maß, ohne die Sicherung durch ein transzendentales Signifikat", see *Der Geist des Kapitals*, p. 87.

play of signs. This aesthetic arguably made it difficult for non-experts to determine whether these signs had any concrete value or meaning, or whether they were merely self-referential or ironic, but certainly signification had less and less direct relation to any concrete reality. At the same time the financial markets were radically liberalised in the 1980s and 1990s as stockbrokers fully embraced the irony of derivatives and futures. Once again, only experts seem to be able be able to comprehend the convoluted steps it takes to get from a bag of sugar or a lump of gold to the numbers on stock exchange computer screens (though recent events have made even experts' comprehension of the market seem doubtful). In this sense, the market starts to resemble theatre and the theatre mimics the market.[90]

Alexander Karschina suggests that very often postdramatic theatre tends to perform the kind of attack on the borders of the body as vessel or limits of the self that I have described in Pollesch above. He argues that in order to portray the subjectivities arising from a globalised world of precarity, a media-saturated society and neoliberal economies, characters must be completely dispensed with, whether fictive or real "und nur noch den Text der Reden auf die Bühne zu bringen, ohne identifizierbares Personal".[91] He identifies this in Pollesch:

> Die Subversion der personalen Identität, ein An- nicht Zerkratzen, führt das Theater von René Pollesch vor. In *Capucetto Rosso* spricht Sophie Rois davon, dass sie, getäuscht vom neo-liberalen Glücksversprechen, es auf einmal einfach nicht mehr hinbekommt, ihre Rollen zu spielen, denn sie könne nicht sein wie Geld, das immer alles sein will: 'Ich kann nicht heute als Ibsen's Nora Hilfe schreien und morgen bei Pollesch: Wasserflasche Scheiße, das kann ich einfach nicht!' Dem Schwund der Substanz antwortet Pollesch durch ein entsubjektiviertes Sprech-Theater, in dem *speech* und *speed* zusammenfallen wie im Denken auf Drogen.[92]

Arguably, however, this speed is also a characteristic of contemporary society and economies. Modern computing technology enabled the instantaneous movement of capital across space and time and its speed is one of the conditions for the financial market's current complexity, or postmodernity, as Vogl describes it. This has enabled the market to become hyperproductive – and productivity is also foundational ideal of bourgeois culture and indeed capitalism. As already mentioned, Pollesch seems to be aware of the problems

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[90] Rimini Protokoll addressed this directly in their piece *Hauptversammlung* or *Annual Shareholders Meeting* (2009), in which the theatre group acquired a number of shares in Daimler by legal means. These were then sold to members of the public as theatre tickets, giving them the right to attend the annual shareholders meeting of the company.

[91] Alexander Karschina, "Theaterrealität: Reality Check on Stage. Wirklichkeitsforschungen im zeitgenössischen Theater", in *Reality Strikes Back: Tage vor dem Bildsturm*, ed. by Kathrin Tiedemann and Frank Raddatz, pp. 146-159; p. 157. Alexander Karschina is a founding member of the theatre group, andcompany.

[92] Alexander Karschina, ibid., p. 156.

and impotence around criticising capitalism and yet, his response also seems to be one of speed, of hyperproductivity, both within the productions and in terms of his prolific output.

Perhaps it is apt at this point to ask a more critical question of Pollesch's work: does his work not also require the knowledge of experts to arrive at an interpretation, such as the one I have just arrived at? Do his plays presuppose or take for granted an audience who might have knowledge of what the Bretton Woods agreement is, to be able to link "being singular plural" to Jean-Luc Nancy or interpassivity to Jacques Lacan or Robert Pfaller? In short, does his work not require a certain bourgeois cultural capital and address a rather elite intellectual and cultural milieu? His writing in performance is certainly difficult to follow at times, even for those familiar with the subjects he addresses, while at the same time questioning the subjects who carry that knowledge. It seems that Pollesch attempts to deconstruct the bourgeois subject and is highly critical of aspects of capitalism and bourgeois culture, yet in his deployment of academic texts and complex ideas, he reinforces the authority of academic discourse and arguably excludes a non-intellectual audience.

Although a play such as *Tal der fliegenden Messer* could probably appeal to a broader audience because of the juxtaposition of comic sequences and spectacular, manic energy alongside the theory, his work seems to me to appeal to a specific audience of regular theatre-goers, art critics and academics. Pollesch thus reaffirms an elitist function of culture as only accessible to those with a certain cultural capital. On the other hand, perhaps the joke is on them (or us – of course I am implicated in this): every reference functions like bait, tempting the academic, critic or educated member of the public to look up the discourse, piece together the puzzle and reconstruct a coherent interpretation. But somehow I am made aware of this process; I catch myself in the act and am forced to ask myself: what does this achieve? Is the theory better now that I know the author, the book and the precise page numbers? Or was it better in practice (in performance), when it was tested out, despite being partially ungraspable, contradictory and ephemeral? It may be that, in its lack of coherency in the theatrical context, Pollesch potentially generates subjective responses to academic discourse, in which case it is not interpassive, but actually prompts "neues Denken".[93] In academic discourse, convention demands that we eventually come down on one side or the other (as I should here); Pollesch creates a theatre of theory with no synthesis.

Throughout his work Pollesch demonstrates that a rejection of bourgeois representational theatre is not as simple or as unproblematic as at first it may seem. In his

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[93] Rene Pollesch and Carl Hegeman, "Liebe, von der man sich selbst erzählt", in *Die Überflüssigen*, p. 113.

performed deconstruction or even destruction of the bourgeois subject, he is ruthless and provides no solace in the myth of the presence of the body. In his putting into practice and testing of theory, he reveals both the absurdities as well as some moments of brilliant insight in an educated class's own analysis of itself. In his criticism and self-criticism, and the impossibility of reconciliation between the two, the familiar critical gesture of bourgeois culture and one of its central conflicts can once again be identified.

Conclusion
The Criticism of Bourgeois Culture

As I have shown in this dissertation, despite being relatively stable in the nineteenth century, the *Bürgertum* is a shifting social formation. From the old urban bourgeoisie in the early modern period to the commercial and academic bourgeoisie of the nineteenth century, from the new middles classes of the 1960s in the FRG to today's 'new bourgeoisie', 'bobos', 'creative class' and 'digital bohemians', it is not just the *Bürgertum* that has changed, but the structure of class itself. This does not mean that class is obsolete and society is classless, however. It is undeniable that employing the concept of class as it was conceived by Marx, or even by Weber and Bourdieu, is problematic in our post-industrial, postmodern, post-communist and globalised world. The conditions in which we live and work are simply not the same. For example, the basic facts of our greater interconnectedness and the ease of travel, means it is more likely that couples will come together who are from different backgrounds, or move away from the situation in which they grew up, producing a plethora of hybrid and multi-cultural identities. But neither is it sufficient to argue that society is too complex to analyse in terms of social division, and it would be naive to argue that we are all equal. If class is a construct that helps to describe social inequality, then it remains a useful and important concept today. My concern in this dissertation was not, however, to establish finally whether there was or is a homogenous *Bürgertum* in the strict sense of class, but to explore the values and ideals common to different forms of *Bürgertum* in relation to culture: *Bürgerlichkeit*, which can be clearly identified throughout the modern age, albeit also in slightly shifting forms.

My main aim was to examine theatre which addresses contemporary German society's relationship with this historical system of values, political ideals and its correlated aesthetic forms. To what extent *Bürgerlichkeit* persists is less important than how present society relates to this cultural inheritance. But in that sense, it most certainly still exists, in that it informs German society's contemporary representation of itself and its negotiation of its identities, even if bourgeois values and culture are rejected. The debate around *Bürgerlichkeit* and cultural representations of it are interesting due to the mere fact that it is a subject of debate and object of representation, rather than only for its individual positions. My approach in selecting and analysing the theatre productions discussed involved taking not just content into account, in the sense of representations of the *Bürgertum*, but also the aesthetic of the performances, in the sense of the representation *process* itself. Representational realism and literary drama are forms which were

established by the German bourgeoisie and were central to early bourgeois culture. Even if it is doubtful that these forms still dominate, they are yet the convention that serves as a foil to many deconstructions and subversions of them. Thus while Thomas Ostermeier's work is clearly related to the *Bürgertum* in its representation and criticism of bourgeois milieus and values on the level of *content*, René Pollesch's work is equally relevant, but primarily on an *aesthetic* level, in his deconstruction of the very foundations of bourgeois culture: representation, the mind/body dichotomy, the bourgeois subject and the critical gesture itself. Michael Thalheimer's work was explored on both levels and also demonstrated clearly the nexus between past and present constructions.

Thalheimer's productions of canonical plays from the early bourgeois period unavoidably address historical bourgeois values and ideals, but reinterpret the plays in a contemporary aesthetic. This reinterpretation resulted in vivid images of today's bourgeois subject as driven by desire, and constructed by language and the society of its own making. I showed that his work, when viewed in relation to the concept of canon, can be seen as a creative and critical negotiation with canonical dramas, which paradoxically may reinforce the concept of canon. Both Ostermeier and Pollesch were shown to operate in a similar manner. Ostermeier's productions of Ibsen's plays, highly critical of bourgeois culture, employed a more conventional realist aesthetic, but reasserted the theatre as a space of concrete critical engagement with the social world. Confronting the audience with such representations of the contemporary family, media culture, materialism and violence is just as penetrating as Thalheimer's reinterpretations or Pollesch's deconstructions. Pollesch too criticises the fundamental constructs of bourgeois culture in his theatre of theory, but in doing so appeals to a rather bourgeois or even elite discourse, once again attacking and reinforcing simultaneously.

My central thesis, which I hope has by now been made clear to the reader, is that the main characteristic of the *Bürgertum* is a critical stance based on the ideal of autonomous thinking. This is related to or caused by the end of the age of mythical and religious dominance, and the clear definition of one's role as a member of an estate (especially as an 'unfree' man). The bourgeois subject is first and foremost an individual in a community of other individuals, and must find orientation within his and her social surroundings. The divisions that went along with this – public and private, desire and duty, work and art, body and mind – create an antagonism in the bourgeois subject, which often results in a sense of crisis in or criticism of the fundamentally bourgeois (or at least originally bourgeois) aspects of culture and society from *within* the *Bürgertum*. This is coupled with the fact that bourgeois ideals were often in stark antithesis to the reality of

nineteenth century industrial society, which led to the inversions and mutations of bourgeois ideals in the extreme nationalism and other movements of the early twentieth century. Indeed, such an antithesis can also be discerned in today's society, in which vast freedom of choice and autonomy in the form of individualism have perhaps become overwhelming to the individual once again, resulting in the nostalgia for traditional bourgeois values, which are perceived to provide orientation and structure.

It is however clear that today the specific forms of the *Bürgertum* as a clearly defined class formation (which demarcated its limits against the classes above and below) have largely disappeared as something obligatory and restrictive, defining the entire lifestyle, career, marriage choice and so forth, of an individual. Nonetheless many cultural practices, social rituals, values and ideals persist from the age of *Bürgerlichkeit*, especially in the field of culture and the public sphere, which are by definition *bürgerlich*. Theatre is a case in point as an intersection between these two spheres. In our post-industrial age of consumption, however, these lifestyles are to a certain extent a choice among many, although I stand by Bourdieu's assertion that there are elective affinities, and that therefore individuals are not completely free to choose their path in life, but are predetermined significantly by education in the home.

Furthermore, in political terms, many fundamental bourgeois ideals have proved remarkably stable and recurrent, even if they appear again in a slightly altered form (such as liberalism, 'classlessness', civil society and of course democracy). Once again, I argue for the centrality of a critical impulse as the reason for the perennial persistence of these ideals: like the canon, bourgeois culture creates gaps and contradictions as it tries to incorporate everyone in its systems of ideals, and thus constantly modifies itself to adapt to the given situation, although there have been some major instances of failing to adapt of course, such as to mass culture at the end of the nineteenth century. Even the catastrophe of fascism can be seen in this light: the bourgeois adapted their ideal of communal relationships into a nightmare version of a society which detested and obliterated the individual, perhaps due to many years of experiencing crisis as an individual in a mass society.

There seems to me to be three fundamental characteristics which link various formations of the *Bürgertum* and *Bürgerlichkeit* across the centuries and in different forms. Whether one views it critically or not, the *Bürgertum* is fundamentally linked to capitalism, and its values are often those which aid success in the capitalist system and capitalism itself. This necessitates the ability to adapt and change slightly its ideals, the reason why criticism is a second major feature. It is a mechanism built into bourgeois culture to enable

its adaptation and survival. In the 'canon of theory' and in increasingly aestheticised art, criticism has become an extremely dominant practice and arguably a necessity in our time. This has a number of simultaneous effects: it excludes the less educated, but is also creative and oppositional, causing new shifts (in the canon, in artistic practice, in thinking), which however may end up revitalising the same institutions, which are in the first place *bürgerlich*. Finally, *Bürgerlichkeit* is inextricably linked to modernity, and although sociologically speaking not all members of society can be described as *bürgerlich*, nonetheless, in terms of its foundational ideals and values, including self-criticism, in a sense, bourgeois culture *is* modern culture – and this is what makes it such a vast and complex, but fascinating topic.

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Chapter One
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